

**INCLUSION  
or  
CONFUSION**

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Dedication

To my son:  
Chris

Perseverance & Faith = Achievements

## Abstract

My choice for an in depth project is to focus on the term Inclusion. I have found that considerable interest has been generated in recent years by the attempt to integrate, mainstream, or include disabled children into the regular public schools. There are many social and educational issues related to this process that must be looked at. Throughout this paper, the realities and myths of inclusion will be explored, from the point of view that inclusion in and of itself is neither good nor bad. Knowing very little on this subject area I wanted to first be open minded and cover all the facts. I was to discover that the “Inclusive Education Model” is the 1990’s solution to resolving the issue of equal education for all. This composition will clarify several enabling conditions which are significant to the “Inclusive Education Model”. It will discuss some of the major issues or concerns that are relative to the educational system. The most crucial controversy to be debated “is inclusion feasible for all children?” and which authors have influenced the growing concerns for and against inclusive schools. Through professional journals, teacher magazines, teacher education conferences, textbooks and teacher’s conversations; the term “inclusion can be defined as a set of values and principles” that are fundamental to contemporary schools.<sup>1</sup> Inclusion is really about school change to improve the educational system for all students. It means changes in the curriculum, changes in how teacher’s teach and how student’s learn, as well as changes in how students with and without disability labels interact with and relate to one another. Through this model there are several enabling conditions which must be met to successfully fulfill this challenge. <sup>2</sup>

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1 Grant, J., (August 1996) personal communication; Professional Development Day

2 Sautner, B., (July 1997) Professional Development Day

## **Inclusive Education Model**

The successful merging of special and regular education depends on the positive attitudes, beliefs, and values of all educators, and on the presence of enabling conditions. The beliefs and values of inclusive education can only be fostered through a clear goal or philosophical statement by which all teachers, administrators, parents, and community representatives work towards as a unified system. The last but by far the most important point is that of the enabling conditions to make the inclusive classroom a reality. The merger of regular and special education will not happen quickly or easily. The most important enabling conditions listed are a) Professional Training and Development, b) Pooling of Resources, and c) Administrative Leadership and Support. <sup>3</sup>

The First of the enabling conditions Professional Training and Development are being addressed through such things as Professional development days, and Education Conferences. Teachers will require addition information which will broaden their understanding and appreciation of children with special needs; information such as how to identify learning problems, and on how to adapt the environment and their instruction to accommodate those problems. <sup>4</sup> Courses which are recommended by leaders in the field of Inclusive Education are as follows: dynamic assessment, individual educational planning, adaptive instruction, differential learning, multicultural education, and holistic curriculum.

The second enabling condition is that of the pooling of resources. Inclusive education will impose additional financial demands on school boards during a time when Federal financial support is steadily shrinking. This increase in financial out-put will be used for such things as support personnel, school building modifications, material resources (e.g. assessment

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<sup>3</sup> Villa, A. R., Thousand, J. S., (1995)

<sup>4</sup> Villa, A. R., Thousand, J. S., (1995)

instruments, program materials, and instructional aides). “If .... a given number of students required instruction in an alternative communication system (e.g. Language Arts, Math Resource Class), self-care skills, or advanced physics, the cost estimates to operate such services could constitute the justification for monetary appropriations, rather than categories of labeled children.

5 What Grenot-Scheyer, Bishop, Jubala, and Coots, are referring to in this statement is if students in the inclusive model need a one on one instructional program or an enrichment program they should receive this support to enhance their academic program in the inclusive classroom.

The third enabling condition is that of administrative leadership and support. Administration must promote the merger of special and regular education; support integrated learning; develop supportive networks with community; foster respect for individual differences; promote consultative, cooperative, and adaptive educational practices; promote the goals of inclusive education; and empower teachers. 6 It is critical that administration help teachers help themselves cope with the frustrations and stresses involved in inclusive education states that teachers who are entrusted with responsibility for school-based changes and school-based management arrive at solutions to problems that more accurately meet the needs of students, parents, and communities.

Several of the authors that will be explored and discussed throughout this paper will be: J. Black, K. D. Bishop, J. J. Coots, W. Dover, M. Falvey, D. Fuchs, L. S. Fuchs, M. Giugno, J. Grant, M. Grenot-Scheyer, C. M. Jorgensen, K. R. Logan, L. H. Meyer, M. Sapon-Shevin, B. Sautner, A. Shanker, W. Stainback & W. Stainback, J. S. Thousand, D. Townsend, R. A. Villa, and C. Wang and other authors who have expressed interest in the inclusion model.

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5 Grenot-Scheyer, M., Bishop, K. D., Jubala, K. A., Coots, J. J. (1996)

6 Grenot-Scheyer, M., Bishop, K. D., Jubala, K. A., & Coots, J. J. (1996)

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In gratitude to:  
David Townsend  
&  
Rick Mrazek

**“A friend is a person with whom I may be sincere.  
Before him I may think aloud.”**

by: Ralph Waldo Emerson

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## Introduction

Considerable interest has been generated in recent years by the attempt to integrate, mainstream, or include disabled children into the regular public schools. There are many social and educational issues related to this process. We live in a society that has a negative social attitude towards special needs children but times are changing, families are changing and schools are changing. In such a context the school system must be better able to use any theories or practices that can benefit children. Inclusion as it is presently practiced has resulted from changing social, legal, and educational philosophies. Throughout this paper, the realities and myths of inclusion will be explored, from the point of view that inclusion in and of itself is neither good nor bad.

I believe one of the most important principles guiding education is the legal requirement that all children have a free, appropriate, public education. It is incumbent upon each educator to help achieve this goal for our children and to support those who are working to provide better programming for both our non-disabled and disabled children. It is of primary importance that we educate and instill good values in our youth. We can achieve those goals by loving our children and by providing them with good examples to follow and by educating ourselves to be open minded, caring and loving in our judgments. In such ways we can help to bring about positive changes in our society, one of which should be that children will learn to interact well with each other and accept each other's academic and physical limitations. They should also learn to react in socially acceptable ways. Our influence can bring about effective behavior changes in our children and promote a positive approach to the problem of educational disadvantage that academically and physically challenged students face.

