



# **Inclusive Policy and Practice in Education: Best Practices for Students with Disabilities**

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## Introduction

There are many authors who claim in their work to discuss “best practices” in inclusive education. Very few of these authors, however, are speaking of the same thing with regard to “best practice,” or even “inclusive education.” Depending on the author’s viewpoint and philosophy, best practices may stem from any number of models distributed along the continuum of social versus medical model of disability. On one extreme, there are those who believe that students should be given every opportunity to succeed within the context of the regular school system, provided with any number of supports in any number of locations. These views may accept the limitations inherent in most public schools, and aim to work around these limitations. On the other extreme, there are those who believe that schools must change their structure so that so-called “special” supports are no longer necessary, and students with special needs/exceptionalities/disabilities (terms members of this group may or may not agree with) have access to the same supports that are needed if in different quantities by all students.

The Canadian context is located somewhere between these two views. Inclusion in regular classrooms in community schools of students who may have intellectual, physical, learning, sensory or other kinds of disability, or who are gifted in some way, is officially seen as the most positive learning atmosphere for all. Accordingly, most provincial (special) education policies express this philosophy, but within the context of a “continuum of placements and supports” that makes provision for placement of students in segregated learning environments if educational experts deem that it is in the best interests of a particular student. The need for such a continuum is illustrative of what Sefa Dei et. al. (2000) call “the realities of social and institutional inequity:”

... for a large number of people, participation in today’s mainstream schooling is not only problematic, it is impossible. An acceptance of this truism, while basic to anti-racist theory and practice, is not the norm in society. Bearing that in mind, it becomes apparent that we not only struggle against structural inequity but against philosophical barriers as well (2).

The continuum of placements to which students who do not fit the mould of regularity are subject is mirrored by the views of stakeholders as to the purpose of the school system. Sera Dei et. al. (2000) are again instructive: “At the moment, conventional schools are being developed to meet the challenges of the global market place... we fear that at this moment, concerns for money management, and the bottom line are taking precedence over the basic needs, desires and opportunities of *all* students (2, authors’ emphasis).”

With the understanding that, at the present time, schools in Canada are in the early stages of true inclusion – the full-time placement of students with disabilities in regular classrooms – this review of best practices will focus on both policies and practices that

are considered, or have been proven, to advance the true inclusion of all students. Areas of focus include:

- Philosophy of inclusion at all levels of governance and administration
- Inclusive education policies and budgets supported by effective provincial legislation, standards and guidelines
- Needs-based versus categorical assessment and placement
- Inclusive classroom practices and design
- Modification of curriculum
- Parent participation in decision making
- Provision of supports to students, teachers, administrators
- Teacher training and professional development
- Transition planning
- Physical accessibility/universal design

This report will draw on a variety of sources to discuss best practices in each of these areas. It will also provide examples of best practices in inclusive policy as practiced by various Canadian provinces and territories.

## **I. Philosophy and Policy**

### **A. Philosophy of Inclusion**

It is generally agreed that schools need a strong philosophy of inclusion which supports the right of all children to participate in an inclusive way (Special Education Review Committee, 2000; Lupart, 2002; Bunch, 1999). Raymond (1995) quotes Klaus Puhlman of the Yellowknife School District, who presents the following tenets of a positive inclusive philosophy:

- Every student has the right to participate in all aspects of school life;
- Every student will participate in a regular homeroom with supports to individual needs provided through that classroom – modification of regular curriculum will take place outside the regular classroom only if specific skills cannot be accommodated within a regular setting;
- All students will be placed in an age-appropriate setting, within the student's attendance area.

The Saskatchewan Special Education Unit (2001) also provides a number of indicators of inclusive educational philosophy. These include:

- Individualization and child-centred programming;
- Sharing of educational responsibility with the student's family;
- Learning with "age-appropriate" peers who do not have disabilities;
- Educational goals "that are functional for the life and life direction of the particular student involved (7);"
- The use of teaching methods that are natural and least intrusive;
- Provision of instruction in multiple environments – classroom, other school environments, the home, the community;
- Integration of needed supports/services and types of instruction.

The Saskatchewan report states that "inclusion exceeds the meagre idea of physical placement and assimilates the basic values of participation, friendship and interaction. Inclusion involves the basic practices of good teaching and good teaching, ultimately, is an accepting relationship between two people (13)." This quote could perhaps be amended by including a community of people in the learning experience, if such a community is needed by a particular student. The report also suggests that both school districts and individual schools should define their vision of special education through a mission statement, which lends credence and concrete goals to an inclusive philosophy.

### **B. Inclusive Education Policies and Budgets supported by provincial legislation, standards and guidelines**

To limit the variability of education policies across jurisdictions, it is necessary for effective supportive legislation to be in place. "Limit" is a key word in this phrase, as

legislation and central policy must be flexible enough to allow regional jurisdictions and individual schools to interpret policy and legislation to suit regional and local needs. While Supreme Court interpretation of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms provides a substantial basis for the development of education policy (and provincial policies in general follow this interpretation), absence of provincial legislation can be a hindrance to inclusion. Lutfiyya & Van Walleghem (2001) discuss the situation in Manitoba with reference to an absence of legislation, stating:

Given the lack of a clear legislative mandate for special education services, no coherent set of regulations and policies, the opportunity for school divisions, districts and Aboriginal Education Authorities to develop their own policies in this area, and the variability of personnel preparation, it is not surprising to note that actual special education practice varies widely across the province... What actually happens depends on what the student's needs are, where the student lives and attends school and who the educators are (Lutfiyya & Van Walleghem 2002, 90-91).

