

An Analysis of the Move to Inclusive Education in Canada

What Works

Introduction: Initiation of Inclusive Education in Canada

This article focuses on Canada's federal government role in Inclusive Education, and roles of Provinces and Territories with attention to where Inclusive Education flourishes and where it does not. The next pages outline Canada's situation. Discussion moves from focus on the challenge of change to the practice of Inclusive Education and closes with examples of inclusive teaching strategies supportive of inclusive practice. Change and practice are the essentials of Inclusive Education.

The Canadian situation is somewhat different than that of most nations when it comes to elementary (approximately 9 years) and secondary (approximately 4 years) education. As a result of Canada's constitution the federal government has no authority at these levels of the education system. Authority at these levels is strongly guarded by Provinces and Territories.

Until the late 1980's the Special Education terms "mainstreaming" and "integration" were in general use across Canada with reference to students with disabilities are placed full-time or part-time in regular school settings. Other students with disabilities are placed full-time in special schools or in segregated special classes within regular schools. Many educational authorities confuse integration with Inclusive Education and use the terms as if they were synonymous. Winzer (1999) clearly illustrates this belief in her diagram of the Special Education Model. Inclusive Education is a completely different Model that does not use the term integration nor does it divide students with disabilities based on their degree or type of disability. Many Canadian governments and educators do not appear to understand the difference between the two Models.

Growth of Inclusive Education

I begin with the story of the birth of the term "inclusion" as applied to disability and education. In the late 1980's Marsha Forest and her husband Jack Pearpoint convened a meeting at Frontier College, Toronto, Ontario of people from across North

America who believed that education for persons with disabilities was not progressing satisfactorily under the Special Education Model. They believed that insufficient progress, both academically and socially, was being made. Social justice is not a strong quality of the Special Education Model and does not lead to appreciation of the abilities of students with disabilities. In fact, it is a negatively-based model emphasizing placement in the school system based on degree of disability. At the meeting in Toronto, following considerable discussion, the term "Inclusion" was adopted as the term preferred regarding their vision for persons with disabilities.

The term inclusion rapidly became popular. It was adopted by increasing numbers of parents and advocates and even by some progressive educators. The term has now entered the common vocabulary around the world. At a 1994 meeting in Salamanca, Spain, with specific reference to those with disabilities, UNESCO endorsed inclusion of all students in the same regular school classrooms. Other groups of marginalized students were mentioned, but the focus of the Salamanca Statement was on those with disabilities and their education.

Over the period since 1994 Inclusive Education has been welcomed by many and decried by others. It remains a controversial educational topic. Nevertheless, the values of Inclusive Education have been accepted in an increasing number of nations. Inclusion is strongly supported by research studies, such as that by Bunch and Valeo comparing the outcomes of Special Education and Inclusive Education (2004). The 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities confirmed global Inclusive Education for students with disabilities, and **increased emphasis for other marginalized groups**, thus causing the aforementioned confusion in Canada. In Canada Inclusive Education is a term now used by all school systems to refer to all these marginalized groups. However, most provincial governments leave the door to Special Education wide open, suggesting lack of full commitment to the new global policy when it comes to students with disabilities. In these jurisdictions educational inequity remains the case.

Provincial and Territorial Responses

Canada consists of 10 provinces and 3 northern territories. Following UNESCO's 1994 Salamanca Statement for students with disabilities did not change to inclusion for most students and teachers in Canada. In turn, no real change for most Canadian students

with disabilities followed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) of 2006. However, the term “Inclusive Education” was specifically extended to other marginalized groups of students at this point, allowing all educational systems to use the term in their policy statements. Again, most have not changed their approach to students with disabilities.