Inclusion has become a word that generates a great deal of soul searching in me. I have discovered my own beliefs and values have played an important role in how I perceive this issue. Inclusion, to me, is not a new concept or a new way to deliver special education services and support to students with disabilities. For several decades students with disabilities have attended general classes. The issue of segregation, however, is one that has been given great attention by educators and parents because it has always carried with it such a negative connotation. Segregation due to visual impairment, or learning disabilities, or behaviour has always been equated with deficiency, so separate has never meant equal. Inclusion, for many people, has been seen as the best way to make up for the problems caused by segregation.

In Canada, many different interest groups have put pressure on the federal government to provide sufficient funding for the adequate care of special needs children. They argue that there are limited opportunities for special needs students to learn in a healthy, happy environment with their peers. Inclusion is said to be the ideal answer, in that children with disabilities will be reared together with their non-disabled peers and will be educated as equal participants in society. As a mother and a teacher, I adhere to the belief that all children are unique, that each child is born with strengths and needs. As children grow they may have difficulty in realizing their full human potential, due to physical, psychological, cognitive, emotional, or social factors, or a combination of these. As educators we can help alter their educational program to meet their unique needs. Throughout my teaching experience the onus for intervention on behalf of special needs children has been placed on teachers, psychologists, speech therapists, counselors, and other professionals who must work together as a team to plan the best possible

educational program. A child may require related services such as curriculum modification, transportation, physical and occupational therapy, or diagnostic medical services. The work of a team is essential, for without collaboration the structures as they exist in most schools would not be able to support the needs of all the children that must be served.

## An Overview of Related Literature

Consensus rules. The Inclusive Education Model is the solution to resolving the issues of equal education for all. Or is it? Several enabling conditions are clearly important for the Inclusive Education Model to function effectively but I think the most crucial question to be debated should be “Is inclusion feasible for all children?” Which authors have influenced the growing concerns for and against inclusive schools? Through my study of professional journals, books, my attendance at teacher educational conferences, and my conversations with other teachers I have concluded the term inclusion can be defined first as a set of values and principles that are fundamental to contemporary schools (Grant, 1996).

Inclusion is really about school change to improve the educational system for all students. It means changes in the curriculum, changes in how teachers teach and how students learn, as well as changes in how students with and without disability labels interact with and relate to one another. Within this model there are several enabling conditions which should exist. For example, in the classroom, teachers must pay close attention to the manner in which their own practices create, sustain, and reinforce the stigma of being disabled. It is my belief that “special needs children” are a minority of their own and while characteristics of this minority group are recognized, its members are not necessarily accepted by the society in which they live. This group has failed to assimilate and to be assimilated into the larger society. It may be that they have simply

been excluded.

Inclusion has also been defined as a way of life, a way of living together, based on a belief that each individual is valued and does belong (Thousand and Villa, 1995).

Thousand and Villa “present a constellation of rationales for inclusion, including our changing assumptions of how children learn, demographic changes, shifts in funding, and demonstrations of effective programs.”

Inclusion continues to provoke strong and often differing opinions among educators. These opinions are often expressed in discussions of the legal issues that surround the question of how best to educate disabled individuals. Legal matters have followed two paths, one in the area of civil rights, the other in education. In recent history, separate education has been found to be unequal as parents have become very active and dissatisfied with the education of their disabled children. Slowly, through the courts, parents have gained support from the public at large, other parents, professional groups, and the government. Decisions to educate children without discrimination have been supported strongly by the courts. It was not only issues of skin color, race, religion, social standing and language that needed to be addressed. The disabled persons’ needs became a major issue in the courts of North America in the latter part of the twentieth century (Bishop, Coots, Grenot-Scheyer, and Jubala, 1996).

It is important to note that while inclusion has received the favourable attention of the courts the question of whether or not to place a student in a segregated special education class, against the wishes of the parents, has also been resolved by the equality provisions of Section 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The decision was that placement in a “segregated” program did not constitute discrimination under Section 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms, section 15(1)

states that “every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.” One implication of this interpretation for Alberta is that our School Act mandates and requires consultation with parents before placement in a special education program, but children can be placed in segregated settings nevertheless.

Stainback and Stainback (1990) stated one of the most significant improvements in education over the past couple of decades has been the increased partnership between special and regular education. The Alberta Education Policy: Education Placement of Students with Special Needs (1.6.1) declares “educating students with special needs in regular classrooms in neighborhood or local schools shall be the first placement option considered by school boards, in consultation with students, parents/guardians and school staff.” These and several other legal precedents have stipulated that all children should be treated as equal. Many educators have said that is why the Inclusive Education Model is the 1990’s solution. In Alberta, every effort is made by schools to comply with the intent and the spirit of the provincial policy.

Interwoven with social and legal change is change in the field of education itself. Much of this change has occurred due to the combined results of research, experimentation, and law. For example, findings in psychology have affected our beliefs in what education is and how it takes place. Taking new theories and implementing them into a well organized curriculum and focusing on how and what to teach have become serious professional responsibilities for today’s teachers.

The work of Jean Piaget in the early 1950’s gave insight into how children learn and process information. Albert Bandura and other educators showed us that children

learn from modeling other children. The terms segregation, mainstream, integration and inclusion have been created from research. Low Deiner (1993) shows in her book Resources for Teaching Children with Diverse Abilities: Birth Through Eight that new teaching methods, support services, and technology used in the classroom have helped to advance the move towards inclusion. She also concurs with various other authors that inclusion means more than placing disabled children into the classroom. Deiner takes the process one step further by outlining inclusive levels. She argues that inclusion depends on teachers' ability to measure and program for children's learning, for their strengths and needs, at many points along a developmental path.