Though Manitoba education policy directs school boards in inclusive practices, provincial educational legislation “offers neither a specific intent in regards to special education nor a general right to appropriate education or individualized programming (Lutfiyya & Van Walleghem 2002, 84). The Public Schools Act merely infers that boards must provide “adequate school accommodation” for those who have a right to attend school. Therefore, while students are not excluded from public education on the basis of disability (i.e. platform rights are upheld), students do not have clear legislatively-backed rights to specific educational entitlements (i.e. secondary rights are in question).

To be specific, in Manitoba there is no legislative or regulatory provision for:

- Educational entitlements of students;
- Individualized education programs;
- Non-discriminatory assessment;
- Description of appropriate placements;
- Parental involvement in planning and decision making;
- Right to appeal on substantive and process issues;
- Prohibition of suspension or expulsion if the grounds are related to disability;
- Requirement to provide an educational program in the event of suspension or expulsion (Lutfiyya & Van Walleghem, 2002).

As in other provinces, these rights are inferred from the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, but the fact that education falls under provincial jurisdiction makes it necessary that they be provided for in provincial legislation and regulation. “The absence of any legislative foundation for special education leaves room for largely unacceptable practices to take place (Lutfiyya & Van Walleghem 2002, 85),” for example zero tolerance policies that may serve as a “back door” expulsion mechanism for students who have difficulty controlling behaviour.

Hentellef (1993) provides information that puts the Manitoba situation in perspective. The author writes that “government policies that refer to establishing rights... but which do not provide the means of enforcing them, are not only meaningless, they are dishonest. It gives the impression that there are rights, when in fact, there are not (quoted in Lutfiyya & Van Wallegghem 2002, 86).” This also comes out in different ways. For example, in Manitoba, Individual Education Plans are needed for boards to justify additional special needs funding, but divisions are not required to account for individual student progress. The mere existence of an IEP triggers special needs funding, but accountability mechanisms are lacking.

### *Translating Policy to Practice*

The transience of special education policies, and of public governance policies in general, is manifest not only in jurisdictions that lack a strong legislative base, but also in jurisdictions that report a poor correlation between educational policy and practice. For example, New York Schools recently adopted a “continuum of placements and supports” model of special education that is similar to the Canadian provincial model. This policy “moves away from the old model of one-size-fits-all special education toward a focus on providing a ‘flexible spectrum of options’ for services to meet the needs of each child (Wolff, 2003).” However, Wolff notes that students with disabilities have been moved into regular classrooms without ensuring adequate teacher training or supports. As well, the flexibility of this policy allows other students to remain in segregated settings if it is decided that inclusion in a regular setting cannot meet their educational needs.

Problems communicating good policy into good practice is often most difficult in areas that are characterized by remoteness and low population, as is the case in Nunavut and the Northwest Territories. While O’Donoghue (2002) rates these two territories as strong in a legislative and policy sense, “given the levels of funding, the geographical challenges, and the training presently available to educators, the question that needs to be addressed at this point centres on the ability of the local schools and educators to provide a full range of services (15).” The author contends that this is particularly true for communities that are small and/or remote – high educator turnover, the use of educators from the south who may come from more segregated systems (and who may hold positions of power in the northern system), and an overall shortage of needed services may all conspire to undermine the possibility of inclusiveness.

### **C. Examples of Best Practices in the Provinces and Territories – New Brunswick**

When applied to all aspects of the educational life of a student with a disability, “full inclusion” requires not only the student’s presence in a regular classroom, but a range of policies and supports that combine the specialized instructional facets of a resource classroom with the social and educational benefits of the regular classroom. The

Student Services Branch of the New Brunswick Department of Education has produced two documents that provide a list of best practices in inclusive principle and policy – *Best Practices for Inclusion* (1994) and *Working Guidelines on Integration* (1988). This section of the report will provide an outline of these documents. The subsequent section will examine current provincial/territorial education policies across Canada that meet the benchmark set by New Brunswick.

*Best Practices for Inclusion* is based on the principles that “all children attend age appropriate regular classroom in their local schools,” “all children receive curriculum relevant to their needs,” and “all children benefit from cooperation and collaboration among home, school and community,” among others. These principles serve as a basis for eleven categories of best practice, including the following:

1. A school learning environment that holds positive expectations and opportunities for all students;
2. Collaborative planning among administration, students, teachers, parents, and community partners;
3. An administration that provides an enabling and empowering school environment for all students;
4. A school environment that enables and expounds the importance of social responsibility, including the celebration of difference;
5. The inclusion of students and parents in the planning of curriculum to students with disabilities, and the accommodation of individual strengths and needs;
6. Support programs and services (e.g. counsellors, health and social service workers, educational assistants) that meet the needs of students with disabilities;
7. The use by teachers of a range and variety of instructional and assessment practices in order to “accommodate various learning preferences;”
8. Transition planning that involves all stakeholders in the life a particular student (i.e. receiving teachers and administrators, job counsellors, parents, external service workers, etc.);
9. Partnerships between the school, the student’s family, and the greater community;
10. Innovative system and staff growth through evaluation and professional development;
11. School and school district accountability, both to students/parents and to the Department of Education.

In *Working Guidelines on Integration*, the New Brunswick Department of Education outlines inclusive policy that is supported by the New Brunswick Education Act, and that supports the practices outlined in *Best Practices for Inclusion*. The major policy in the *Guidelines* not addressed by *Best Practices for Inclusion* regards the non-categorical assessment of student need: “Assessment should emphasize the student’s strengths and needs for instructional planning purposes rather than emphasizing categorization, labelling or eligibility for existing social programs (p.5).” This type of assessment is also supported by a majority of the Special Education Review Committees that were

undertaken between 1997 and 2002 in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Nova Scotia.

