

ASPECTS OF INCLUSION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

I am privileged to be asked to speak to you at the beginning of the Novosibirsk Science Pedagogical University 4th Scientific School On Inclusive Education. Thank you all for this opportunity.

I begin with what I believe to be the most important aspect of change to Inclusive Education. In my experience the following is essential to understanding the basis of this change.

Education for learners experiencing disability is undergoing revolutionary change. The traditional Special Education Model, with its series of possible settings for education of this group of students, is being challenged by the recent Inclusive Education Model, with its concept of all students being educated in regular classrooms along with typical students.

Change to Inclusive Education for all students has been promulgated by United Nations policy. This policy, signaled by UNESCO'S Salamanca Statement of 1994 leaves no doubt that positive change is to be accomplished.

Quote: Inclusion and participation are essential to human dignity and enjoyment of human rights. We believe and proclaim that....regular schools are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities and achieving education for all.

This UNESCO policy has been reinforced by the more recent Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability which extends the number of student groups, such as street children, working children and others presently denied education in **various nations**.

I have been asked to speak today on a range of topics associated with this change. I selected a number of possible topics suggested. I also have included some of my own thoughts on concerns regarding how schools might strengthen the move to Inclusive Education.

Preamble

The move from various levels of educational segregation for students with disabilities has two parts. The first part is simply a firm decision. It is the acceptance of the right and values of students with disabilities learning in the same classrooms as their typical peers. The move is human rights and social justice in action. It is the acceptance that positive change that the move to Inclusive Education must occur.

The second part takes many people more time to accept. It is that governments and educators must follow up on this decision. Following up requires time to plan how to achieve the major long-term objective of education for all. Deep and innovative thought is necessary. A

step-by-step plan starting now and reaching into the future must be developed to achieve the ultimate goal of all students learning together in educational justice for all. Without the realization that change is social justice in action, many will experience doubts.

Many of these will simply use the term Inclusive Education to appear to support change while their educational systems continue to be based on the segregation model. Many nations using the term Inclusive Education do not have a long-term plan that is based on attaining education for all. They are blinded by the fact that some students struggle with academic progress more than they see as appropriate. For them academic gain is the only important goal for education.

They take the easy road of continuing with a series of educational placements based primarily on academic strength. They do not fully understand that education has two aspects. One is that all students will make academic progress, though at different levels. The other is that it is the right of students to learn together and get to know and appreciate each other. For many students it will be the social side of education that will prove more important in their lives.

I know what has happened in education for students with disabilities in Canada. In Canada the federal government does not have authority over elementary and secondary education (ages 4 to 18). We have 13 independent educational jurisdictions across the country. Governments in four of these quickly embraced Inclusive Education. They accepted Inclusive Education on the merits of educational social justice for all. They are at various stages of progress and are continuing to work on improvements. The other nine jurisdictions use the term and state that Inclusive Education is the first choice for all students. But then add a statement in their educational policies that allows individual school systems to continue with the Special Education Model. They do not accept the argument of social justice in education for all. They choose the appearance of change while maintaining the old model. The extra note in their policy on education and disability for them is an escape clause from education for all. They are safe to continue with Special Education.

I know this is what happens across Canada.

What is happening across Russia and other nations?

Academic/Social Effects of Inclusion

Four voices should be heard regarding the academic and social effects of inclusion. These are the voices of students with disabilities, of their typical peers, of their families and of their teachers. However, a scan of the research (mostly that of the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom, but also some from other nations) suggests that the focus of research has

been research focused on teachers. Of course, the voice of teachers is a necessary part of research, but it is of restricted nature, relating as it does primarily with how well students are learning academically. As a result, the voices of students with disabilities, of their typical peers and of families are heard only faintly in research.

Research has tended to be of statistical nature with regard to students with disabilities and focused on academic progress. Findings from these studies are of a mixed nature, but generally indicating modest, if any, academic gain over instruction in Special Education settings. The academic picture is only one side of the purpose of education.

On the social side, while having relatively few formal studies, a different picture emerges. Various studies examining the relationship of students with disabilities and their typical peers indicate that inclusion has strong positive effect on friendships between these two groups. Though not all typical students in inclusive settings develop friendship relationships with their peers with disabilities, there is general acceptance of the right of those with disabilities to education in regular classrooms. Within the group of typical students and their peers with disabilities, friendships often occur. Some friendships are limited to the school environments. Other friendships extend beyond school premises. To students with disabilities friends are important, especially for life after school. A recent Canadian study pointed out that the majority of young people with disabilities educated under the Special Education Model live lives of loneliness.