As Sapon-Shevin (1995) stated, "I have never, ever met a parent of a child with disabilities who did not hope that their child would someday have friends and connections with the broader community." Sapon-Shevin is a strong supporter of more inclusive schools. Her vision is that all children will be supported and nurtured in communities that really meet the needs of all the children within them, rich in resources and support for both students and teachers. Kauffman (1995) is on the other side of the issue; he believes schools should be open to alternatives, that a continuum of services is needed. He argues we should teach to the need of the child not the need of laws, governments, administrations, or teachers.

How did the current inclusion model evolve.? In the 1960's and 1970's, there was a major push for special education as parents and teachers of children with varying abilities came to believe that traditional education was not meeting the needs of their children. This was the beginning of the closures of special schools for the blind, deaf, and severely disabled children. By the early 1980's in Alberta most children were being integrated into the regular classroom with the aid of special education services. The

theory held that with individual programming, instructional modifications, and teachers specially trained in areas of exceptionality more effective education experiences for children with special needs would result (Townsend, 1997).

During the 1980's however, the special education movement began to show signs of erosion. More children were assessed and labeled, which began to lead back to segregation. "Special education" could not deal with the dramatic increase of children in need of special services. The result was that many children started to fall through the cracks in the educational system. These children included a disproportionate number of the poor, students with low aspirations, those who were chemically dependent, or culturally different, and children for whom English was a second language. The response to this in Alberta was a much more concerted effort to broaden the educational curriculum, in order for teachers to meet the needs of all students, and to foster respect for individual differences and similarities among all children. The "Inclusive Education Model" was given a position of priority in public education (Townsend, 1997).

Research, legislation, and many educators support the case for inclusion of special needs students in regular classrooms. So now that educators have found the answer, the question arises: How is inclusion best done? As schools are challenged to effectively serve more an increasingly diverse student population, the concern is not whether to provide inclusive education, but how to implement inclusive education in ways that are both feasible and effective in ensuring schooling success for all children, especially those with special needs.

The successful merging of special and regular education depends so much on the positive attitudes, beliefs, and values of all educators, and on the presence of enabling conditions. The beliefs and values of inclusive education can only be fostered through a

clear goal or philosophical statement which all teachers, administrators, parents, and community representatives work towards in a unified way. Teachers know the union of regular and special education does not happen quickly or easily but they know, too, that it is more likely to happen if the following enabling conditions exist. a) Professional Training and Development, b) Pooling of Resources, and c) Administrative Leadership and Support (Thousand and Villa, 1995). As suggested by O'Neil (1995) inclusion is bigger than special education and therefore, has the potential to positively impact education for all children and their teachers. To enable this to happen schools must change so that they become caring, nurturing, and supportive meeting the needs of all children and teachers (Bishop, Coots, Grenot-Scheyer, and Jubala, 1996).

According to these authors, the first of the enabling conditions of Professional Training and Development is being addressed through such things as Professional Development days, Educational Conferences, special workshops and Special Education Conferences. Teachers require additional information to broaden their understanding and appreciation of children with special needs, information such as how to identify learning problems and how to adapt the learning environment and their instruction to accommodate these problems. Courses which are recommended by leaders in the field of Inclusive Education are as follows: dynamic assessment, individual educational planning, adaptive instruction, differential learning, multicultural education, holistic curriculum and increased attention to diverse student needs and individualization (Jorgensen, 1995).

The second enabling condition is that of the pooling of resources. Inclusive education can impose additional financial demands on school boards during a time when financial support is steadily shrinking. This increase in financial cost will be used for such things as support personnel, school building modifications and material resources (e.g.

assessment instruments, program materials and instructional aides). If a given number of students required instruction in an alternative communication system (e.g. life skills, self-care skills, tutoring programs, or advanced physics) the cost estimates to operate such services could constitute the justification for monetary appropriations, rather than categories of labeled children. What Bishop, Coots, Grenot-Scheyer, and Jubala (1996) are referring to in this statement is if students in the inclusive model need a one-on-one instructional program or an enrichment program they should receive this support to enhance their academic program in the inclusive classroom.

The third enabling condition is that of administrative leadership and support. Administration must promote the merger of special and regular education; support integrated learning; develop supportive networks with community; foster respect for individual differences; promote consultative, cooperative, and adaptive educational practices; promote the goals of inclusive education; and empower teachers. It is critical that administration helps teachers cope with the frustrations and stresses involved in inclusion.

If these three enabling conditions are present on a consistent basis, there is an opportunity for students with special needs to succeed in an integrated environment. As with the case of my own school, the issues at the school level are: principal support/involvement, teacher support/involvement, parent involvement, written policy statements, guidelines for integration, formal communication systems about integration for parents and for teachers, reduced class sizes, some regular teachers trained in special education, regular teachers responsible for Individualized Program Plans, life skills programs, time for integration and students prepared for integration.

A major area of disagreement among parents, educators, and community members

in regard to inclusive education has to do with whether or not academics are being satisfied and whether or not inclusion advocates are too concerned with socialization? It is the parents, teachers and the special educators who are on the front line and can best identify special program needs for every student. Administrators must review proposals for new programs and identify strengths and needs of the programs and implement them so that they meet the needs of both the student, the administration, the teachers, and the parents (Fuchs and Fuchs, 1995).