Prince Edward Island, Nunavut, Yukon and Nova Scotia also have non-categorical assessment policies that can be looked to as examples of best practice in this area. Other inclusive policies outlined in the *Working Guidelines* include:

- Inclusion of parents in the assessment and planning process: "...parents should be involved and have a right to participate in planning, especially in matters relating to the child's individual education plan, its development, implementation and follow-up (p.6)."

The inclusiveness of the assessment and planning process is farther extended by policies that explicitly require the invitation to students as well as parents for involvement in the assessment and planning processes. Nova Scotia, Nunavut, Yukon, Ontario and British Columbia each have policies that ensure that both students and parents have a chance to be involved in the steps leading up to curriculum implementation.

- Clear guidelines on situations in which removal of students with disabilities from the regular classroom is acceptable: "Removal of exceptional pupils from the regular class environment should occur only when extensive and appropriate individual program planning indicates that education in regular classes with the provision of supplementary supports and services cannot meet the student's educational and social needs, or there is clear evidence that partial or full removal is desirable for the welfare of the child or other children (p.11)."

While no other provinces have policies that contain language as strong as that contained with the New Brunswick guidelines, Nunavut and Prince Edward Island contain systems that are built on and reflect a disinclination to separate students with from students without disabilities.

Policies that outline the primacy of placement in regular classrooms can only be effective when underpinned by strong legislation such as that in, for example, New Brunswick, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, and Nova Scotia. Section 64(2)(d) of the Nova Scotia Education Act states: "A school board shall, in accordance with this act and the regulations... develop and implement educational programs for students with special needs within regular instructional settings with their peers in age, in accordance with the regulations and the Minister's policies and guidelines".

The *Working Guidelines* also underline the importance of the availability of student services and supports that enable teachers to provide the best environment for each individual student. Such supports and services include "curriculum modifications, different evaluation procedures, adapted teaching methods, alternative assignments and materials, resource room programs, adjusted timetables, (and) physical

modifications to classrooms and/or buildings (p.12).” These supports must be available to students in the classroom, during extracurricular activities, and during testing and evaluation.

#### **D. Examples of Best Practices in the Provinces and Territories – Cross-Canada**

This section will examine actual legislation and policy across Canada that meets a set of criteria of inclusiveness based upon the best practices outlined above. Reference will be made to specific policy needs of an inclusive system, the jurisdiction responsible for specific policies, and the details of each policy in question. This is an illustrative rather than exhaustive outline of examples of best practice.

##### **1. Multi-site Needs-based Assessment and Identification**

- a. Northwest Territories *Education Act*, s.16(1): "The school administration in consultation with professional staff and parents or, where a child is not in attendance at a school, the deputy minister, in consultation with professional staff and parents, shall determine(a) whether a student is a student with special educational needs and, if so, (b) what Individualized Education Plan is appropriate to meet the needs of that student."
- b. New Brunswick *Guidelines and Standards: Educational Planning for Students with Exceptionalities*, p.5: "... planning and interventions for the student by both the classroom and resource teachers can occur even though an exceptionality has not been identified through formal assessment. However, it is expected that informal and/or formal assessment information be provided with a pupil's referral to the resource teacher and/or school-based student services team for consideration."
- c. Nova Scotia *Special Education Policy Manual*, p.45: "Informal assessments... should form the basis of a comprehensive profile of strengths and needs. When formal assessment is deemed necessary, parental consent is required and the purpose, format and results of the assessment should be discussed with parents/guardians."

##### **2. Time-limited Requirement for Initial School-based Team Meeting**

A frequently-cited problem with the education of and provision of services to students with disabilities is the delay that often happens between the beginning of the school year and the time a student begins receiving adequate and appropriate educational supports. Some provinces, such as Alberta, do impose time limits; however these limits (in Alberta's case, a team meeting must take place within 8 weeks of referral) cannot be characterized as responsive to need.<sup>1</sup> A similar example of this sort of policy is Regulation 181/98 in Ontario, which sets timelines for notification of relevant

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<sup>1</sup> See *Standards for Special Education*, p.4.

stakeholders, but does not set timelines for Identification, Placement and Review Committee meetings. It cannot be said that best practices are evident in this area.

### **3. Requirement for Individual Education Plans for all Students Identified as having Special Needs**

- a. British Columbia, *Individual Education Plan Order M638/95*, s.2(1): "A board must ensure that an IEP is designed for a student with special needs, as soon as practical after the student is so identified by the board."
- b. Alberta, *Standards for Special Education* p.6: "School boards will ensure that an IPP is developed, implemented, monitored and evaluated for each student identified as having special needs." p.22: "All students with special needs, from severely disabled to gifted and talented, require an IPP."
- c. Saskatchewan, *Creating Opportunities for Students with Intellectual or Multiple Disabilities*, p.87: "... each student with an intellectual or multiple disability requires a Personal Program Plan that focuses on individual strengths and needs."
- d. Manitoba *Handbook for Student Services* (section B:2, "Individual Planning"): There are four kinds of individual plans, depending on the needs of the student: 1) Individual Education Plan; 2) Behaviour Intervention Plan; 3) Multi-System Plan; 4) Individual Health Care Plan.

