

# **ATTITUDES TOWARD INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

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## ATTITUDES TOWARD INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The topic of this presentation is “Attitudes to Full Inclusion”. My intent is to make it an interactive session in which we all contribute our knowledge and experiences.

I have been requested to focus attention on attitudes of regular classroom teachers, but also to touch on groups such as school administrators, parents, and typical learners. The frame for my comments primarily will be Canada, though contributions of some other nations may be mentioned.

Our session will begin with consideration of what the term “attitude” means and how differing attitudinal generalizations regarding complex social topics, of which learners with disabilities certainly is one, may be conceptualized. One noted Western attitudinal theorist (Kerlinger 1984) suggests that social “*attitudes are enduring and organized structures of social beliefs that predispose individuals to think, feel, perceive, and behave selectively toward referents or ‘cognitive objects’*”. One meaning of attitude may reflect a conservativist, traditional set of attitudes;

*Traditionalism is a set of educational beliefs that focuses on ultimate truths and principles, the intellectual aspects and standards of education, subject matter, spiritual and moral values, tradition, discipline, and the authority of the teacher, and education as preparation for further study and for life.*

whereas another may be reflective of a liberal, progressivist set.

*Progressivism is a set of educational beliefs that is characterized by emphasis on the needs and interest of the child, the freedom of the child and the teacher, permissiveness, life experience as educative, quality of teacher and student,*

*democratic citizenship, and physical, emotional, and social development and thus education of the "whole child".*

The two possibilities lead in different directions.

Reform toward education of learners with disabilities in regular classrooms of community schools, rather than in special environments, fits into the second, progressivist, attitudinal system. Much of my commentary and analysis during our session will reflect Canadian liberal progressivist thought, though the conservativist progressivist thought position will draw some attention.

Setting a theoretical perspective will not take a great deal of time. It is meant only to serve notice that two thought systems are bumping against each other, a relationship generally referred to as "change". Education of learners with disabilities, until quite recently, has been largely a history of those with disabilities not being regarded as learners, but as a population without true learning capacity in the cognitive sense, and little in the affective sense. This idea is being challenged.

Change toward inclusion in regular education environments has a history going back to the 1960s in Canada. As inclusive education had its earliest substantial beginnings in Canada and similar change is appearing in other nations, we may take it that what is said about Canada today may be said about similar nations. Change toward inclusion for learners with disabilities in Canada has followed, and continues to follow, a bumpy path. This session will take us on that journey, and involve you in considering the path, which might be laid down in India and other places by you and others.

Though I have some experience of India and some other nations in inclusive education, I lay no claim to expertise in your context. My context is my research and

practice into attitude and inclusive education. It is this research and my practice and their possible revelations and implications, which I shall present. Together we will work on implications for where I work and for where you work.

My growing belief is that it is in nations such as India that the greatest potential for significant change in education of learners with disabilities exists. It will be interesting to explore this point.

The education system in Canada remains, for the most part, tied to the medical/psychological model. This explains the special education practice of integrating some learners with disabilities on a full-time or part-time basis and segregating others in special classes or institutions. Within this general picture, however, change toward inclusion is occurring and inclusion is taking place more and more.

Many Canadian teachers argue that inclusion is simply part of the special education model. They see many learners with disabilities as being so different from typical learners, that the two groups cannot be educated together. I believe that this is simply a symptom of resistance to change. Is it?

On the other hand, an increasing number of Canadian teachers see inclusive education as absolutely disconnected from the special education model. They see inclusion as a new and quite possible model. They see inclusion as beneficial to both typical learners and those with disabilities. They base this position on concepts of social justice and on their experiences in inclusion.

We shall have a close look at these two conflicting ideas, their sources, and how they play out in the minds of teachers.

School administrators hold positions of importance for what happens in the education system for all learners. Their positions make them leaders in maintaining the status quo or in moving toward new educational structures. We shall explore Canadian research into how Canadian administrators and teachers see roles of administrators in educational reform. Do they share the same views as their teachers and of their counterparts in other nations? Are the challenges for educational administrators essentially the same from nation to nation?

A third group of importance is that of parents of typical students. The special education model is founded on the belief that placing typical learners and learners with disabilities together for education will result in interference with the learning of both groups. This belief alarms many parents. Conversely, inclusive education argues that typical peers will support learners with disabilities. They will become tutors and models for learning. There will be benefit for both typical learners and for those with disabilities. These are comforting thoughts for parents. What, however, does research say about the perceptions of the parents of typical learners with regard to education in an inclusive environment? Which views are supported?

Extending this discussion further, what is the experience of typical learners? Do they see opportunity to reject, tease, and bully? Do they form friendships with their peers with disabilities? What attitudes develop when typical learners are in close contact with learners with disabilities for extended periods of time?

There are a great many questions around the attitudes of central players in the contemporary move toward inclusion of learners with disabilities in regular classrooms. This session will provide opportunity for us to consider some of these questions in terms

of our own different contexts. What is beyond question is that our attitudes toward students with disabilities will control the learning processes we put in place for them.