Provinces and Territories develop policies for education independently of each other. Though there is a degree of collaborative discussion among Provinces and Territories, the arrangement is loose and does not mandate change to educational policy or practice across jurisdictions. The situation is similar for universities responsible for teacher preparation at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Even within the same province universities maintain their individual independence in designing and offering courses and undertaking research dealing with Inclusive Education. There is overlap in course offerings, but no consonance from province to province or within provinces from university to university. Though most offer courses on social justice and on Inclusive Education, the focus of interest is questionable when it comes to students with disabilities. Emphasis tends to be on the other marginalized groups mentioned in the CRPD. The result is that the Special Education Model is accepted by most graduating teachers. In large respect, this is due to little in-class input on Inclusive Education and practicum periods almost exclusively in schools that adhere to the Special Education Model (Bunch, 2014). Most educational jurisdictions have opted for inclusive policy for students with disabilities in theory, but have not mandated it as compulsory in practice. One Province, New Brunswick, has adopted Inclusive Education as policy and practice, as have the 3 northern Territories. In these areas of Canada, governments have made it clear that Inclusive Education involves all students, no matter what differences, such as disability, exist among students. For example, the Northwest Territory (NWT) Education Act specifies:

Inclusive schooling is more than a method or strategy. It is a way of life that is tied directly to the value system that values diversity. Inclusive education is also a philosophical and practical education approach which strives to respond to individual needs, and is intended to assure equal access for all students to educational programs offered in regular

classroom settings. Inclusive education is mandatory within the NWT school system.

The experiences of NWT and the other jurisdictions named have proven that Inclusive Education works when it is employed with all students, including those with disabilities.

Whereas unequivocal statements exist in the three northern territories and one Atlantic province, nine provinces elude full commitment to Inclusive Education practice. A portion of students with disabilities are enrolled full-time in regular classroom settings while others are segregated in special classes and special schools. This is the Special Education Model in practice. For instance, a 2000 Saskatchewan Ministry of Education report, *Directions for Diversity: Enhancing Supports to Children and Youth with Diverse Needs*, views inclusion:

To be a philosophy and a set of related practices that have implications for **the location of a child's instruction and location may not always be in the regular classroom all the time.**

This overview of the state of Inclusive Education in Canada indicates that a confused picture exists. A number of jurisdictions have embraced Inclusive Education in both theory and practice for all students. However, the majority of governments recognize inclusion as a value system that does not mandate regular classroom placement for all students. These jurisdictions have placed caveats, such as that of Saskatchewan, in their policies that permit continuance of the Special Education Model. In British Columbia policy also, the practice of inclusion is not necessarily synonymous with integration in regular classrooms... **unless the educational needs of the student with special education needs...indicates that the educational program for the student with special needs should be provided elsewhere**" (British Columbia Education Act, 2008).

Despite an "escape" clause similar to those of Saskatchewan and British Columbia the Ontario Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board (HWCDS) in Ontario is an example of a local school system that has moved to Inclusive Education in theory and in practice. HWCDS became the first school system globally making a

definite change to Inclusive Education in policy and practice (Hansen, Leyden, Bunch & Pearpoint, 2006)

It is not only Canadian governments and school systems that are slow to act on the values of inclusive education. A number of authorities known for their expertise in education of students with disabilities defend the Special Education Model. Reference in this regard was made earlier to Winzer (1999) who considered integration and inclusion to be synonymous. This clearly is an example of confusion regarding the meanings of Inclusive Education and of Special Education. The two terms definitely are not synonymous. The two approaches to education of students with disabilities reflect diametrically different understandings of educational equity and practice.

Inclusion and Inclusion Strategies

The Inclusive Education Model rejects almost all of the beliefs supporting the Special Education Model. Chief among them is the belief that segregation is a stronger response for many students with disabilities. The foundational belief of Inclusive Education is that students with disabilities learning with their typical peers, and in ways similar to their peers, is academically and socially more beneficial for all students involved. Inclusive Education means that regular classroom teachers take ownership of all students in a class regardless of difference. The regular classroom teacher is the model for all students in the classroom. However, the classroom teacher does not act alone. Special Education Teachers (SET) are needed to provide support when and as appropriate. Educational Assistants (EA's) also are available in a support role. Parents and the entire student group in the classroom should be a natural part of the support team. These are the guidelines of Inclusive Education.

As noted, confusion is found in Ontario. Though provincial policy is Inclusive Education, the provincial Ministry of Education has not yet moved to enforce the policy in practice when it comes to students with disabilities. Nevertheless, the Ontario Ministry of Education evidences clear understanding of the value of Inclusive Education. A Ministry of Education Publication (2006) expresses a set of guiding principles and key themes that, if put in force, would do much in terms of realizing inclusive education for students with disabilities.

Belief 1: All students can succeed.

