

CRUCIAL TERMS FOR INCLUSIVE AND SPECIAL EDUCATION AND CONFUSION IN EDUCATION FOR LEARNERS WITH DISABILITIES

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The term “inclusion”, as applied in recent years to education of learners with disabilities, signals to many parents, people with disability, and educators fundamental reform away from the cascade of increasingly segregated educational placement characterizing the special education model. Inclusion refers to permanent placement of all learners in the regular classrooms of community schools. Though movement toward inclusive education has been apparent in almost every nation of our world, adherence to one form or another of the special education model continues to dominate education for learners with disabilities.

In Canada, it is apparent that advocates of the special education approach have begun to appropriate the term inclusion, and other related terms, to describe provision of segregated placements. Simultaneously, some advocates of inclusion continue to employ terms associated with the special education model to describe inclusive service. One such term is “integration”. Such appropriation and contradictory use leads to confusion in the minds of many young parents of children with disabilities as they seek the strongest educational service for their children. Confusion also develops in the minds of practicing and future teachers, university teacher educators, educational administrators, and political decision-makers, all of whom deal with educational policy and management, to say nothing of curricula, pedagogy, and learner development.

This presentation focuses on a Canadian project designed to develop recommended definitions of crucial terms employed to describe inclusive and special education services for learners with disabilities. As a nation, Canada is divided on the

issue of most beneficial education provision for its learners with disabilities. Due to the nature of the British North America Act, Canada's founding constitution, the federal government has no presence in education for Canadians between the ages of approximately 4 and 18. The nation's ten provinces and three northern territories act individually in designing educational policy and management for their citizens with disabilities. This has led to one province and all three territories declaring for inclusion and development of plans, strategies, and supports for movement to inclusion. Nine provinces remain tied to the special education model, though increasing the number of learners "integrated" in regular classrooms on a fulltime or part-time basis. Some provinces refer to their philosophy as "inclusive", though stating that some learners will require special placements to meet their educational needs. Some parent groups lobby for continuation of segregated services. Others push for inclusive service.

Included in the presentation will be discussion of the need for clarification of crucial terms, development of a literature scan of terminology, development and analysis of a crucial terms questionnaire and its distribution nationally, findings from six regional focus groups, and development and dissemination of a lexicon of recommended terms for guidance of Canadian decision-makers.