Before we go on to look at attitudes of various groups toward inclusive education, let us have a look at a recently developed Canadian definition of inclusion as it applies to education (Bunch, Finnegan, Humphries, Dore, R., & Dore, L., 2005). Each nation is different, has its own culture, and has its own groups of students to consider. India will need to develop its own definition of inclusive education. Expect that not everyone will agree with whatever definition is developed. That is the case in Canada and everywhere else I have travelled. Nonetheless, you would be well advised to develop a definition of inclusive education as a guide to practice and as a signal of how what you are trying to achieve differs from other responses such as special schools and special classes.

*Inclusive education refers to educational practice based on the philosophical belief that all learners, those with and without disabilities, have the right to be educated together in age-appropriate class groups, and that all will benefit from education in regular classrooms of community schools. Within these settings teachers, parents, and others work collaboratively using appropriate and sufficient resources to interpret and enact the regular curriculum in flexible manner in accordance with the individual abilities and needs of all learners.*

Let us go a bit further than simply reading a definition. Let us examine its parts. It is the parts of a definition that fill out its meanings and implications.

- Inclusive education refers to educational practice
- based on the philosophical belief that all learners, those with and without disabilities,

- have the right to be educated together in age-appropriate class groups,
- and that all will benefit from education
- in regular classrooms of community schools.
- Within these settings teachers, parents, and others
- work collaboratively
- using appropriate and sufficient resources
- to interpret and enact the regular curriculum
- in flexible manner
- in accordance with the individual abilities and needs of all learners.

## **CONTROVERSY**

Inclusive Education is a controversial topic in education across the globe. I see three major reasons for the controversy.

- Inclusion requires change in educational perspectives of learners with disabilities. Change typically is met by heightened passions coupled with resistance or acceptance.
- Classroom teachers believe themselves not prepared for inclusion of learners with disabilities in their classrooms. Most teacher preparation programs have not responded to the need to focus on teaching strategies supportive of students with diverse levels of ability.
- Absence of effective leadership from the administrator level is often the case. Administrators must take the lead in moving toward inclusion. Without leadership, many teachers will not consider inclusion as serious educational policy.

All three reasons relate to matters of attitude. This presentation will consider what we know of the attitudes of classroom teachers, of their administrators, of parents of the typical learners in the classroom, and of these typical learners. As we go along, I will ask you to consider your attitudes and those of members of these other groups. The first step toward inclusion or away from it is motivated by the attitudes we hold toward people with disability and their place in our society and in education. I believe one way to move forward progressively is to become familiar with what we know about the attitudes of those involved in education and the place of learners with disabilities within that agency of society.

I invite your active participation in this session. As we all know, learning is advantaged by being involved. I will pose a series of questions as we go along. You have received a handout on which are the questions. I will ask you to spend a few minutes discussing each question with those near you. I suggest groups of three. If you find it useful, please write notes for yourself using the handout. I will not be asking you to report on your three-way discussions. Your notes will become a resource for you, along with your recall of this session, and the copy of the presentation you will receive at its end. By the way, this is an inclusive strategy in that it is focused on having everyone in a class, this room, collaborating on considering a question, and contributing what they can based on their abilities and needs.

### **ATTITUDES OF REGULAR CLASSROOM TEACHERS**

Teachers in regular classrooms are the educators who will assume primary responsibility for the education of both regular students and learners with disabilities.



More than any other group, it is classroom teachers who will decide the fate of inclusive education.

Given this fact, however, all of those involved in education have their own important roles to play. Teachers need leaders. All students need adult models. Parents need insightful school administrators and progressive teachers. Administrators and teachers need supportive and involved parents. Typical students without disabilities need to welcome, accept, and support their peers with disabilities.

My experience is that teachers have the knowledge needed to teach successfully in inclusive settings. There are some new instructional strategies to learn, and some supportive structures needed in school practising inclusion. Learning a limited number of new strategies and putting supportive structures in place are not big barriers to inclusive practice. But attitudes toward learning new strategies, putting supportive structures in place, and looking somewhat differently at who can be a learner in a regular classroom can raise major barriers. They also can be major motivators. Regular class teachers tend to hold concerns regarding inclusion and they tend to hold positive views of inclusion. The situation when it comes to attitudes is more complex than simple.

**Q 1: In your experience what attitudes, both positive and negative, do regular classroom teachers hold toward inclusion of learners with disabilities in regular classrooms?**

I would like to discuss the findings of a national study of teacher attitudes I conducted in Canada to answer such questions. The first question is one of a series, which I will ask you to consider as we look at the area of attitudes and inclusion. First a look at teacher concerns.

## **Teacher Concerns**

### **Fear of Professional Inadequacy**

The majority of classroom teachers in the Canadian study believed that they were inadequately prepared for inclusive practice. They believed that their preservice and their in-service professional preparation had not been sufficient in this area.