### **4. Participation of Parents and Students in Identification/Assessment and Planning**

- a. Quebec, *Education Act*, s.235(1): "...such procedures shall provide for the participation of the parents of the students and of the students themselves, unless they are unable to do so."
- b. Saskatchewan, *Creating Opportunities for Students with Intellectual or Multiple Disabilities*, p.94: "It is.. Important to know which environments the student and/or student's family wants to access..."
- c. British Columbia *Special Education Manual*: "On a case-by-case basis as needed to plan for individual students, the team should also include the student's referring teacher, and involve the parent, the student, and, as appropriate, district resource staff, and representatives from community services or other ministries."
- d. British Columbia, *Individual Education Plan Order M638/95*: "Where a board is required to provide an IEP for a student under this order, the board must offer a parent of the student, and where appropriate, the student the opportunity to be consulted about the preparation of an IEP."

- e. Ontario, *Individual Education Plans: Standards for Development, Program Planning, and Implementation*, p.17: "A form documenting consultations with a parent and the student (if 16 or older) must be prepared and attached to the student's IEP."
- f. Saskatchewan, *Creating Opportunities for Students with Intellectual or Multiple Disabilities*, p.88: "A Personal Program Plan is... an assessment by teachers, family, students and related services."

## **5. Legal Recourse/Appeal for Parents and Students**

- a. Nova Scotia, *Education Act*, s.25(3); also *Ministerial Education Act Regulations*, s.53-61 ("Board of Appeal - Special Education"): "Where the parent of a child with special needs does not agree with the individualized program plan that has been developed for that child; and the disagreement cannot be resolved by a school board appeal process, the parent or the school board may initiate an appeal as prescribed by the regulations."
- b. British Columbia, *School Act*, s.11 ("Appeals"); s.11(2): "If a decision of an employee of a board significantly affects the education, health or safety of a student, the parent of the student or the student may, within a reasonable time from the date that the parent or student was informed of the decision, appeal that decision to the board."

## **6. Requirement for Scheduling of Reviews of Individual Education Plans**

- a. British Columbia, *Individual Education Plan Order M638/95*: "Where a board is required to provide an IEP for a student under this order, the board must ensure that the IEP is reviewed at least once each school year following the year the IEP is developed and, where necessary, it is revised, or cancelled..."
- b. Alberta, *Standards for Special Education*, p.9: "School boards will... inform parent's of the student's progress, at regularly scheduled reporting periods, throughout the year;" p.7: "Teachers will... document, in the IPP, the formal review of the student's progress, at regularly scheduled reporting periods."
- c. Quebec, *Policy on Special Education*, p.11: "The principal must see to the implementation and periodic evaluation of the individualized education plan and inform the student's parents on a regular basis."

## **7. Legislation and Supporting Policy Favouring Inclusion**

- a. Northwest Territories, *Education Act*, preamble, principle 12: "Every student is entitled to have access to the education program in a regular instructional setting with his or her age group in a public school or public denominational school in the community in which the student resides."

- b. New Brunswick, *Working Guidelines on Inclusion*, p.11: "Removal of exceptional pupils from the regular class environment should occur only when extensive and appropriate individual program planning indicates that education in regular classes with the provision of supplementary supports and services cannot meet the student's education and social needs, or there is clear evidence that partial or full removal is desirable for the welfare of the child or other children. If removal from the class is deemed necessary, this should occur for a limited time period and with a goal oriented plan focused on returning the child to his/her regular class."

#### **8. Requirement for Full Inclusion in Recreation, Intramurals, School Trips, etc.**

- a. New Brunswick, *Best Practices for Inclusion*: "All children participate in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities."
- b. Alberta, *Policy 1.6.1*, "Educational Placement of Students with Special Needs:" "School boards are responsible for ensuring that students with special needs... enjoy the life of the school and... participate in local community activities..."

#### **9. Requirement for Provision of Needed Supports and Services**

- a. British Columbia, *Support Services for Schools Order (M149/89)*: outlines the need for schools to provide space for a community health nurse; to provide assessment, equipment and maintenance of equipment to students in need of auditory systems; to provide speech and language services to students in need; to refer students appropriately for medical assessments and specialized health services.
- b. Saskatchewan, *Creating Opportunities for Students with Intellectual or Multiple Disabilities*, p.12: "The guiding principles for support to inclusion include...systematic arrangement of general educational settings, personal support and instructional adaptations... individualized instruction that is carefully planned to attend to the specific needs of the individual student, but does not interfere with the feeling of membership and belonging in the classroom."
- c. New Brunswick, *Working Guidelines on Integration*, p.9: "Funding will be provided to school boards and should be used to provide... coordination services... instructional services... support services... counselling services... psychological services... (and) health services."

#### **10. Requirement for Educational/Curriculum Accommodations**

- a. Ontario, *Regulation 181/98*: students have a right to the accommodations listed as part of their IEP: Accommodations that do not significantly modify the curriculum are included under the rubric of "facilities and resources" provided by a special education program.

- b. Alberta, *Standards for Special Education*, p.7: "Teachers will include the following essential information in the IPP: ... required classroom accommodations (e.g. any changes to instructional strategies, assessment procedures, materials, resources, facilities or equipment...)."
- c. Saskatchewan, *The Adaptive Dimension In Core Curriculum* (1992): "It is acknowledged that students come to the classroom with significant differences in cultural backgrounds, aptitudes, interests, abilities, and achievement levels which must be accommodated through adaptations to curriculum content, instructional strategies, and the learning environment if all are to benefit equitably from the approved programs.<sup>2</sup>"
- d. Quebec, *Policy on Special Education*: p.11: "School boards must adapt the educational services provided to students with special needs according to each student's needs and in keeping with the student's abilities as evaluated by the school board."