If I am to believe such proponents of inclusion as Baker et al (1994), Coots et al (1995), Grant (1995), Grenot-Scheyer (1996) et al, O'Neil (1995), Sautner (1995), Stainback and Stainback (1988, 1990), Thousand and Villa (1995) and Wang et al (1995), the Inclusive Education Model can be an educational dream if all enablers are in place. So, is inclusion a good idea? Absolutely. If you listen to these authors this should be the model available to all families and their children. It has been suggested that whether or not to follow an inclusion model is a question guided by our values as a society. Bishop, Coots, Falvey, and Grenot-Scheyer argue that all students benefit from attending schools that teach, model, and promote understanding and appreciation of diversity and engage in practices that result in successful inclusion of all students, without exemption.

Inclusion can provide an opportunity for most children to share a learning environment full of rich experiences. The benefits of inclusion, however, go beyond accessing the core curriculum. Everyone benefits from being part of a community of learners where everyone belongs, everyone learns, and everyone receives the supports they need to do their personal best. By understanding, accepting, and celebrating human diversity within such communities of learners, children can feel a sense of belonging and learning to become vital members of a supportive and interdependent community of peers

and adults. It is clear from both the research and from practice that inclusive educational practices should benefit many students in this manner and teachers, as well.

But it is equally clear that the effectiveness and sustainability of inclusive education rests upon broader school reform and change. That is, inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classes will be most successful and sustainable when it is part of a broader effort to support all diverse learners within caring classrooms and school communities. Educators recognize that all schools are at different stages in regard to school reform and implementation of inclusive educational models. Many schools throughout Canada are just beginning to think about how best to change their educational programs to meet the increasing diversity of students found in their classrooms today.

As I have discussed this issue with educators, I have come to believe teachers will increasingly advocate for a diverse educational system, one that takes into consideration the needs of all children. While school systems will undergo major transitions to: 1) foster lifelong learning, 2) provide educational equity and quality, 3) facilitate independent learning and thinking, 4) promote a school home partnership, 5) encourage living and learning in a community, and 6) develop academic and social competence, this will require a great deal of preparation and commitment. More importantly, not only does the process need to be decided upon and acted upon, but it also needs to be continually monitored and evaluated (Schumaker and Deshler, 1995).

Kauffman and Shanker (1995) state that "... requiring all disabled children to be included in mainstream classrooms, regardless of their ability to function there, is not only unrealistic but also downright harmful - often for the children themselves". Like these authors, I believe that a one-size-fits-all approach will be disastrous for the disabled children themselves. Nevertheless, we have seen a rush to inclusion regardless of a child's

disability. As a Special Education teacher, I worry about the students who have fallen through the cracks. Fuchs and Fuchs (1994) say that “when children are not benefiting from instruction in a regular class, a compromise must be struck between legitimate social needs and equally valid educational needs.”

Deshler and Schumake’s (1995) views are profound for me because they make a big point about actively involving students in goal-setting and assignment-selection processes. What a strong statement! Teachers and students together can learn new strategies, develop new attitudes. I am in strong agreement that educators and researchers need to “continue their search for improved ways to deliver, manage, and monitor instructions so that their classes of academically and behaviourally diverse students find learning to be a more exciting and rewarding experience.” For me, this has given me encouragement to look for alternatives to an ineffective inclusion model in my own school.

Several excellent points made by these authors include the following:

. we need to educate the public on the need for school reforms to ensure equity in educational outcomes for all children. It will take great courage and effort to lead the way to new, more coherent, and genuinely useful programs at the margins of the schools, and to bring the schools into broader collaborative efforts for community betterment. Two major factors are critical to the effectiveness of the inclusion efforts: 1) effective collaboration among classroom teachers and the special education staff, and 2) a weekly block of instructional planning time. During my own teaching experiences I have found, as has Jorgensen (1995), that these are the issues that are being ignored.

Almost everyone involved in research related to inclusion seems ultimately to want one thing; that all children have the same opportunities for a successful learning experience. However, most teachers and administrators are aware of the challenges that

confront them. Many children have difficulty in realizing their full human potential. Their intellectual, emotional, physical, or social performance falls below that of other children. The differences may be related to physical, psychological, cognitive, emotional, or social factors, or a combination of these. There may be times when the Special Education classroom, designed to meet these unique needs of children with exceptionalities, is a better experience for children than classrooms based on the Inclusion Model (Shanker, 1994). In my experience, too many of the children in a Special Education classroom have very severe needs that cannot be addressed in the regular classroom without jeopardizing the learning of all other children.

## My Personal Experiences With Inclusion

In 1997 our school superintendent, administrators, teachers and students began to struggle with inclusion. Many differing opinions came to the surface in the first four months of the school year. Why was inclusion introduced? For many years our school had provided special needs services through a segregated special education classroom, resource pull-outs, working in small groups in the classroom, or working one-on-one in the classroom. When we decided to look at the legal issues of segregation-versus-inclusion we were encouraged to prepare a new and improved special education policy for the school district that would open the door for inclusion. Past practices of mainstreaming and integration definitely helped influence the move towards the current model of inclusion. We dreamed about education that was to be equal for all.

Children come to our school with different experiences related to their own environment, culture, language, race, and economic backgrounds. Many children have encountered physical abuse. Many children are used to being slapped, hit, kicked, shoved, or having objects thrown at them. Flesh wounds or other injuries are fairly common. Severe abuse that may result in major injury, permanent physical or developmental impairment is far too frequent, while emotional abuse involving humiliation, berating, or other acts carried out over time have terrorised and frighten many of the children who attend our school. Sexual abuse is another defiant behavior, too often inflicted on our children, which leaves a legacy of children who act out, experience anxiety or depression. Children who face parental neglect, rejection, and maltreatment are among our student population. How does a child overcome these adversities and learn? How can teachers, administrators, or government programs create a healthy learning environment? How should these issues be addressed by the educational system?

Apart from all the aforementioned, children have their own internal and external wars. They face peer pressure or rejection. Drugs and alcohol abuse is running rampant in our society. Sniffing gas, hair spray, white out, or glue is present in our student culture. Dropping out of the school structures to wander the streets has become a way of life for many of our teens. Some unable to cope with the pressures, choose suicide. These and many more obstacles face our children our schools have to look at how they can address these problems within an educational model, knowing that, unchecked, these problems can produce emotional, physical, spiritual, and mental problems for many of our children.