- *Teachers might feel that they're not prepared professionally and they might not have the educational background.*
- *There has been zero to nil preparation on this topic at the Faculty of Education.*

Conversely, a number of respondents, while recognizing that professional preparation was lacking, indicated that fear of being unprepared lessened with experience in inclusive education.

- *When we first started I was really stressed out. I'll be quite honest with you. I cried several nights when I went home. But, once we were over the hump, it was just a matter of learning to let go and just go with the flow.*

### **Fear of Teacher Workload**

The second significant concern related to workload for the regular class teacher. A considerable number of interviewees feared that inclusive practice meant more work.

- *They may have to do more work, whether it's research or understanding what the students might need in the classroom, whether they might have to change their teaching styles.*

### **Fear of Insufficient General Support**

This area of concern was the second most frequently mentioned. An impressive number of interviewees expressed fear that regular class teachers would have students

with disabilities assigned to them while, at the same time, supports would not be provided or would be withdrawn.

- *Our experience is that resource personnel are gradually pulled out of the system, and then there is no one to assist these included students with their needs.*

For some participants it seemed that experience in inclusive settings altered this attitude.

- *They're worried about all kinds of things. They'll be worried about the students. They'll be worried about responsibility. What happens if the student gets injured? But, you know, the worries get alleviated once a person starts working.*

### **Fear of Lack of Administrator Support**

Two types of support were mentioned by participants. Direct support by administrator to provide time and resources, to be responsible for student discipline, and to back up a teacher's authority.

- *Administrators need to consider extra planning time for the teacher with special needs students.*
- *I want to know that when our enrolment comes up for special needs students, that our administrators are fighting to get resource personnel.*
- *Discipline. When I send a kid out, I want the administrator to support me.*

The second type of support was more indirect. It involved administrator leadership and example, administrator mentorship, and administrator empathy.

- *I want to see commitment to inclusion. The administration of the school is responsible for the school, sets up the training process, the idea of education, where it's going.*

- *I think we just need to know, if we're having a really bad day, the administrator wasn't going to think of us as bad teachers. Just sometimes a shoulder to cry on or someone to hug.*

These are the major concerns regular classroom teachers expressed during the study. They suggested that teachers fear certain aspects of teaching learners with disabilities in regular classrooms: Fear of Professional Inadequacy, Fear of Workload, Fear of Insufficient General Support, Fear of Lack of Administrator Support. All four suggest negative attitudes focused on matters of classroom and school practice.

### **Teacher Positives**

Not only did regular classroom teachers have concerns, they had positive views of inclusion of learners with disabilities in regular classrooms. These views often went beyond classroom practice to matters of philosophy, collaboration, and student learning.

### **Soundness of Concept of Inclusion**

Many regular classroom teachers supported the concept of inclusion as sound educational practice. They had no difficulty suggesting areas of value touching on student rights, equity, societal diversity, and enhanced learning.

- *Experience has shown that ghettoization of children, in any capacity, whether it be equity issues through race, or culture, whatever, does not help children blend in society. It's not good for the dominant group because it gives them such a limited perspective on the world.*
- *The biggest thing is that we live in an inclusive society, and, so, by working on a daily basis in an inclusive school, in your classroom, you're helping children. So*

*when you go out into the world of work, and pursue education past your local school, you're going to be in environment that deals with variety.*

- *Having them in the regular classroom allows typical students to be made aware of their positive attributes and they become more familiar with them. I think it benefits most of society in that way. And it also benefits those who are disabled. It allows all of us to become more aware of people, more accepting of people with differences, that it makes us more open to change, and to new ideas.*
- *Included students are able to model the other kids. They're able to adapt to everyday situations more readily.*

### **Collaborative Relationships**

A central tenet of inclusive education is collaboration among teachers, special education resource teachers, and administrators. Though regular class teachers feared that resource teachers would not be available and administrators might not be sufficiently supportive, they wanted to work collaboratively with these groups in support of successful inclusion.

- *If the teacher is a resource teacher, than that teacher needs to be a resource to the classroom teacher, to find those programs that are available, to help with the children, to deal with outside agencies.*
- *The resource teacher should be there to help the regular class teacher with teaching the whole class. Kind of like team teaching.*
- *It should almost be like a team teaching role. Where you can meet the teacher in the classroom, but then, at other times, where you can meet to plan things together out of the classroom.*

- *It should be a three way street between administration, the teacher, and the resource teacher.*
- *It's the principal who sets the tone of the school. It's her job and I think she should be responsible and involved directly.*

### **Effect on Regular Students**

The majority of teachers saw value in inclusive experience for the typical students. At times reference was made to negative effect, but infrequently and mostly related to fear that included student behaviour would reduce learning. Both social and academic effects were mentioned.

#### **Social Effect**

The majority of interviewees described positive social effects. Included in their perceptions was typical student understanding of diversity and equity within the general population. Understanding of ethical principles, growth in self-esteem, and growth in self-understanding.