### **11. Attainment of Certificate/Degree while studying Modified Curriculum**

- a. Saskatchewan: Saskatchewan Learning does not issue a diploma – instead, students receive a “Transcript of Secondary Level Achievement” indicating program of study. Programs of study include Regular, Alternative Education, and Functional Integrated.<sup>3</sup>
- b. Nunavut: All students receive a diploma; Courses on transcript of students who have IEP are signified with an “I” designation.
- c. Manitoba, *Handbook for Student Services*, section A:1 ("Redesigning Course Content"): Students whose curriculum expectations are modified ("Modification applies to students who have significant cognitive disabilities and require alteration to over 50 per cent of the learning outcomes") have report cards which show "a modified or M-designation. Support teams must consider the long-term consequences of modifying learning outcomes. For instance, colleges and universities usually will not accept modified course for entry."

### **12. Requirement for Accommodations in Testing**

- a. British Columbia, *2002 Foundation Skills Assessment: Instructions for School/District Administrators*: Students with special needs receive the same supports and adaptations needed in classroom studies - those documented in the IEP.

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<sup>2</sup> See [www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/docs/policy/adapt/cc3.html](http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/docs/policy/adapt/cc3.html) .

<sup>3</sup> See [www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/student\\_records/transcripts.html](http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/student_records/transcripts.html) .

- b. New Brunswick, *Provincial Examination Program: Guidelines for Exemptions and Accommodations - Provincial Assessments and Examinations (April 2002)*: outlines the need for examiners to provide additional time, alternative settings, provision of test in different formats, use of technology, signing, etc, and verbatim scribing of responses.
- c. Ontario, *Policy/Program Memorandum No. 127*: "Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test in English-language Secondary Schools - Accommodations, Deferrals and Exemptions:" "The obligation of school boards and schools to provide accommodations for students with special needs is reinforced both by legislation and Ministry of Education policy."

### **13. Teacher Training Requirements and Provisions**

- a. Alberta, *Ministerial Directive 4.2.1*, 2(e): "... teachers who hold an Interim Professional Certificate are expected to demonstrate consistently that they understand... all students can learn, albeit at different rates and in different ways. They know how (including when and how to engage others) to identify students' different learning styles and ways students learn. They understand the need to respond to differences by creating multiple paths to learning for individuals and groups of students, including students with special learning needs;" Section 3(d): "Teachers know there are many approaches to teaching and learning. Teachers appreciate individual differences and believe all students can learn, albeit at different rates and in different ways. They recognized students' different learning styles and the different ways they learn, and accommodate these differences in individuals and groups of students including students with special learning needs."
- b. Alberta, *Policy 2.1.5*: "Teacher Growth, Supervision and Evaluation;" *Directive 4.2.1*: "Teaching Quality Standard Applicable to the Provision of Basic Education in Alberta:" Teachers are required to submit an annual professional growth plan that shows attempts to improve necessary qualifications.
- c. Nunavut: Through the Collective Agreement between Nunavut Teachers and the Minister Responsible for the Public Service Act, a Professional Improvement Fund (consisting of 4.5% of the gross basic salary of Federation members) is required (see <http://www.gov.nu.ca/fnt.pdf>, p.28) -- the agreement does not specify types of professional development; though student support teachers receive regional training for at least one week per year.
- d. New Brunswick, *Best Practices for Inclusion*: "Methods and resource teachers, who are knowledgeable about exceptional children, competent and experienced, with strong interpersonal skills, provide primarily collaborative consultative support to classroom teachers about programs, strategies and alternatives in meeting student needs."

## 14. Requirement for Transition Planning

- a. Nova Scotia, *Special Education Policy Manual*, Policy 2.7, p.49: "Transition planning is part of the individual planning process for each student with special needs... Careful attention should be given to the composition of the program planning team to ensure that all those involved or potentially involved with the student's program are part of the decision-making process."
- b. Saskatchewan, *Children's Services Policy Framework*, section V.4.2i: "Transition planning is an integral part of the personal program planning process for students with diverse needs. Personal Program Plans for students with exceptional needs include documentation of transition planning."
- c. British Columbia, *Special Education Policy Manual*: "... the IEP should include, when applicable, plans for the next transition point in the student's education (including transitions beyond school completion) and linkages to the SLP in the intermediate and graduation years."

## 15. Community Resource Interaction

This section addresses the need for school staff and administration to liaise not only with parents and outside professionals, but also with support, service, advocacy, and other agencies in the community who may have expertise with a population of students with students. It addresses, for example, the requirement for planning and placement teams to consult with such agencies, as well as provisions for school visits by outside non-professional stakeholders. Also at issue are supports and plans within schools to coordinate connections between various stakeholders.

- a. New Brunswick, *Best Practices for Inclusion*: "School district administrators work in partnership with school boards and the community to ensure that equitable, inclusionary policies govern the programs and services."
- b. New Brunswick, *Working Guidelines on Integration*, p.9: "Funding will be provided to school boards and should be used to provide... coordination services... one person whose responsibility it is to coordinate all services required by any student and provided by the school district or other agencies."
- c. Nunavut, *The Tunit Model of Student Support*: "Beyond the school the interagency, interdepartmental links and more formal protocols are necessary to move toward a collaborative, integrated service delivery model for those students requiring health and social services as well as educational services in order to meet their learning and life goals;" "A student support model is being developed that will assist teachers in recognizing and providing the care and supports required (for inclusion). Inherent in this is the establishment of a School Team that assists with student support and interagency cooperation and enables plans to be developed, strategies suggested,

referrals made to outside agencies who can help with programming, materials and equipment.”<sup>4</sup>

## 16. Monitoring and Evaluation

This section addresses the monitoring and evaluation regimes of provincial education authorities. The major question to be asked in this regard is whether there is only an emphasis on the financial accountability of the administration of services to students with disabilities, or whether accountability for student achievement based in Individual Education Plans is emphasized alongside financial accountability.

