

CANADA AND UN/UNESCO POLICIES ON INCLUSION

INTRODUCTION

I believe it to be important throughout this article to note Canada's contribution to inclusive education, as well as to initially note where inclusion flourishes in Canada and where it does not. Following a brief review of the situation of inclusive education across Canada, I shall present positive contributions to the question of "What Works?", beginning with the following anecdote, the story of the first introduction of the term "inclusion" in education as applied to those with disabilities. Up to the time mentioned the terms "mainstreaming" and "integration" were used with reference to those students with disabilities who were placed full-time or part-time in regular school settings.

Marsha Forest and her husband Jack Pearpoint convened a meeting at Frontier College, Toronto of people from across North America who believed that education for persons with disabilities was not progressing sufficiently under the Special Education Model. They did not believe that the terminology of the Model did not describe what they felt would be social justice for students with disabilities in the school system. The language of the Special Education Model was such that the focus was degrees of disability and need for a set of alternate settings aligned with degree. Those present did not believe that

such terminology and the underlying model did not promote social justice nor did it lead to recognition of the abilities possessed by the students. Following much discussion the term “inclusion” was suggested. This resulted in much additional discussion with final acceptance of the term “inclusion” for all people with disabilities, particularly as it applied to those in school.

Immediately, the term became popular. It was adopted by increasing numbers of parents and advocates and even by some educators. The term has now entered the common vocabulary of nations around the world. Some progressive educators began to test the Inclusive Education Model in schools. At a meeting in Salamanca, Spain educators and others concerned with the education of all students, with specific reference to those students with disabilities, UNESCO endorsed the inclusion of all students together in regular school settings.

Over the period since 1994 inclusion has been debated, accepted by many and decried by others. It remains a controversial view. Nevertheless, the values of inclusion have been accepted by many and are increasingly being documented through research. In 2006 the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities continued global level support for the Inclusive Education Model. In Canada inclusive education is a term now used by all school systems, even though many

governments and school systems leave the door of Special Education wide open. Inclusive education is controversial and many are avoiding inclusive practice for all, but one fact stands out. Inclusive **Education works when it is employed with all students.**

Canadian school systems and governments have accepted the UNESCO Salamanca Statement and the federal government of Canada has ratified and signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This overall statement on the two policy documents should not be confused with actual commitment in terms of actual inclusive practice in education. The federal government has no constitutional voice in how provincial and territorial governments go about education of students with disabilities from first entry to the formal school system at an early age to graduation from secondary school.

Provinces and Territories all develop independent policies and put these into practice accordingly. Teacher preparation in university Faculties of Education in the area of disability vary according to vary from province to province. Faculties of Education within individual provinces plan professional preparation of teachers or working with students with disabilities with little to no consultation with other universities.

Provincial and Territorial policy varies within each from school system to school system. There is little to no

consultation among provinces and territories. Most provinces have opted to promote, while limiting, change toward inclusive practice in schools. All three northern Territories, Yukon, Northwest Territory and Nunavut and one province, New Brunswick, have enacted policies making it clear that inclusion involves all student, no matter what difference between students, such as disability, exists. For example, the 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.

Whereas such unequivocal statements exist in the three northern territories and the one Atlantic province, nine provinces, as mentioned earlier, elude inclusion for students with disabilities in regular classroom settings without resource to routine segregation in special education classes. For instance, a 2000 Saskatchewan report, *Directions for Diversity: Enhancing Supports to*

Children and Youth with Diverse Needs, of the Ministry of Education is typical. Saskatchewan 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.

The summing up of this overview of the state of the art of inclusive education in Canada indicates that a confused picture exists. A number of jurisdictions have embraced inclusive education firmly and, though not everything is perfect, are well on their way. The majority of governments have recognized inclusion as a value system that does not require a focus on regular classroom placement. They have placed caveats in their policies permitting the continuance of the Special Education Model for students "who cannot benefit from education with their typical peers". Though some progressive school systems, such as the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board (Hansen et al. 2006), have moved fully or substantially to inclusion for students with disabilities in schools that are permitted to continue with segregation of some students, they are few.

It is not only governments and school systems that are slow to act on the values of inclusive education. The well-

known author, Margret Winzer, in a 1999 publication designed a form of the traditional Special Education Model in which she labels the first three steps of deciding which students might be in regular classrooms full-time or part-time, as “integration/inclusion”.

Hansen, J., Leyden, G., Bunch, G. & Pearpoint, J. (2006). Each Belongs: The Remarkable Story of the First School System to Move to Inclusion. Toronto. Inclusion Press.

NWT Education. (1996). A Directive and Guidelines on Special Needs Education in the NWT. Yellowknife, NWT. Government of NWT.

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Winzer, M. (1999). Children with Exceptionalities in Canadian Classrooms (5th Edition). Scarborough, Ontario. Prentice Hall Allyn and Bacon.