Students with extreme high needs can become so disruptive that learning for other students becomes impossible. Over the years, learning had deteriorated in our school and the morale of the staff had begun to deteriorate as well. Our school like many looked at inclusion as the answer in correcting many of the problems associated with labeling and segregation of children with exceptional needs. Administrators looked at inclusion as the answer to improving the overall educational system for all students. They hoped that by changing the curriculum, changing how teachers teach and how students learn, the gap between teaching special needs students and students without disabilities would narrow. When we introduced inclusion, the goal of our school was to provide a caring, nurturing, and supportive educational system for teachers and students. Instead, it seems the whole learning environment almost shut down completely. The dream was to create a safe and caring educational environment for all children, exceptional and special needs. The reality was more like a disaster.

In trying to understand why this happened it may help to begin with a look at the physical set up of the school. Was it conducive to learning? There are four grade levels from grade five to grade eight. There is an average of twenty-five students per class at any

given time. In these classes we have students who are exceptional, average, and those who have been identified in the past as special education students. Each grade has three teachers and is set in a pod format. Each pod has a team leader who answers to the administrators in the school. The structures encourages each pod to be self-reliant. Little if any interaction takes place between pods, yet any pod is only as strong as its teachers.

Unfortunately, many of our pods had first year teachers who were struggling to discover the curriculum dealing with students who were struggling with their own problems. Each pod was expected to design its own forms of discipline, rules, and curriculum development. Each teacher had expectations of what special education meant for their own students in their own pod. I had six teachers plus forty or more students who were listed as needing my special services. Very quickly I found it impossible for me, one special education teacher, to teach grade six health to three classes and cover the special needs requirements of the grade five and six pods.

I knew I had to find ways of dealing with the high needs children. There were children who exhibited chronic, destructive, impulsive, and aggressive behaviour, and there were children with extreme learning disabilities who had to be dealt with in some order of priority. The students who were more than two grade levels behind in their educational program and were coded "high needs" took all the allotted time but there were many more students who needed my attention. Working with the home room teachers in an inclusive model I could see the slow erosion of learning for all students. The needs of the disabled students were not being met any more than the needs of the students without disabilities. Collaboration with families, general and special educators, administrators, paraprofessionals, and related service personnel, a key element of inclusion, came to a stand-still. There were not enough hours in the day to address all the required needs

effectively.

Our attempts to discuss our problems with special services administrators proved futile. Their response was, "Inclusion works, so make it work!" They did not want to hear problems: they wanted to see results. Communication became severely strained between our principal and special services. After four months it appeared we were being asked to choose between meeting the needs of the majority of students or meeting the needs of the disabled students. I know any new concept must be entered into slowly and everyone needs to take small steps to help it mature and grow, but the big problem for us was that the children could not wait for intervention. After four months the inclusion model in our school was disbanded in favor of a totally segregated special needs classroom.

A special five and six classroom was formed to address the educational program of the high needs students. Twelve of the more challenging students came together in one area. These were children who had codes and labels such as Severe Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, Fetal Alcohol Effect, Attention Deficit Disorder, Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, Conduct Disorder, Suicidal and Severe to Mild Depression. Two students were in foster care due to abuse and neglect. One student acted out sexually, on a consistent basis and all twelve had severe to mild learning disabilities. Using behavior modification, anger management, modeling, cueing, rewards, and lots of understanding our new team took on the challenges these students presented and began to help them form a bond and learn.

After several months, the academic program could be seen to be stronger as the students' behavior modified or improved. The underlying goal was supposedly to correct the behavior and mainstream these students back into the regular class even though, in its

first try, inclusion did not work for these individual children because their individual needs could not be met. I did not think it was a good idea to take these students away from where they could get the most help. It seems to me our model of inclusion collapsed because it was fundamentally inadequate. Teachers could not cope with the added stresses fueled by a lack of resources, over-crowded classrooms, an extremely high population of special needs students, the extreme behavior of some students, lack of parental involvement, lack of support from administrators and teachers, lack of teacher assistants, teachers' unwillingness to change, cultural diversities, different social and economical boundaries, and lack of educational instruction and policies.

The critical component necessary for the successful inclusion of students with disabilities or without disabilities is the provision of appropriate supports and services for every student and for every teacher. This did not happen in our school. Teachers were left to handle a classroom of twenty-four or more students with perhaps ten or more requiring intervention at some level from special services. Parents who might have played a key role proved to be a weak component. Teachers needed added support from aides who might have been used to assist them to create a more positive learning environment, one that would have allowed more students to do their personal best, but the school budget did not provide any funding for additional staff to be hired. Time and energy for teams to work together to plan and implement the inclusive educational model and collaboratively solve problems as they arose was never made available.

We found some success with a form of segregation with resource assistance when needed. In our case this did not mean unequal; it meant different. I think the main reason why segregation worked in this one case are as follows:

. The room was managed by an effective teacher who set high expectations and applied strict rules with fair consequences.

. There was a safe environment for learning, life skills, social skills, for meeting the students emotional, physical, spiritual, and academic needs, and for making learning a creative fun-filled experience.

. These children needed time to heal before they could face an academic program.

Our form of segregation was meeting their needs while giving them an equal opportunity to learn.

In our society we have come to know that cultural, racial, gender, or socioeconomic stereotypes have an effect on teaching and learning. Addressing these social and emotional factors has become an increasingly important part of teaching. As a teacher I am the one who sets the climate in the classroom. My students' behavior is closely linked to my own. My actions, attitudes, and expectations greatly influence how my students act. To help increase the odds that all my students will become their best I have established strategies for preventing problems before they occur. By having consistent enforcement of rules, routines, adequate lesson planning, smooth transitions between lessons, challenging seat work and, most important, by listening to the feelings of my students, I can best help them learn and grow. Because I have been highly organized I have created students who feel relaxed, want to learn, and enjoy learning all at the same time.