- a. Manitoba, *Education Agenda for Student Success*: schools initiated a new planning process in 2002-2003, and the Ministry is developing a set of performance and reporting indicators for boards (see “Discussion Paper: Planning Using School-Based Indicators”). While Ministry-suggested indicators are input rather than outcomes-focussed, special needs indicators are included. A twelve-school pilot project is underway in the province to improve education planning. Two major priorities are “improving outcomes, especially for less successful learners” and “strengthening links among schools, families and communities.”<sup>5</sup>
- b. British Columbia: Through the Accountability, Monitoring and Reporting Department, boards are required to produce accountability contracts, which include a measure of “the achievement of special education students” and “the results of the parent, staff and student satisfaction surveys.”<sup>6</sup> Coordination and monitoring of funding and spending on special education is also a stated activity of the Ministry.<sup>7</sup>

## II. Practice

Emerging research in best practices in educational practice emphasizes a standard regime of legislation and rules that set a minimum standard for policy and practice. On top of this minimum standard, there is a definite role for inclusive values injected in all school activities, as well as a need for informed educators who are able to understand and meet the needs of a range of student learning needs and styles. As Raymond (1995) has written, “educators that have been involved in including students with special needs in the regular classroom have found that there are no easy solutions or cookbooks to accomplish the task. This is because every child is unique and requires educational plans that respond to these differences. However, some educators have found that there are common threads that are necessary in the successful inclusion of all children. These include:

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<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.ecss.nu.ca/ss/Inclu.pdf> .

<sup>5</sup> See [www.edu.gov.mb.ca/ks4/sdds/pie/10-25-02\\_pie\\_div.pdf](http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/ks4/sdds/pie/10-25-02_pie_div.pdf) .

<sup>6</sup> See [www.bced.gov.bc.ca/schools/sdinfo/acc\\_contracts/](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/schools/sdinfo/acc_contracts/) .

<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/accountability/district/> .

- Welcoming parents and family members as part of the planning team
- Involving the student, their classmates and peers on the planning team
- Focusing on the student's strengths and possibilities rather than focusing on what is "wrong" with the student
- Having a common commitment in believing in inclusion as the best choice for the student (Raymond, 1995)"

For example, *The Children's School*, is a small school teaching pre-kindergarten to grade 5 located in Brooklyn, New York. In every classroom there are 18 students in general education and 6 students who have various types of disability (which range from mild learning to intellectual disabilities and autism). Each class has two teachers (at one of whom is trained in special education) as well as at least one teacher's aide. Hemphill (2002) explains the school's success as stemming from "strong leadership, small ratios of grown-ups to children, and a competent staff that allows children to progress at their own pace."

The *Positive Alternatives to School Exclusion* (PASE) Project, carried out in the United Kingdom in 1996-97, examined effective teaching methods in schools that showed a commitment to reducing social exclusion. An important philosophy of the research was the idea that "whatever the nature of the constraints within which teachers and schools operate, there is significant scope for positive action and intervention within every institution." The book that resulted from the study provides a look into seven schools in the U.K. which are attempting to make programming more inclusive (Cooper et. al., 2000).

Following are examples from the literature of best practices in school-based educational practice for students with disabilities, which builds on best practices in policy outlined above.

### **A. Inclusive classroom practices and design**

#### *Teachers*

- Speak only positively about all children in the classroom and to other staff – present the positive aspects of each student
- Take cues from the child, think in terms of strengths and progress rather than deficits
- Give students a sense of control over their own learning
- Cue students who do not respond well to change in advance of daily program/subject transitions
- If the teacher sets the tone for acceptance, students will follow the example
- Involved students in supporting each other
- Don't carry problems over from day to day
- Don't blame the student for a lack of proper resources

- Express student's positive accomplishments to parents
- Make an effort to listen to and understand the knowledge of parents
- Collaborate with other teachers involved with the same students (Raymond, 1995)

### *Teaching Assistants*

- Rather than concentrating on one, or a few, students, work with all students some of the time
- Assist the teacher in preparation of materials and supervision of work for all students
- Work to foster independence in students (including independence from teaching assistants)
- Act as a model for building relationships among students
- Interpret and explain behaviours and experiences of students to parents, administrators, teachers, other students (Raymond, 1995)

Raymond (1995) provides a number of alternate teaching techniques that can be used for students who need more individualized instructional methods. These can be grouped into the following categories:

- Adaptations to the environment
- Adaptation of presentation style
- Adaptation of materials
- Adaptive assistance
- Adaptation of goals
- Adaptation of evaluation

Adaptations to materials, goals and evaluations are more relevant to curriculum adaptations, and will be covered in that section.

### *Adaptations to the environment*

Adaptations to the classroom environment can include strategies that increase physical as well as intellectual accessibility. Changes can be made to a student's position in the room (in consideration, for example, of sensory disabilities and/or sensitivities), and the use of various sorts of organizational aids (e.g. extra drawers and containers, tying pencils to a desk, colour coding of binders).