The bulk of information on friendships comes from qualitative studies. Qualitative studies seem more powerful than are statistical studies in bringing out the voices of students with disabilities, typical students and family members.

I have undertaken both statistical and quantitative studies in this area. One of my quantitative studies examined typical student attitudes toward students with disabilities in elementary and secondary schools. Half of the schools involved followed the Special Education Model. The other half followed the Inclusive Education Model. Findings indicated frequent development of friendship formation and much less abusive behaviour in inclusive schools. Though some students in the Special Education schools advocated for their peers with disabilities, most simply did not pay attention to them and took no action when witnessing abuse. In Inclusive Education schools friendships were common and advocacy by students in response to any abusive behaviour was routine. Students in inclusive schools routinely spoke to the abusive student directly or reported the abuse to an authority figure.

Criteria and Indicators for Developing Inclusive Education

The primary criteria for moving to Inclusive Education are laid out in a long term plan once the decision to move to inclusion is firm. An action plan under Universal Design for

Learning (UDL) has two main parts. One is the development of broad learning guidelines, as follows.

These broad guidelines noted below refer to Universality and equity, Flexibility and inclusion, Appropriately designed space, and to Simplicity and Safety.

Universality and equity:

UDL is intended to ensure that teaching will meet the needs of all students. Within that general objective is that classroom lessons relate to the same information for all students, both typical and those with disabilities. Lessons involve providing challenging materials to meet the learning needs of each student. For example, students will learn under a similar approach and in keeping their needs and abilities. All will cover fundamental learning points and be exposed to any related elaborating points. One example, for instance, in a history lesson about Columbus's discovery of North America. The objective is that students will become familiar with this piece of history. However, not all learners will go on to learn elaborating points such as the names of Columbus's three ships –the Nina, the Pinta and the Santa Maria. .

Flexibility and Inclusion: Key needs here include individual modes of responding to questions and other types of classroom and out-of-classroom interactions. For instance, all students need to see chalkboards and lesson materials and have the necessary working space in uncluttered classroom and so have access to all parts of the school premises.

Appropriately designed space: Individual sight lines and seating taking hearing are taken into consideration, having right or left handedness is considered, as well as adequate space for assistive devices and teaching assistants.

Simplicity: Consistent expectations for all students, indication of importance of all parts of lessons, teaching in small steps, routine feedback, minimization of distracting elements in lessons and in the overall classroom.

Safety: Consideration of any hazards in classrooms and other school areas, knowing safety needs of each student and what to do if necessary, awareness of any bullying.

Expanded explanations of these various points may be found in appropriate manuals on educational change. For this section of my presentation I referred to the Ontario, Canada, Ministry of Education 2005 manual Education for All.

The second criterion under UDL is Differentiated Instruction. The broad aspects of differentiated instruction are differential lesson contents, differentiated process and differentiated product.

Differentiation of instruction is the second major element under Universal Design for Learning. It is the teacher's response to the needs of learners. The basic teacher approach emphasizes small-group work for all students. Teachers must be familiar with the different abilities and talents of each student. Specific tasks are assigned to groups and they all work together to reach a specified learning goal. The work of each group requires everyone to contribute to reaching their group's goal. This approach to learning, based on the work of Vygotsky, is designed to involve all group members in developing interdependence and responsibility in the task. When necessary the teacher provides explicit instruction related to barriers in learning. The teacher supports students but does not solve the problem for her or his students.

Closing

I have provided a general look at various aspects of Inclusive Education. Teachers need to be supported by their leaders at various levels of your education system. Teachers need to know that their superiors in the education system are aware of the human right and social justice base of change to Inclusive Education, accept it, and are working with all others in developing a plan leading to the goal of inclusion for all. The teachers in turn need to lead all students and their parents in understanding why and how Inclusive Education operates.

I hope these thoughts assist you in your work in the Scientific School. You are fortunate to be associated with a university that is taking on the important leadership and support roles in achieving change. I am proud to be associated with NSPU.

Gary Bunch

Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Gary Bunch