All students can demonstrate competence in literacy and numeracy. Teachers can ensure their students' success by getting to know them through ongoing observation, assessment, and evaluation, and then carefully establishing the next steps which each student needs to take in order to learn.

Belief 2: Universal design and differentiated instruction are effective and interconnected means of meeting the learning or productivity needs of any group of children.

Universal design ensures that the classroom and other learning environments are as usable as possible for students, regardless of their age, ability, or situation. Teachers should also aim to respond to the specific learning profiles of individual students with differentiated instruction.

Belief 3: Successful instructional practices are founded on evidence-based research, tempered by experience.

Children with special needs benefit most when teachers deliver programming informed by both professional judgement and domain knowledge supported by empirical evidence. Good pedagogy is based on good research. Basing instruction on sound research will avoid the pitfall of following trends lack efficacy.

Belief 4: Students with special needs may receive important support for programming from a number of people, but the key educator for literacy and numeracy development is the classroom teacher(s). Classroom teachers are ideally placed to gather ongoing assessment data and monitor student learning. They have the advantage of knowing the child well and can provide valuable feedback to others working with the student.

Belief 5: Each child has his or her unique patterns of learning.

Patterns of learning may vary greatly within a classroom. Teachers need to plan for diversity, give students tasks that respect their abilities, use dynamic and flexible grouping for instruction, and provide ongoing assessment.

Belief 6: Classroom teachers need the support of the larger community to create a learning environment that supports students with special education needs.

Despite such clear understanding of the values of Inclusive Education and how Inclusive Education practice can be put in place, Ontario and the majority of other provinces are not putting the vision into practice. Examples of teaching strategies known to work in support of inclusion close this article. Theory and practice are inextricably intertwined in Inclusive Education.

The Canadian educational community is not unique in recognizing the value of Inclusive Education policy in theory then not carrying the theory through to practice in schools and classrooms. One example is India.

Patricia Mascarenhas a writer in India (2014) comments that Inclusive Education has stalled there despite clear national policy. She notes that Government departments and NGOs dealing with special schools, the existing primary India service system for students with disabilities, believe that Special Education and Inclusive Education are synonymous. A few organizations (such as ADAPT centered in Mumbai) are to initiating Inclusive Education, and are making notable, though limited progress. Almost all school systems in India continue with the Special Education Model despite national policy.

Naturally, inclusive change does occur overnight. It is a process that depends on committed leadership at all levels of education. If reaching that goal is not the objective of the in-class team, there is likelihood that change will not continue. My experiences in various nations, such as Canada, India and Russia, have shown me that if one does not accept the value and importance of inclusion, and if it is not clear that everything done in schools and classrooms is directed toward the goal of strong academic and social Inclusive Education, equitable education for students with disabilities will not evolve. A spin-off concern is that other students, parents and teachers will not have close understanding of the potential of students with disabilities, but continue to concentrate on what they have difficulty with. This reality has implication for friendships between the two groups and reduction of employment opportunities as adults. Typical students who are accustomed to segregation of their peers will carry that experience throughout their lives to the detriment of their peers with disabilities. This fact is realized in the Sandbox Project (Snowdon, 2013), the data of which reveals that the significant majority of young Canadian adults with disabilities graduating from education “live lives of isolation and loneliness” from lack of bonding with their typical peers in early life.

On the positive side is the growing realization that students with disabilities are much more alike other students than previously thought. Until recently the education community believed, and many continue to believe, that students with disabilities are so different from other students that many cannot learn beneficially in the same classrooms as their typical peers. This belief is a central underpinning of Special Education, now considered by the U N and many educators to be outmoded. The Inclusive Education Model challenges and moves past the long-held belief that academic and social segregation are needed to educate students with disabilities. One must not ignore that when students with disabilities were first admitted to the education system, they were accepted only in special schools. Eventually, some students with disabilities were placed in regular schools, though within special classes, then some were placed in special classrooms on a part-time basis and in regular classrooms otherwise, and finally more were placed full-time in regular classrooms, though other students with disabilities were segregated in the same school. This movement of some students closer and closer to regular classroom settings has signaled weakness in the Special Education Model. Bunch (1994) mapped this continual change.

Wikipedia does a sound job of noting the basic differences between the two Models, realizing what many governments and educators have not.