An effective teacher addresses the emotional needs of her students, in part by raising their self-esteem, teaching them to be responsible and fair, motivating them to learn, and helping them make choices. By being alert to the classroom atmosphere I can bring success! I have come to feel my students, to know their moods, to know what makes them happy or sad. I sense when they need time out or just a one-on-one ear to

listen to their feelings. I have learned to ask my students to be patient with me, to know that I can't be there all the time. By never embarrassing my students in front of their peers or other teachers, and by giving respect at all times, I am able to model expected behavior. I have learned to ignore minor inattention and not to expect perfection. I have learned to avoid extended reprimands or over-reactions. Forgiveness is also required in teaching. I try to start each day fresh. Children need to feel accepted for who they are; it is their behavior or actions that need to be challenged or changed. I feel these are some of the effective tools that need to be used to create an inclusive classroom.

Once the separation had been made at our school, at no time did my students feel segregated or different. In fact, other students from the regular classes would often ask to attend our class. What higher praise does a teacher need? All my students were given skills or strategies to help arm them for the lives they were living. Each student has the goal of moving into the regular class. In the past five years of teaching disabled children, I have watched my students succeed and I have concluded they are only different in the way they learn. All of my students have been mainstreamed into the regular classroom successfully at one time or another. Each of them has required additional time to bloom and grow.

## Portraits of Inclusion

I will introduce two students who have similar disabilities. My intent is to share their stories to illustrate some important concepts regarding their educational programs.

### **Case Study #1**

In January of 1986, Chris started life in due quietness. A life time of experiences would become a road map of his expressions. Chris is immature and child-like. He is dwarfish in stature and very mentally disabled. His stomach protrudes in the manner of a very undernourished child. He has very peculiar looking ears with no separation of his earlobe from the side of his face. His eyes are fairly close-set and droopy. His head seems very small and oddly shaped compared to his poorly-proportioned body. His face is extremely asymmetrical and overall has an inverted triangular appearance. His mouth is of normal shape; his upper lip is long and smooth, suggestive of fetal alcohol syndrome. He has curious teeth in that they shimmer. His hands, too, are a little unusual in that he has clinodactyly and a simian crease on the right hand; his fine and gross motor skills are much behind those of his age counterparts. He has extreme difficulty talking in a clear diction; his speech is almost incoherent. As well he has an outrageous chuckle, which is often remote. People do not tend to stay long in his presence. He does not attract.

His history is vague. Chris's mother has two other children, none of whom appears to be as challenged as Chris. He has little contact with his biological father. His mother suffers from chronic alcoholism and provides a very dysfunctional life style for her children. Chris has been

coded as: Severe Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, learning disabled, visual perceptual deficiency, auditory perceptual deficiency, memory perceptual deficiency, organizational skills deficiency, socially delayed, communication disability, and fine motor coordination deficiency. These are overwhelming disabilities for one child to face.

I first saw Chris in September, 1992. He was in a special education setting with four other disabled students. His school records and teacher reports indicated that he was working below a kindergarten level. Since then he has been placed in numerous special education classrooms and has had intervention throughout his education. Most of the time Chris seems excited about being in school. This is his safety zone. Due to many domestic fights and numerous alcohol-related disruptions his home environment is less than healthy. He is poorly nourished and his emotional needs are neglected. When he is alert and awake, he follows the movements of the other students with his deep chocolate brown eyes. Chris seems to be continually seeking a place of acceptance.

In 1997 the school administration and superintendent implemented the policy of total inclusion. Chris was integrated into the regular grade five classroom. Within the first month several factors came to light. The regular classroom setting was having a difficult time meeting his needs, due to the lack of support, resources and additional instructional time required. Chris's life skills, social skills, and maturity level were well below his age and grade level. Reading and writing were always difficult for Chris because of his learning disability. He did not know his alphabet.

His IQ is supposed to be somewhere between 40 to 50. Chris has a great number of problems with cause and effect. He does not understand consequences. He has no concept of what is negative and inappropriate behavior. He can become very loud and aggressive when not in a structured program. He requires continual visual and verbal cueing. Time must be taken to discuss his behavior and to explain to him the correct way to react. Feedback must be immediate. Chris's individual educational plan was to start where he was academically. This required additional material and resources at his own level. He needed one-on-one assistance for 90% of his work and the homeroom teacher could not meet these needs. Unfortunately, a teacher assistant could not be hired. With twenty-four other students and eight more students listed as below grade level and requiring an individual educational plan the regular classroom proved inadequate in meeting his needs. He was then placed in the specially designed grade 5 and 6 split classroom with other students who had similar disabilities. Within the confines of a special education classroom Chris slowly started to grow, was accepted, and experienced small successes. He was slowly able to learn to monitor his own behavior, to monitor his tone of voice and to choose appropriate vocabulary when he talked to his peers.

Chris was unable to attend school by taking the regular school bus. He would run and hide and refuse to get on the bus. He was afraid to get on the bus with other children because of the continual teasing, hitting and verbal abuse. Other children show little respect to Chris. He is a target for bullies. After a time the regular school bus driver refused to pick Chris up. Arrangements were made for the handi-bus to pick him up at his home.

Throughout Chris's educational schooling his attendance has been extremely poor. To help improve his attendance a new time schedule was activated. School started at 8:40 a.m. but Chris was transported to school at 9:00 a.m. each morning. This gave him the opportunity to sleep in. His attendance improved by 90-%. As well, he was less tired and more energetic.