- *Ethically, learning to accept everyone as an individual and looking for the abilities and what the person is worth, is something that can't be taught from a book.*
- *If there is such a thing as a typical student, the underlying thing is self-esteem. For them to be able to see persons who may be mentally or physically different and to be accepted by their peers, allows typical students to accept themselves and be accepted.*
- *They learn to appreciate their own gifts, their own talents. They learn also to value each human being, no matter what their gifts are.*

### **Academic Effect**

Beyond the social learning evident for typical students, the majority of interview participants believed inclusive experience to contribute to academic achievement. Involved were growth through experience as peer tutors, through leadership opportunities, development of cooperative and communicative skills, acceptance of responsibility, and team building.

- *Peer learning is one of the strongest ways kids can learn. I can see that it would be beneficial, academically, in most cases.*
- *Academically, sometimes. Some of the slower students that are in the regular classroom will benefit from the extra instruction that the special students may require. So, instead of singling just one out, they can make it a small group.*
- *Realizing that there are other ways to evaluate, I can apply that to my other students.*
- *As far as attitude about other people and caring, and learning look after others, and help others, and work collaboratively, there are a lot of advantages.*

### **Effect on Included Students**

The majority of participants had no doubt but that inclusion had social and academic benefits for learners with disabilities. Their being surrounded by typical peers touched, in particular, on their social learning.

- *For that particular student, the exceptional learner, the benefit is to see what appropriate behaviours and appropriate responses, if you will, are. They see these in the typical students.*

- *Learning to get along with others. Learning how to cope when there are lots of people around you. Learning the proper behaviour.*
- *It's like opening a window on the world. I mean, nobody could doubt that being with regular students could benefit them.*
- *I compared their behaviour and academic standing from one year to the next. Once we included them, we found their behaviour improved.*

### **Academic Effect**

A substantial number of participants noted academic effects, though comments were not as specific as those under social effect. Areas of effect included academic motivation and general academic effect.

- *If they're in a regular classroom, they'll try to act more like a regular student. So that pulls them up academically.*
- *Academically, even though a lot of the work is individualized for that student, I think they will pick up a lot of other things that are being taught within the classroom. I think, a lot of times, even their parents are surprised at their accomplishments.*
- *The academic benefits are hard to measure. But they are there./*

**Q 2: What lessons can be learned by those who wish to move toward inclusive education from knowing the concerns and positives teachers find in including learners with disabilities in regular classrooms?**

### **ATTITUDES OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS**

Though a number of studies have examined attitudes of school administrators toward education of learners with disabilities in regular classrooms, little in the way of



understanding administrator attitude toward inclusion. One reason for this is that most studies selected as informants principals who were not actually engaged in inclusive schools. Most appear to have had some experience with integration as conceptualized and practiced under the special education model. As a recent Canadian study found, integration is not the same as inclusion. The two models differ fundamentally.

Barnett and Monda-Amaya (1998) in one United States study, for instance, randomly selected school administrators from a total of 3,879 schools in a single state. The state concerned has no policy of inclusion and organizes education for learners with disabilities under the special education model. The researchers considered the information resulting from the study to apply to inclusive education. Whatever the value of the information, it is apparent that it was not based on experience of inclusion.

At best the information gained could be considered as based on what school administrators thought would be inclusion. If this limitation is applied to the study results, some insights are available. One insight deals with what qualities would school administrators believe characterized inclusion. Here are the top 6 characteristics.

- Supportive environment 56 %
- Shared responsibility 48 %
- Cooperative ethic 41 %
- Collaborative ethic 35 %
- Team instructional approach 30 %
- Supportive assistance for staff 30 %
- School-wide vision 25 %

It is apparent that less than half of the school administrators participating in the study agreed on characteristics of inclusive education. The question, “Of what value is the information gained?”, arises.

In the same study school administrators were asked what types of disabilities applied to inclusion. In other words, which students with disabilities could be placed in inclusive environments?

- Learning disability (NA definition) 97 %
- Intellectual challenge 36 %
- Severely/profoundly handicapped 20 %

To me, the thinking reflected in this information relates more to the special education model than to the inclusive model. It is the special education model, which defines students who can be educated in regular classrooms by the type of disability involved.

A second American study of school administrator attitudes (Livingston, Reed, & Good, 2000) provided short descriptions of five students and asked participants to indicate the preferred educational placement for each. Again, the American state from which participants were chosen had no particular mandate for inclusion. No indication was provided that participants had experience with inclusive education.

It is evident from the figures above that the over-whelming majority of school administrators participating in this study believed that the learners with disabilities described could not be educated in the regular classroom. Between 81 and 53 % of school administrators would place all the students described in full-time special education settings. The balance would place them in regular classes on a part-time basis (resource room) or on a fulltime basis. Even then, the preference of most was part-time.