Inclusive Education differs from previously held notions of 'integration' and 'mainstreaming', which tended to be concerned principally with disability and 'special educational needs, and implied learners changing or becoming 'ready for' accommodation by the mainstream. By contrast, inclusion is about the child's right to participate and the school's duty to accept the child. Inclusion rejects the use of special schools or classrooms to separate students with disabilities from students without disabilities. A premium is placed upon full participation by students with disabilities and upon respect for their social civil, and educational rights. (Downloaded 11/17/2009).

The change has convinced the United Nations and a growing number of governments, academics, educational administrators, teachers, support personnel and parents that a leap forward, a leap to a socially just, equitable approach, not just another limited change, is needed. Once this realization takes place the stage is set for Inclusive

Education for all. The practices developed by Canada's three northern territories and the province of New Brunswick are proof that teachers can handle the change.

At present we are engaged in struggle between those who continue to support the Special Education Model and those who recognize and accept need for the Inclusive Education Model. Gary Thomas and his co-authors (2001, 2004) are excellent resources on understanding the struggle. The struggle promises to be lengthy, as the education system is strongly resistant to change involving central elements of its belief system. Nevertheless, research and professional experience are documenting that, once put in place, Inclusive Education is academically and socially more beneficial for all students than is the Special Education Model. Following up on the six Beliefs presented earlier, strategies such as the examples on the following pages have supported progressive educators and are known to work. We have looked at the theory of Inclusive Education, now we look at practice.

As stated earlier, the job of all classroom teachers is one of continual adjusting of her/his teaching to meet the learning characteristics of students in order to enable learning. Enabling learning is already a basic teaching strategy known by all teachers. It is common practice. Teaching concepts such as cooperation with parents, multiple intelligences and learning styles are examples of how teachers already work to enable the learning of all students. These strategies work for students with disabilities as well as for typical students. They are within the average teacher's knowledge. This concept of enabling is central to Inclusive Education. I use the term Enabling Adjustments to describe teaching practice as having clearer meaning for teachers and parents than do the administrative terms "modification" and accommodation". Among resources regarding enabling practice are some of mine and my co-authors (1996, 2006, 2009).

EXAMPLES OF VARIOUS ENABLING ASJUSTMENTS

Foundational Beliefs of Inclusive Education:

- Learning with their typical peers and in ways similar to these peers is academically and socially more beneficial for students with disabilities.
- Typical teachers should and can be the central figures in the education of learners with disabilities.

- Regular classroom teachers take ownership of all students in a class regardless of difference.
- Regular classroom teacher is the only person who can make all students feel that they truly belong to the regular classroom.
- Regular classrooms are the only places where all children of a community come together to make their future friends and acquaintances and to understand the capabilities and capacities.

As an experienced teacher and administrator in Special Education, I questioned the idea of Inclusive Education when I first heard of it in the 1980's. As a researcher I decided that I would undertake an observer study in school systems that had moved to inclusion. I wanted to put Inclusive Education to the test. The study ran over three years with me and a research assistant as observers in classrooms. We took notes on how the teachers taught all students, with particular focus on the students with disabilities. As I witnessed the enabling relationships between teacher and typical students' interactions with their peers with disabilities, I began to see the positive results of the inclusive approach. The following teaching strategies that follow are taken from notes made during the study. During that period, I found myself thinking in terms of how teachers enabled student learning. This experience led me to the concept of Enabling Adjustments (2006). Examples of teacher strategies follow.

Basic Teaching Strategies

The central support for all students is the regular classroom teacher. The teacher's tools are the regular classroom curriculum and a repertoire of Enabling Adjustments. Also, the development of an in-class team led by the teacher and supported by Special Education Teachers, Educational Assistants, other professionals, and by the parents and other students is fundamental.

Students must be uppermost in the mind of the teacher. This is the teaching strategy that must underlie everything a teacher does for all students. An effective teacher tries to understand how the students in her/his class can learn best. Then he/she plans an approach to teaching that supports how the class of students learns. While most students will be able to work comfortably within this general approach some students may have

specific learning needs, which should be considered. For these students Enabling Adjustments and the in-class team can be powerful supports.