### *Adaptation of Presentation Style*

Teachers and teaching assistants can use a variety of presentation strategies to include all their students, including:

- Breaking information into steps
- Using a variety of sensory inputs (e.g. words, pictures, sounds)
- Simplification of instructions

- Involving students in presentation
- Modification of instructional pace, voice, movement

More examples of adaptive presentation style can be found in Raymond (1995), Bunch (1999), Sacks & Silberman (1998), Hilton & Ringlaben (1998), and Andrews & Lupart (1993).

## **B. Needs-based versus Categorical Assessment and Placement**

Klaus Puhlman of Yellowknife School District (as quoted in Raymond, 1995) states:

The more programs we introduce in our schools, the more we threaten our community. It is well documented that the categorization of special education has contributed to the disjointedness of education and our inability to meet the new morbidities: child depression, drug use, teen-age pregnancy, poor academics, motivation, and school absences. This categorization model allows these students and others to slip through.

There appears to be an increasing move towards non-categorical strategies of assessment and placement. As Forness & Kavale (1998) report, students are now less likely to be characterized according to the type and severity of their disability, and more likely to be assessed according to need, and intensity of needed supports.

Besides the goals of inclusion, individualized learning, and participation of a diverse range of stakeholders (teachers, parents, support staff, students and peers) in the IPP process, Raymond (1995) also includes the principles of *dynamism* and *environment*. By dynamism, the author means that the IPP should be free to change over the course of the school year, reflecting a student's progress and increased interaction/knowledge between the student and their support network. By environment, Raymond alludes to the idea that the IPP must take into consideration the distinct environs of individual schools, and must use that environment to mould educational programming and support.

## **C. Modification of Curriculum**

Hoover & Patton (1997, vii) emphasize that "effective curriculum implementation and associated adaptations for students with learning and behaviour problems best occur when educators possess an understanding of the total curriculum implementation process at the classroom level." In other words, an informed, prepared teacher who is comfortable with the curriculum will be most adept at adapting that curriculum to the needs of individual students.

The authors point to three "curricular elements" that can be adapted: content, instructional settings, and instructional strategies. This section, therefore, will act as support to the previous section on inclusive classroom practices and design.

### *Adaptation of Content*

The adaptation of content within provincial curriculum is often tied to the modification of expectations for students with disabilities. This section, however, will focus on modification of content that maintains curricular integrity. Rather than changing what is expected of a student, best practice must focus on using different methods to teach the same material, knowledge and skills. As Hoover & Patton (1997, 41) write, “due to increased emphasis upon... mandated curricula in which the objectives related to subject material that students must be taught are already outlined... teachers are responsible for teaching required content; however, adapting that content is frequently necessary to meet the needs of special learners.”

Hoover & Patton (1997) provide several strategies for adapting content to fit individual needs. These include:

- Concentrating on the pacing of instruction, combined with ongoing review of material
- Simplification of tasks (e.g. rewriting phrases in reading material in simpler language)

### *Adaptation of Instructional Strategies*

Drawing from the work of Mastropieri & Scruggs (1994), Hoover and Patton point to the clarification of learning goals, presenting tasks in steps, modeling required procedures, and the continuous monitoring of student understanding (with adjustment of teaching style if necessary).

The authors provide an exhaustive list of possible strategies, including:

- Contingency contracting (verbal or written agreement between student and teacher that lays out expectations and rewards with regard to a particular activity, assignment, etc.)
- Providing choices (providing several avenues for a student to accomplish the same goal)
- Student input into curriculum decisions
- Shortened or stepped assignments
- Individualized instruction
- Alternative methods for response
- Modification of presentation of abstract concepts
- Peer tutoring
- Using proximity, touch, time-outs and non-verbal cues to manage disruptive behaviours
- Planned ignoring
- Clear and concise expectations

### *Adaptation of Instructional Settings*

Adapting instructional settings often involved the types of student groupings used in the classroom. For example, the organization of different learning areas within classrooms, the use of study carrels, and group seating to maximize student involvement in both their own and other students' learning. Hoover & Patton state that the style of an instructional setting must:

- Provide the opportunity and requirement for a student to manage her or his own behaviour
- Minimize the risk of behaviour-based failure
- "Foster the message that students are expected to complete the task (45)."

#### **D. Parent participation in decision making**

The role of parents includes the following:

- Involving the child in activities outside of school that contribute to an overall development process
- Participating in school-related decisions (e.g. collaborating with teachers and administrators to set realistic goals for students)
- Participating in all school activities, not only the ones your child is involved in
- Promoting inclusion at the school board, regional, and provincial levels
- Act as interpreter/facilitator between child and school staff
- "Not to fall into the trap of needing to have all the answers of how to include their child (Raymond, 1995)."

#### **E. Provision of Supports and Services – to teachers – to students – to administrators**

##### *Support to Teachers*

Under the heading "Meeting the Needs of Teachers," the Saskatchewan Special Education Unit (2001) states that "it is unreasonable to expect one teacher to be solely responsible for meeting the needs of a student with an intellectual or multiple disability in an inclusive situation (32)." There is a general need for proper pre- and in-service professional development as well as ongoing supports in the classroom – "the premise for preparation is to make the teacher feel not only accepting but competent at the job at hand (32)."