Case Study	Residential Setting	Special School	Special Class	Resource Room	Regular Classroom
Jessica is not toilet trained & is wheel chair bound. She needs medication 3 times a day.	4 %	18 %	47 %	12 %	15 %
Joseph is non-verbal, but he uses & understands some sign language. He wears a hearing aid & is hard of hearing.	2 %	13 %	38 %	32 %	10 %
Elizabeth cannot walk and uses a wheelchair. She cannot communicate verbally, but does share her needs through gestures & a communication board.	3 %	16 %	43 %	21 %	12 %
James has been diagnosed as being legally blind, uses a wheelchair, and is non-verbal.	3 %	37 %	41 %	12 %	4 %
Debbie is a student with Down Syndrome. She has excellent hearing & can communicate verbally, but is limited to 2 to 3 words.	0 %	12 %	59 %	19 %	7 %

Again, the question is, “Does this study deal with inclusion, or does it deal with how many students could be integrated in regular classrooms under the special education model”?

**Q 3: School administrators must be leaders if a school moves to inclusive education. What should school administrators do in support of inclusive education to indicate their views regarding such a move?**

A small Canadian study (Valeo, 1994) differed from most other studies in that it focused on a small number of school administrators and employed interviews rather than

questionnaires. This approach provided more in-depth information. However, at the end of the study the researchers was of the opinion that, even though the term inclusion was used, the schools led by the administrators were not inclusive in nature. There is an interesting problem relating to definition of inclusion here. Nevertheless, some interesting data relating to attitudes toward inclusion was drawn by questioning the administrators on how they supported inclusion throughout the schools.

***Question: What is your role in supporting inclusion in the school?***

*My role is, my background is, I was a former consultant for special education, so I try to be involved whenever I can. So that when we have special education or division meetings, and we have a School Based Support Team Meeting every two months, and an Interdisciplinary Team Meeting following that, so I encourage teachers to bring up any children that they think are having difficulties. So we can start modifying. I certainly visit the classes on a regular basis and assist them wherever I can in modifying.*

***Question: Is there any support that you offer the regular class teacher only?***

*Well, we've got a School Based Support Team model here, and we meet on a regular basis in order to discuss students that, leading to Interdisciplinary Team Meeting. Obviously we discuss kids that are at risk there, and also talk about their needs. Beyond that I meet with the classroom teachers monthly to go over their (attendance) registers and talk about students that are having problems. So, I would say that I'm pretty involved in special education to the extent that time allows me.*

***Question: What role do you play in meetings around student needs?***

*My role is to make sure that, well, a lot of it's administrative. Get all the paper work done. I read all the review forms. I read all the Pupil Education Plans. So I have to be aware of what's going on. I should also be a resource to them. I have a background in special education. They should be able to come to me. They usually don't though.*

These quotations underline that the administrators involved see their role as administrative; arranging and attending meetings, ensuring that reports are completed, arranging for various concrete supports. The administrators often saw their role as remaining in the background and offering support only when asked. It is quite a challenge to lead educational reform from the background (Hansen, Leyden, Bunch, & Pearpoint, in press).

One Canadian school system led all the rest in the move to inclusive education. It began to reduce its special education structures beginning in 1969. By the mid 1980s the system had no special classes on a fulltime or part-time basis and no special schools. Every student, disabled or not, in the system attended a regular classroom of the elementary (ages 4 – 13) or secondary (ages 14-18) school down the street. Teachers and support staff make enabling adjustments to support the learning of students with disabilities.

Though no study has been done on this school system, a book describing its move to inclusive education will be published in the very near future. You might be able to obtain an idea of the attitudes of school administrators from the following quotations. Note that some quotations suggest considerable “worry” regarding the move to inclusion

in the early days. Before beginning the quotes, here is a statement of how educators in the system guide themselves with regard to how they treat students.

***Each Belongs Credo***

*Each person is endowed with the dignity of a person.*

*Each person has equal value despite differences in ability.*

*Each person has a right to grow and indeed each person can grow.*

*The limits of individual growth are unknown and should not be circumscribed.*

*No person is static, each is ever in the process of becoming.*

*Each person is unique and irrepeatable.*

*The beliefs we hold about people can serve as prison walls limiting us at every  
turn.*

*They can also set us free from our shackles to confront great new possibilities  
never dreamed of before.*

*Life is the ultimate gift and learning is it crowning.*

Here are quotes from school administrators regarding their direct experience of inclusion over a number of years. I believe you can obtain a sense of their attitudes from the quotations.

- *When we started, none of us knew what the end would be. If we had to set down our outcomes before we started, we never would have predicted what did happen, or worse still, we may have limited the possibilities.*
- *To be honest, I didn't know what to make of this movement to [include] students with special needs into their home schools. On the surface, it appeared to be a*

*terrible idea. However, it soon became clear to all of us that this was indeed the way to go.*

- *That a school principal would listen to and talk with all the students and their parents with kindness, understanding and genuine empathy instead of coming with the proverbial big stick struck me as amazing. This is when I started to realize “Each Belongs”.*
- *I remember the smile on Stacy’s face when she heard my voice. Or the waving of arms of excitement of other non-verbal students when I spoke to them and joked with them.*
- *I had to stop and say “Whoa! Why?” because at that time I believed these children were best served in a specific protected environment where “specialists” could provide the best program in a segregated setting that was not really academic. Boy! Was I ever wrong.*
- *The hostility Sharon exhibited in September and October was almost non-existent. Her sullen countenance changed. She was now one of the group.*
- *I think we need to celebrate diversity because I think basic to an inclusive school is a sense of community.*

**Q 4: What meaning does the information just presented have for you given your earlier thoughts on what administrators might do in support of a move to inclusive education?**

## PARENT ATTITUDES

Parents fall into two groups where attitudes to inclusion are considered. One group is that formed by the parents of learners with disabilities who are included in regular classrooms. The second is that formed by parents of the typical learners in the classroom, the peer group.

