

Germany

**WHAT DO YOU MEAN WHEN YOU SAY
“INCLUSIVE EDUCATION”?**

Speakers' Corners Presentation

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WHAT DO YOU MEAN WHEN YOU SAY "INCLUSIVE EDUCATION"?

Inclusive Education is revolutionary change in how we respond to learners experiencing disabilities. It makes those who administer education uncomfortable, as education is not an area known for willingness to change quickly. Most prefer to talk about change instead of actually creating it. As with any social innovation, care must be taken to define exactly what the change means. Definitions that are loose and general, though much loved by politicians and governments, have value in suggesting direction of change (as with the Salamanca Statement). However, they have less value for those who must experience the change (families and those experiencing disabilities), or who must put the change in place (school administrators and teachers). They need definitions that are more than broad policy directives.

In my experience working in a number of nations, clear and specific definitions of what inclusive education means are rare. Much more common are the loose and general type. These might have values for pointing to change, but they open the door to misunderstanding, disagreement, and mis-use at the level of educational practice.

Here are some examples of what I mean when I speak of clear and less-clear definitions. Some appear to be accord with implications of the Salamanca Statement. More common are those that suggest lack of understanding, attempts to deny change, or attempts to limit it. Some of the examples are drawn from government policy; some are comments from school level educators, and others from various sources. All provide an idea of how those uttering them understand the meaning of inclusive education.

- Ministry of Education, British Columbia, Canada

Inclusion is a value system, which holds that all students are entitled to equitable access to learning, achievement and the pursuit of excellence in all aspects of their education. The practice of inclusion transcends the idea of physical location, and incorporates basic values that promote participation, friendship and interaction.

The policy of inclusion is not necessarily synonymous with full integration in regular classrooms.

I interpret this wording as avoidance of the Salamanca concept that inclusion mandates regular classroom placement. It suggests that inclusion can be achieved when not in the presence of all other students.

- Department of Education, North West Territories, Canada

Inclusive schooling is more than a method or strategy: It is a way of life that is tied directly to the belief system that values diversity. Inclusive education is also a philosophical and practical education approach, which strives to respond to individual needs, and is intended to ensure equal access for all students to education programs offered in regular classroom settings. Inclusive Education is mandatory in the NWT school system.

This policy is much more in keeping with the Salamanca Statement, but still vague on what inclusive practice involves.

- Department of Higher Education, India

The government is committed to providing education through mainstream schools for children with disabilities, in accordance with the provisions of the

Persons With Disabilities Act, 1995. Non-specialist schools whether at the elementary, secondary, or higher levels can, with appropriate support from the educational community can adapt themselves to work with children with disabilities.

This policy, too, is more in keeping with Salamanca, though vague regarding practice. The emphasis on community is valuable. It should be noted that, though the 1995 Act is cited as pointing to education in the mainstream, that was not what happened for almost all learners experiencing disabilities.

Elementary and Secondary School, Special Education Teacher: India

We have everything needed for inclusion. Many students with disabilities are in the same classrooms as the other children. We also have a centre where they spend part of the day for special support. For some children, that is where they stay all day.

This seems to indicate confusion between inclusion and special education cum integration. To me, this statement describes the special education model and calls it inclusion.

- **Comment from England**

I was inspecting in one school where I was invited to visit the “inclusion room”.

One of Her Majesty’s Inspectors of Schools.

“Co-locational inclusion” refers to a special school and a typical school sharing the same grounds, but functioning separately.

A Term Presently Gaining Currency in England, University Professor

These two statements are almost unbelievable. Both indicate either complete misunderstanding of what "inclusion" signifies or deliberate mis-use of the term.

Teacher in a Typical School, Russia

We are including this student in our school. At present he needs individual teaching by one teacher for the full school day. We are working toward preparing him for inclusion in a general class. We think he will be ready in about two years.

This may be the beginning of a long-term plan to move the student to inclusion. However, the idea of needing to be prepared in segregation for inclusion makes me wonder.

Teacher in a Different School, Russia

Irina is included in this class with the other children for all her work. She has an aide to support her. Her progress is acceptable and she has friends.

This example is from a school in the same city. It seems to reflect strong elements of inclusive practice.

- **Guiding Definition of Inclusion, Canadian Association of Inclusive Educators**

Inclusive education refers to educational practice based on the belief that all learners, with and without disabilities, are educated in age-appropriate class groups. Moreover, all benefit from education in regular classrooms of local schools. Learners with disabilities are accepted and respected as members of the classroom and school community. Within these settings teachers, parents, and

others work collaboratively using appropriate resources to implement universally designed curricula. Instruction is differentiated in a manner that supports the individual abilities and needs of all learners.

This final example resulted from a Canadian national study that involved parents, students, teachers, government officials, school and school system administrators, and advocates in defining what they believed inclusive education and other crucial terms in education and disability to mean. It is what I call a “functional definition” in that it agrees with the larger concept of Salamanca while detailing specific practices that characterize inclusion.

Question Arising

The various examples indicate that everyone uses the term “inclusion”, but understand it as implied in the Salamanca Statement. As I reflect on the examples, a number of questions occur to me.

- Who is included in inclusive education?
- Where does inclusive education happen?
- When does it start for a learner?
- Who is responsible for teaching the student?
- Who collaborates in creating inclusion?
- What curriculum is used?
- When does inclusion end?

It seems to me that these questions can serve as a litmus test of whether the intents of the Salamanca Statement are being pursued when one states what she or he means by “inclusive education”.