To help encourage his mother to participate in his educational program several strategies were implemented: 1) home visits were made, 2) special rewards were given for five days of consecutive attendance 3) special notes of appreciation were sent home, 4) \$10.00 a month was given for 100% attendance. Proper nutrition was another important issue. Chris would be hungry in the morning and come with no lunch. By providing breakfast, lunch and a safe learning environment and by helping him feel a part of the class I was able to see him become a more happy and contented child. Often I would discuss with other students the importance of respect and how one can show that respect. I tried to get them to see that being a bully, teasing, swearing and fighting were not acceptable and that consequences for such behaviour would be very severe.

Chris is only one of thousands of special needs children who require intervention and acceptance. Feelings of exclusion are ever-present for many disabled children. To understand the experiences of a person who has a disability is to experience the frailty of the human body and mind. "People are defined or categorized as disabled if they have any persistent

physical, mental, psychiatric, sensory, or learning impairment; if they consider themselves to be, or believe that a potential employer would consider them to be, disadvantaged in employment because of an impairment” (Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, 1991). Chris has very individual needs and, at this stage in his development, an inclusive educational program did not prove effective in meeting his needs. This is not to say in the future Chris could not be integrated into a regular classroom with the support of a teacher’s aide, additional resources, and assistance from other specialized individuals.

## Case Study #2

The following example is a case study of another student who required a great deal of intervention. This case illustrates the challenges inherent in reaching and teaching a child with learning disabilities.

Bobby came to my class in the fifth grade after experiencing a great deal of frustration and failure in his previous schools. His school records and teacher reports indicated that he was working at a grade one level. He was viewed as a major discipline problem. He had significant behavioural and emotional problems and was underachieving. For most of Bobby's school life he had some type of intervention through special education.

First, I reviewed all records and testing completed for Bobby throughout his school years. I made a home visit to get a feel for Bobby's environment and family life. I assured Bobby's guardian that a team approach would offer success for him and that it was important to work on building self-esteem. I suggested the following issues needed to be addressed: anger management, behavior modification, life skills, and developing an Individual Education Program for language arts and math. I requested a four-week intervention period during which I could observe Bobby, get to know him, and informally assess his needs in the following areas: 1. academic, 2. psychological, 3. health, 4. perceptual-motor, and 5. memory tests. It was obvious Bobby displayed certain behavioural characteristics (high activity levels, inability to sit or control impulsive acts, talking out, off task, disruptive, and attention getting) to a severe degree.

Bobby's file stated that he was diagnosed as Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, Attention Deficit/Hyperactive Disorder and Language Disorder. At the age of eight he was tested and assessed by a Speech & Language Pathologist. It was recommended that Bobby start taking Ritalin for his Attention Deficit/Hyperactive Disorder. A hearing test at the age of eight suggested hearing sensitivity within normal limits. His vision and general health was good.

A significant discrepancy existed between his ability (measured IQ) and his achievement in reading, math, and written language. This discrepancy was determined to be caused by a learning disability in visual-motor integration and visual sequential memory. His ability to pronate and supinate is obviously minimal due to his radioulnar synostosis. His right forearm and hand are pronate when at rest, while his left forearm is closer to neutral. Bobby has done extremely well in compensating for these limitations by adjusting his trunk, arm, and head position.

An "Individualized Education Plan" and case meeting was planned with Bobby's guardian, myself, the school counselor, and the principal. We discussed test results and observations. We identified learning strengths and needs and determined that Bobby would be placed in a special needs classroom. Material and resources on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/Fetal Alcohol Effects and Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder were given to his guardian. Goals, listed objectives, and strategies to help manage Bobby at home and school were identified. I stated that I would like to take a holistic approach in working with Bobby.

Bobby was taken off Ritalin. Behavior modification, weekly counseling for his anger, life skills, rewards and building on his self-image were implemented. This turned out to be a very effective approach. Using Maslow's Scale of Needs for reference I was able to create a very successful program for him. Society likes to impose labels, fit things or people into categories. Bobby had numerous labels starting with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, Fetal Alcohol Effect, Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, language disorder, learning disabled, severe physical disability, and the list continues. Bobby is another student who did not fit the inclusive education model. Before he could, much work needed to be done.

Bobby possesses great courage, not the kind that fights lions, but the kind that wins wars. From the day I met him he has struggled. Within a two- year special education program Bobby successfully moved four grade levels. He matured and slowly took control of his own behavior. Teaching coping skills and strategies on how to manage his disability brought success. Bobby has since been integrated or mainstreamed into a regular grade seven program. He has made friends and is no longer disruptive of the learning of other students. The curriculum has been modified and support is given in language art and math.

When I took on the task of coordinating this new 5 and 6 split classroom the label of special education classroom, or resource room, was not used. My approach was to put children in a special program and then gradually reintroduce them to the regular class once their academic skills and behavior approached the proper level. My experience also convinced

me of the value of collaboration among my fellow teachers. The class integration process will only work with the help and assistance of all teachers, willing to accept these children into their classroom with open arms. As a special education teacher I have no special bag of tricks. Good teaching is good teaching. I have only applied given knowledge of caring and sharing with my students, taking the time to explain, model, interact, or practice particular strategies. I have found that strategies that work well with labeled children usually work just as well with non-labelled children. If I could pin point one major effective strategy it would be that I make the students feel they belong. Their physical needs, emotional needs, spiritual needs, and cognitive development are all nurtured.

It is important to define the needs of all children and to adjust the educational structures to include special needs children like Chris and Bobby. As an educator, I recognize I do not have all the answers to questions families have been asking as they have seen our school move towards a more inclusive education model. As a special education teacher my simple answer is to teach to the needs of the individual child. The integration process appears to work especially well when the special education teacher works as a member of a team. Yes, it is important to reduce the gap between special and regular students. This is a critical goal for parents, teachers, administrators, and communities members.