It should be noted that studies of parent attitudes are not numerous. In many instances, thought must be given to whether the studies available even deal with inclusion. In my analysis some studies actually examine effect of integration as understood under the special education model, rather than inclusion. For instance, Dong-il Kim, a Korean researcher, reported at the Hong Kong Inclusive Education in the New Millennium Conference of 2003 on *Teacher and Parent Perspectives of the Barriers to Inclusive Education: Comparison Between Elementary and Secondary Schools in Korea*. My discussions with Dong-il Kim and my reading of his conference presentation have persuaded me that what he calls “inclusion” deals with a shift within the special education model in Korea from complete segregation to part time integration in regular classrooms or resource rooms. Other studies mis-use the term inclusion in similar manner considering it synonymous with integration.

Until a substantial number of studies focused on school systems or individual schools, which do not support special education structures, but include all learners with disabilities full-time in regular classrooms, we will not be able to develop a literature based on inclusion. We must be careful to ascertain whether studies now available confuse integration with inclusion.



That being said, there is something to be gained in terms of parent attitudes from the studies now available. It is the lens through which we examine them that must be selected with care.

**Q 5: What do you believe the attitudes of parents of typical learners, those without disabilities, are toward inclusion of students with disabilities in their children's classrooms?**

Zang Ningshen of LiaoNing Normal University, China (2002) studied attitudes to both parents of typical children and parents of children with disabilities to inclusion (in my view, integration which seems to be where China is going at this time). This study suggested that parents of typical children generally:

*Hold an attitude of understanding and acceptance....[but] a certain number of parents with non-disabled children still tend to have an attitude of refusal, segregation, exclusion, and passiveness.*

And that parents have preferences among disabilities when it comes to regular classrooms.

*They more willingly accept those mentally normal while the mental retardation can disturb them more.*

Zhang Ningsheng qualifies the "general acceptance" of parents of typical learners in describing concerns of these parents.

*They don't think this kind of settlement is good for children, especially for their normal children. What they worry is that teachers will tend them less, the regular teaching may be disturbed, and they may imitate the misbehaviour of disabled children. Above all, they believe the coming of disabled children will bring lots of*

*unfavourable factors to their children. While 80 % of the parents still believe that the education of children with special needs should be carried out by special teachers in special schools.*

Whether Zhang Ningsheng is discussing integration or inclusion, it seem obvious that parents of typical children may be willing to allow students who are disabled, but not in the intellectual sense, into regular classrooms, but not some other children. This view of “Yes” to some and “No” to others is what I understand to be part of the special education model and not inclusion.

Contrasting findings come from an early American study. Giangreco, Edelman, Cloninger, and Denis (1993) found that a majority of their parents whose children had a classmate with severe disabilities:

*Reported their children’s experience was comfortable and positive, had a positive effect on their child’s social/emotional growth, and did not interfere with their child receiving a good education.*

The parents reported such dynamics as:

*My son feels he is a good friend of his classmate with a disability.*

*My child enjoys helping his friend. They’ve learned to depend on each other.*

*My son looks on this student as a person, not an inconvenience or a bother.*

Though the research available now is not wholly supportive of the idea that parents of typical students have positive reactions to their children being educated with peers with disabilities, evidence in that direction is stronger than otherwise. There also is evidence that early fears of some parents are diminished over time.

McGregor and Vogelsberg (1998) reported in a review of inclusive school practice that:

*A recent study also suggested a spillover effect, with parents of typical children reporting feelings of greater acceptance of others as a result of their child's school experience.*

*Both groups of parents [those with and without children with disabilities] have been found to be largely supportive of inclusive approaches to education.*

*Among the minority of parents of typical children expressing apprehension about integrated programs, at least one study that included measures at the beginning and end of the school year indicated that concerns lessened over time.*

A 2004 study by Peck, Staub, Gallacci, and Schwartz indicated that their 389 parents of typical children “generally perceived their nondisabled child to have benefited from this [inclusive] experience”.

*When asked to appraise their general attitude toward inclusion after their child had actually been enrolled in an inclusive classroom, parent attitudes were predominantly positive (64 %) or neutral (26 %).*

The majority of studies of attitudes of parents of typical children enrolled in inclusive classrooms report that attitudes are positive in general, and that few negative attitudes following actual experience of inclusion are reported.