Dealing with the Universal Curriculum with Equity:

As a special education teacher I learned that curricula different in many respects from those taught to typical students were basic to teaching in special schools and in special classrooms. A major pillar of Inclusive Education is that all students work from the same curricula. Studying the same teaching topic means everyone sharing some of the same basic knowledge. This brings equity to the classroom experience and strengthens relationships today and in the future. This does not mean that all students deal with exactly the same aspect of the lesson topic at exactly the same complexity, at exactly the same speed, with exactly the same expectations. The teacher must decide which variables in learning need to be adapted to meet the student's needs. Whatever decisions are reached all students learn in the same curricular area under the classroom teacher's instruction, even though someone from the in-class team or others are assisting the students with disabilities just as they support their typical peers. These other personnel or students do not take responsibility for what the student with disabilities learns. They work as a team with the regular classroom teacher as team leader. In inclusion, this is a primary consideration.

The Reflective Teacher: Questions to Ask Yourself While Teaching

The wise teacher reflects on what is to be taught and how it should be taught. Questions such as the few samples here strengthen classroom pedagogy for all.

- What are the most important points of this lesson for all students? Which are minor points that elaborate a topic, but are not fundamental for this particular student? Be flexible on whether or not mastering the minor points needs to be expected of all students, given individual abilities. Understanding the major facts may be sufficient for certain students and within the student's capacity.
- How do my students learn best? Does anyone need a different approach, if so, which approach supports his or her best learning?
- What Enabling Adjustments can I use in this situation?

Handling Enabling Adjustments

As noted, teachers constantly make adjustments to facilitate student learning, adjustments such as inserting a little extra challenge for those who can speed ahead or reducing the level of vocabulary for other students can be effective. Simple Enabling Adjustments such as walking near certain students whose attention tends to wander to remind them gently to focus on the task at hand. This permits students to share responsibility for their learning. These are examples of easy adjustments designed to lead all students to the greatest individual progress. The term “individual progress” is of importance. It is the glue that binds all classroom teaching together. My experience is that classroom teachers quickly understand the reasoning and methods behind Enabling Adjustments. It takes a bit of time to work Enabling Adjustments into one’s teaching repertoire. The litmus test is whether making helpful adjustments is a process that strengthens classroom pedagogy. I have seen teachers teach this way in countries as varied as Canada, Malta, India, Hong Kong, the United States, Germany, and Italy. Need for good, positive teaching does not change from nation to nation.

As noted earlier, good teachers automatically adapt their teaching for typical students. What too many regular class teachers might not have learned is that it is much the same process for all students regardless of difference. The following are samples of simple teaching strategies that support teaching for all.

Management Plan for Behaviour: Observation is a Powerful Tool

Most students do not act out without reason. When acting out occurs, it is not likely to last for a long time or be frequent. Usually there is a reason, such as medical needs, as with migraine headaches, or the student might be reacting to being bullied without the teacher seeing the initial bullying. Being aware of which students are possible bullies helps. Other students may be able to inform teachers when they see that a student is likely to act out or be bullied. However, the best tool is the observant eye of the teacher. Once the source of inappropriate behaviour is known, the teacher can intervene. It is valuable to let other students know what you are doing so that they can work along with you. After all, every classroom is a community. Here are suggested steps in understanding how to handle behavioural concerns.

Step 1: Identify behaviours of concern.

Focus on 1 or 2 central behaviours initially and other lesser behaviours later.

Step 2: Observe target students in various settings.

Watch for what sets off behaviour.

Is the present environment the problem?

Step 3: Observe what other students are doing.

Are they the cause of the behavior?

Step 4: Put observations together as a map to anticipating behavior.

Can you identify triggers for behaviour?

Other people, such as parent and students, can be helpful in identifying triggers.

Participation with Other Students

Collaboration among students is increasing internationally as a teaching tool.

Collaboration benefits all students and is of particular value for some. The days of the quiet classroom are passing in many jurisdictions. Now the idea is for quiet when that is suitable and controlled oral and physical interaction when that fits. Flexibility works at all levels of education.

- **Neighbour Share:** Allow quick chats between students to ask brief questions to clarify points or share advice on how to approach a lesson.
- **Homework Friends:** Set a time for 2 or 3 students to compare homework efforts, discuss any problems and share approaches to questions.
- **Know – Want – Learn Groups:** (Use when introducing a new topic.) Encourage students to review together what they already know about a topic, and then move to what they need to learn now.
- **Drill Partners:** (Use to embed knowledge) Students ask each other questions on mathematic facts, science facts, literature readings, important dates, spelling, vocabulary and other aspects of what is being learned.