## Conclusion

The trends from the last couple of decades have shown a merging of regular and special education into a unified educational system. My belief is that in the 1990's, more than ever before, teachers have been held responsible for addressing all students' unique learning needs. Theories are excellent; it is when teachers try to activate or implement them with real humans that reality emerges. For it to be successful, the process of inclusion will have to be a multifaceted endeavor taking place over an extended period of time. The process itself will take a great deal of time to evolve and grow. Commitment on everyone's part is a prerequisite for the emergence of a unified system of education that can meet the unique needs of all students.

In my school the school structures have been shattered and they are decaying for some or all of the following reasons:

- . lack of government commitment and funding
- . out-of-date resources
- . over crowded classrooms
- . inadequate teachers, impotent support systems
- . totally different values and beliefs in our community
- . parents who are overwhelmed
- . children who have changed tremendously
- . misinformed and out-of-date attitudes and theories.

How can a school system be revived out of chaos?

Many of the educational researchers and practitioners to whom I have referred in this paper have their own points of view and assumptions many of which date back to the late 1960's. They should ask themselves, when was the last time they taught in a real

school system? Which economic, social background, geographic location, and race has been the focus of their own learning? Many authors whose ideas influence Canadian schools have done their research in the United States, yet our school systems vary greatly in structures, attitudes, beliefs, and form. The ideal school system would and should incorporate a commitment to expand opportunities for all students. However, it seems our educational system is eating up every new theory, hoping that each one will be the one to solve all our problems.

Our government pools our most treasured commodity into one large system called equal education for all. As a teacher whose beliefs and values say that every child is special! I feel the educational system is at an impasse. I have concluded that the word inclusion has come to mean a process for catering to the majority while offering a backup system of tinkering for the minority. A good example of this can be seen in what's happening to the First Nations people. The minority becomes acculturated but not assimilated. The First Nations people have avoided absorption into the dominant culture by insisting on their own uniqueness and separateness. This also holds true for their educational system.

The philosophy and humanistic approach, that all children are special, is the foundation of First Nations Educational Policy. The new Treaty 7 Special Education Policy states "that all First Nations children are unique, sacred gifts from the Creator. Each child has the ability to learn and has the right to the highest standard of education that encompasses spiritual, physical, social, emotional and cognitive development necessary for life long learning. All First Nations children have a right to Our Ways Of Knowing as a guiding force in the pursuit of life long education." (Cowley, Crawler, Crosschild, Fox, Goodstriker, MacNeil, McHugh, Morris, Mustache, Pace, Strikes With

A Gun, Strikes With A Gun, Wesley, (1997). All children have particular strengths and weaknesses. In most, the strengths outweigh the weaknesses. Extreme Attention Deficit Disorder/Hyperactivity, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, Fetal Alcohol Effect, conduct disorders, oppositional defiant disorders, emotional traumatized, severely abused (mentally, emotional/physically/spiritually), immaturity, exceptionally violent and language disorders & delay are just some of the many needs that also have to be addressed for the safety of all children. How can active learning take place when these children continually take up over 70% of teachers' energy and time.? Each of the children who fit into the above categories learn at a different speed or pace. Their styles of learning vary. Their interests are different. Personal goals for each child are different. Levels of skill and knowledge are extremely different. So the program to meet their needs has to be infinitely adjustable.

Most arguments against inclusion seem to be based on the unstated assumption that all special education students need a completely different, almost hermetically-sealed learning environment. As an educator of students with a variety of abilities and disabilities, I can say that this is not a correct assumption. They may need more time to complete assignments. They may need intensive help in specific subjects. They may need special or different teaching methods or technologies ...But, I have found I am most effective when I listen to the parents and concentrate on my students' strengths and when I find out how they've learned what they already know and how they actually process information. Once I figure this out, I can structure my lessons to take advantage of their most efficient methods. A primary lesson my students have taught me is that expectations are every bit as important as teaching methods.

I have found not all students with disabilities require elaborate special education services. Some simply need physical accommodations, such as a larger desk or an aide part time. In general, for inclusion to work, special education resources must follow the “included” student into the regular classroom. The above statement hints at some of the reasons why the inclusion model must be evaluated. When teachers, administrators and governments look at inclusion they should stress the word “some”. There is no checklist to ensure that inclusion will work for all students. A wide range of available options, a diversity of student needs, and the particular talents and interests of staff combine to form unique patterns within individual schools and districts. To be effective, inclusion must take on many shapes and meanings.

I don't agree that we should be looking beyond typical ways for children with special needs to become valued members of the community. I believe that we find ways to contribute to the community in its functioning form, and through that contribution we will be accepted and included. That is also why I am against the abandonment of specialized school programs, because some of the best of these programs promote success in the community. We should learn from those successes instead of spending so much time worrying about where students are physically located in the school.

All children, whether disabled or not, want a connection with the broader community. Inclusion is an ideal. The ideal is that children with disabilities will be reared like their non-disabled peers and will be educated as equal participants in society. This is translated to mean that children with disabilities should be taught in their neighborhood schools in regular classes, that their lives should be as normal as possible, and that intervention should not interfere with individual freedom. The sum total of my own experiences as a teacher and my research into other professional opinions lead me to

believe that full inclusion is possible, though very difficult to attain in the real world. >

We live in a very diverse world. Our society has exposed the belief, that we are all created equal, but many struggle to fit into the norm of society, and many fail. I do not want an educational system based on the idea that one size fits all (Shanker, 1995). People all learn at different rates, in different ways, and through different styles because they are different. All children are potentially delightful, unpredictable, and unique. It is important that parents, teachers, administrators and government agencies look at the rewards and see the drawbacks that inclusion offers. Inclusion does not work for all children. It has been successful for many because the resources, support, and educational tools are in place to aid with the program. What appears to be important is to maintain choice and flexibility in the school system so that all children can get the individual programs necessary to move them towards greater inclusion with their peers and the community. No one wants to be excluded.

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