The second group of interest is that of parents whose children with disabilities are included in regular classrooms. Jobling, van Kraayenoord, Watt, and Elkins (2003) defined this group as important as they:

*With their knowledge of the child's personal, social, and academic needs, represent a valuable source of information about the unique characteristics of a student and therefore have considerable potential to contribute to inclusive education.*

Ryndak and others in a 2003 publication addressed parents' perceptions of their children with moderate or severe disabilities after the children had experience inclusion. Regardless of the age of their child, with a range of 5 to 20 years, all 13 parents in this study held "very positive" perceptions. Among the findings were that *"Parents whose children had been educated previously in self-contained classrooms reported many academic, behavioural, and social outcomes that they felt would not have happened without the transition to age-appropriate general education classes"*.

*I was cutting down some brush last night and he (a 19 year old young man with moderate mental retardation and language delays) told me 'You shouldn't cut down the trees. It's bad for the environment'.*

Parents or seven children made comments about their child's understanding of the learning process, learning how to learn, realizing they could learn, and being motivated to learn after being in general education classes.

*I think she feels good about herself. She thinks she's smart. She thinks she's pretty. She thinks she's terrific and really, it doesn't matter if other people agree with you; it only matters if you think it yourself.*

Ryndak et al. were interested in parents' perceptions of what values of their children's experiences stood out.

*When asked to identify the most significant benefits that followed inclusion, the majority of parents referred to acceptance by others, particularly in educational activities with peers without disabilities, exposure to normal expectations, and membership in a typical educational group.*

McGregor and Vogelsberg also commented on positive attitudes of parents of included students. Basic to parent's choice of inclusion were desire for their children to belong and their view of inclusive education as a basic right. Among McGregor and Vogelberg's findings were that:

*Not only is there substantial evidence that parents do not see inclusion harming their children's learning and development, they report that their children benefit from this experience.*

In summarizing their research Ryndak and colleagues voiced the belief of parents in their study that inclusion is the vehicle whereby positive options would become available to their children. The researchers concluded;

*There is some evidence to suggest that these parents may be justified in their optimism.*

**Q 6: How could you work in your role in a school to advise parents and teachers of research findings such as those just presented?**

### **PEER ATTITUDES**

Studies of attitudes of typical peers toward included learners with disabilities are not numerous. Most available studies did not investigate impact of inclusion. Their context was that of integration as practiced under the special education model. Their informants primarily were educators who gained their experience and knowledge of

learners with disabilities under that model. Within this context few learners with disabilities were placed full-time in regular classrooms. The dominant practice was part-time in a regular classroom and part-time in a special education setting. Placement always was conditional on achievement. If academic achievement or social achievement declined, any learner with disability could be moved further from regular classroom experience.

McGregor and Vogelsberg's review of inclusive schooling practice reviewed research from the period before the advent of inclusion and through the first decade or so of inclusion. They found that studies from this period were relatively consonant in their findings.

- High levels of interaction between students with and without disabilities did not reliably occur without some type of intervention.
- Students with disabilities placed in the regular classroom were not always well accepted by their peers.
- Upper elementary aged children, girls and children in schools with the most contact between students expressed the most accepting attitudes toward those with disabilities.

These studies are not to be faulted for not examining inclusive education impact thoroughly. Most were undertaken before the advent of inclusive education and, naturally, reflect experiences under the special education model, a model based on viewing student difference so marked at times that many students needed to be segregated for their learning. However, it is inappropriate to base educational

understanding of peer attitudes toward inclusive education on these “special education context studies”. At best, only a limited and skewed understanding can result.

**Q 7: What could you do in your role in a school to support typical students in forming positive attitudes toward their peers with disabilities in inclusive settings?**

Two studies inform the balance of the present discussion: one, conducted by Fisher, Pumpian, and Sax (1998), compared two matched high schools, one using a special education approach and the other an inclusive approach. Some 1413 typical students were surveyed using an attitude questionnaire. The second study, Bunch and Valeo (2004), studied typical student attitude across elementary and secondary levels. A number of schools were selected from a school system supporting a special education approach and a second school system in which all students attended regular classrooms on a full-time basis, although with a withdrawal program at the elementary level and a resource room model at the secondary. Such supports are common in inclusive approaches.

Fisher and colleagues concluded that the differing service delivery models in their two high schools seemed to have an effect on the overall school community.

- Eighty percent of typical students in the inclusive school believed students with disabilities should attend regular education classes.
- Fifty-nine percent in the special education model school held this belief.
- Some 96.6 % of inclusive school typical students had experience with peers with disabilities. In the special education school the number was 22.8 %.
- These students agreed that their peers with disabilities did not detract from their learning in general education classrooms.

- They also agreed that learners with disabilities did not take up too much of the teacher's time.

The following table provides a comparison of reasons typical students in both high schools gave for attendance of learners with disabilities in general education classrooms.