- **Pairing for Book Reviews:** (Use to expand range of readings and general knowledge.) Students interview each other about books they have read, noting main characters, plot significant events and other aspects.

Caution: Avoid having only typical students taking leadership in such activities. This creates a sense of inequality with one group being charitable to the other. As long as students are treated with charity, equity cannot exist.

Mathematics Adaptations

Teach key terms and vocabulary in advance. Others can help.

- Tape numberlines or other routinely needed information to student desks for quick reference. Do not rely too much on memory for those who have difficulties in this area.
- Use real situations and materials. Use real money, , play card games dependent on math knowledge. Have parents shop with children and to involve them in using their math knowledge. Avoid artificiality. Make learning real.
- Simplify language when teaching mathematics. Be as concrete as possible.
- Set up a Mathematics Friend (partner or helper) among classmates.
- Use calculators only when the basic math steps have been learned.

Homework

Teachers must consider the type and amount of homework for students with varied needs. Also, parents should be encouraged to monitor homework without actually doing it for the students. Some advice on how to handle homework for parents here might be of value.

- Consider attention span of student when assigning homework. Work with parents to set up supportive strategies.
- Set clear, simple directions. Write out directions if necessary.
- Individualize amount of homework according to student characteristics.
- Allow alternative homework formats. Questions can be read aloud to student by parents, or recorded instructions to build student independence.

Preparing student to listen to and follow directions..

- Make certain student is attending and facing you when instructions are given.
- Provide students with a schedule for each day.
- Set up partnerships among students.
- Combine oral directions, pictures, simple vocabulary, diagrams, physical cues.
- Provide a set of written or recorded directions.
- Describe critical parts of task individually.
- Have student repeat task instructions.
- Break task down into smaller parts if necessary.
- Ask student to repeat each instruction.

The above are examples of simple strategies to support Inclusive Education.

Strategies such as these are familiar to regular teachers who use them with regular students. They can be extended to students with disabilities. It also is useful to maintain a record (Appendix A) of areas that affect success in undertaking change as a useful guide.

Conclusion

Given the support of the United Nations, UNESCO and other global organizations and an increasing number of nations advocating change to Inclusive Education for

students with disabilities, it seems that change to Inclusive Education will take place. Further supporting the move to a more socially just educational approach are the many school systems and schools that have made the move. This analysis suggests that all school systems prepare to emulate these pioneers. Contact such systems and share knowledge. Become familiar with research and resources on inclusive practice on social justice and academic progress. Teachers wish to do their very best for students but need active support and strong leadership. Many teachers are struggling with the change toward Inclusive Education and look to their leaders for support. Leadership from governments and educational authorities is a key element in facing change.

It seems the tide of education is toward decisive change. Just as King Canute of England could not stop the tide from continuing to rise in England, the tide of change to Inclusive Education at the global level promises to continue to rise.

The essential realization that many are missing in moving to inclusive change is that Inclusion has two parts. The first is the initial realization that Inclusive Education is a more productive academic and social approach than is Special Education. The second is Inclusive Education is not Inclusive Education unless all students study together in the same classrooms of the regular school system.

Appendix A

ENABLING ADJUSTMENTS RECORD FOR FACILITATING INCLUSION

		YES	No	Partial
1	Are nondisabled peers in the setting?			
2	How many learners with disabilities are in setting?			
3	Will nondisabled peers & disabled peers interact ?			
4	Is a minimum of peer to peer assistance needed?			
5	Can natural and nonintrusive supports be used?			
6	Does the setting match the age of the student?			
7	Are the materials matched to student's age?			
8	Is the activity appropriate for student age?			
9	Is activity familiar to the student?			
10	Can the student start, or be taught to start, activity?			
11	Need the task be adjusted to facilitate participation?			
12	Can the materials be adjusted for participation?			
13	Is special equipment needed?			
14	Is peer support available?			
15	Is the setting accessible?			
16	Is the activity based on the general curriculum?			
17	Is support needed from a special education teacher or other person?			
18				
19				
20				

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