	Inclusive	% of Sample	Special Ed.	% of Sample
Basic human right	129	22	107	13
Increase understanding/tolerance	58	10	23	3
Experience normal life opportunities	57	10	79	10
Increase social skills	44	7	23	3
Students with disabilities can learn	39	7	27	3
Better prepared for the future	29	5	0	0
Fun to be around or friend	23	4	0	0
God created us all equal	4	1	3	.5
If they can handle it	0	0	75	10
Its not their fault	0	0	24	3

Fisher et al. also concluded:

*The results from this study may indicate that general surveys concerning attitudes toward people with disabilities may no longer be useful. That is, most students with some exposure to their peers with disabilities hold generally positive attitudes. Investigations concerning attitude must now be more closely tied to actual behavior and experience.*

The Bunch and Valeo study participants were randomly selected from every second elementary school grade and every secondary grade. The total numbers were 30



for the special education model system and 21 for the inclusive model system. Each student was interviewed by an educator with experience in both special education and inclusive settings. This study was designed to examine whether typical students knew peers with disabilities, whether they were friends, whether peers with disabilities were treated appropriately, and whether typical students became advocates.

Differences between the special education model schools and the inclusive model schools in all areas were apparent.

#### Knowing Peers with Disabilities

Special education system students tended to know of one or more peers with disabilities by name if these peers spent time in their classrooms. Some elementary students knew that students with disabilities were in other classes, but did not know them personally or know their names. No secondary student knew peers with disabilities personally or their names. The one exception was in the instance where a student with disability was a sibling to a typical student. There was some interaction if a student with disability approached a typical general education student. Such interactions were not initiated by typical students except in instances of inappropriate treatment.

Brigette, Grade 7: *None in class. There's two kids in grade 8.*

Ken, Grade 13 *Everyone knows who the special people are, and they'll talk to them if they approach them. But I think most of their friends are in the special classroom.*

#### Friendships

There were rare friendships between typical students and students with disabilities in the earliest grades of special education model schools. By later elementary grades no

friendships were mentioned. It was considered that students with disabilities had friends, but these were all in their special classrooms. There were no friendships mentioned at the secondary level. Again, friends were to be found in the special classes.

In the inclusive elementary schools and in the secondary school typical students knew peers with disabilities and friendships were formed.

Carol, Grade 1: *I know she has lots of friends because some of her friends come and play with her. And when I play with her, I see lots of her friends.*

Katie, Grade 7: *Because she's with us, so we consider her as our friend, and she considers us her friends.*

Marilyn, Grade 9: *Yeah, a lot of people talk to him. Like, when I come in, I say "Hi" to him all the time. And other people talk to him. Like the guys talk to him. He's quiet. He's like everyone else.*

Not every relationship in the inclusive system was a positive, however.

Kevin, Grade 5: *He's got people who he thinks are his friends, but they're using him. Because he's got very good Pokemon cards. And I think his friends just act like they're his friends. They, like, use him.*

#### Abusive Behaviour

Abusive behaviour was rare in inclusive model elementary and secondary schools.

Rose, Grade 11: *Our school is pretty respectful with the disabled and they don't make fun of other kids.*

Francis, Grade 13: *We don't have the nicest people here, but I have never heard*

*anyone say anything. I would speak out against derogatory words. I don't tolerate that. It's not my nature.*

That some unfriendly behaviour does occur at times may be taken from comments such as those of Kevin already quoted. In addition, Wayne and Rose (both Grade 11) referred to students who joke at the expense of students with disabilities as being “immature”.

The situation was different in special education model elementary and secondary schools. At the elementary level there were indications of teasing and insulting by Grade 3. At later elementary levels examples were given also.

*Lorne, Grade 5: People I know call them different things.*

*Dawn, Grade 7: Some people do make fun of him because he has disability.*

At the secondary level abusive behaviour was more apparent with all but one student being interviewed knowing of unpleasant events. Name calling, embarrassment in public, whispering about students with disabilities, and active rejection were noted.

*Ray, Grade 10: Tormentors liked to see how they react. They talk to them and say things to see how they react.*

As with the findings of the Fisher et al. study, this study found that the type of program provided for learners with disabilities drew out different characteristics in many students. Putting in place the part-time and full-time special education programs typical of the special education model was accompanied by students with disabilities having little interaction with typical students, limited friendship formation, and active inappropriate behaviour. In general, inclusive structures, including the less obtrusive withdrawal and

resource room supports, were accompanied by interaction, friendship formation, and much less inappropriate behaviour.

**Q 7: How could you given your role in a school work with typical students to realize positive relationships with their classroom peers with disabilities?**

### **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

I would not be participating in this excellent conference if inclusion of learners with disabilities in regular classrooms of community schools were not an issue for many educators. Inclusion certainly differs from the way education for learners with disabilities has been structured across the world.

In my view it is not the practice of inclusive education that challenges teachers. Teachers can teach. They teach diverse groups of learners every day.

It is change to how learners with disabilities have been perceived that is the challenge and the issue. There are very real questions to be asked and definite facilitatory steps to be taken.

However, the weight of research on attitudes, and research in other areas, supports inclusive education as practical and beneficial. Outweighing even this evidence is the fact that inclusive education is being practiced in many schools. In my view inclusive education will characterize the future for an increasing number of learners with disabilities. Change will occur and continue to occur.

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