Teachers need to be supplied (and need to supply themselves) with all relevant information about the needs of a particular student. This includes the student's strengths and interests, specifics of the student's condition/disability, and teaching strategies that have proven useful with similar students in the past (whether in the same school or as communicated through literature). A teacher also needs to be aware of

behaviour management techniques, administration of an adapted curriculum, and various strategies for alternate assessment. Also, “an awareness that the essential qualities and values of an effective teacher are open mindedness, a positive attitude, knowledge, sensitivity, understanding and viewing all students as individuals capable of learning (Saskatchewan Special Education Unit, 2001, 33).”

### *Support to Students with Disabilities*

The Saskatchewan Special Education Unit (2001) provides a list of instructional strategies that have been recognized as best practices in support to students with disabilities. These include:

- Grade placement corresponds with the student’s age, plus or minus two years, in the local neighbourhood school
- Social interaction is supported and encouraged through the use circles of friends, peer buddies, peer tutors, cross age tutoring, and cooperative learning
- Curricula is functional – that is, it responds to a student’s individual needs (cultural background, family and community resources and values, aspirations and future goals and opportunities)
- Systematic instruction using a diverse range of teaching strategies (including prompting strategies and reinforcement), recognizing the presence of multiple intelligences and the utility of “heterogeneous grouping, which acts to facilitate peer-mediated and cooperative learning structures... systematic instruction also conveys *looking inside* (italics in original text) the current practices to critically examine instructional strengths and weaknesses and to discover any potential barriers to effective teaching (37-38)”
- Generalization of learned skills to settings outside of the classroom environment
- Integrated service delivery – all actors/stakeholders in a student’s education complement one unified program

The Saskatchewan Special Education Unit (2001) suggests that the role of paraprofessionals must be clearly articulated. This will enable team cooperation and student progress. It is also necessary for adequate preparation to take place at the school division and individual school level so that paraprofessionals can themselves be properly supported and positive working relationships developed.

### *Support to Administrators*

Evans et. al. (1999) describe regional networks of clusters of schools as means of mutual support to facilitate inclusion within school regions. For example, in the Netherlands, these clusters may contain between 20 and 40 schools, with funding provided to each cluster, which is then split up as needed among partners.

Leaders/Administrators are responsible for demonstration of moral leadership and commitment to inclusive philosophy, dealing with community public relations, acting as a model for parents and teachers, division and coordination of responsibilities, provision of continuity for learners, supporting teachers and listening to concerns, assembling teaching and support teams (as well as taking part in those teams), supporting and facilitating adequate and useful professional development opportunities, and dealing “with inclusion as a school wide issue” (Raymond, 1995).

“The principal’s primary role is to determine how to accommodate for inclusion... A principal’s pro-active, committed attitude is vital to overcoming difficulties that may arise during the inclusion process (Raymond, 1995).”

### *Team Building*

Raymond (1995) suggests that, since “inclusion of students cannot be achieved alone,” it is necessary to build a team of teachers, parents, assistants, the student and peers, specialists/paraprofessionals, and any other interested parties. While one person (preferably the teacher) acts as facilitator, any member of the team can call a meeting. This should include an end-of-year meeting to plan for transition to the following year and maintain continuity.

The facilitator is responsible for:

- Setting the agenda of the meeting (based on consultations with the member who called the meeting)
- Encouraging participation by all members
- Summarizing key points of the meeting, as well as agreed-upon goals
- Delegation of tasks
- Providing information to team members as necessary (Raymond, 1995)

### **F. Teacher training, professional development**

Klaus Puhlman of Yellowknife School District (as quoted in Raymond, 1995) has stated that teachers “have a responsibility to review (their) own level of competence and effectiveness and to seek necessary improvements as part of a continuing process of professional development,” and “an obligation to do what is best for students as (they) engage in the teacher-learning process that is designed to meet the needs of the learner.”

At the same time, best practice would dictate that teacher training programs provided through Canadian universities include mandatory coursework in inclusive education. At the present time, some schools offer elective courses in inclusive and/or special education, while others make such courses a requirement for graduation.

## **G. Transition planning**

There are five major areas of transition that need to be addressed in the public school system:

- children with disabilities from preschool to elementary school
- students with disabilities from elementary to junior/secondary school
- students with disabilities from junior to secondary school
- individuals with disabilities from the public school system to postsecondary education and/or the workforce

While each period of transition involves different stakeholders and processes, there are a number of strategies that apply to each. For example, it is essential that there be a continuity of supports from one setting to the next. There is a tendency for available supports and services to decline as individuals age, with the most supports often available in the preschool years, and very few being available after a student leaves school.

It is also imperative to ensure communication between sending and receiving settings. This can be accomplished through meetings that involve teachers/caregivers, parents, and administrators from, for example, the elementary and junior schools. Such preparation will provide a student's new teachers and guardians with important context, and will lessen the need to relearn and rediscover what works and what has not worked in the past.

For a more detailed picture of the different periods of transition, refer to The Roeher Institute (2001); Wehman (1996); Wolery (1998); and Sitlington & Neubert (1998).

## **H. Physical Accessibility**

Effective school design is a manifestation of the same philosophy that sees the inclusion of all students in regular classrooms as benefiting both students who do and do not have disabilities: "Inclusive design tries to break down unnecessary barriers and exclusions. In doing so, it will often achieve surprising and superior design solutions that benefit everyone (U.K. Department for Education and Employment 2001, 7)."

The U.K. Department of Education and Employment discuss seven major issues with regard to physical accessibility:

### **1. Adequate Space and Provision of Spaces**

There must be enough space to accommodate all students in general areas of a school and surrounding grounds (classrooms, hallways, exits, washrooms, etc.). This can include the provision of quiet space where students with sensory disabilities can exercise and study away from noisy and distracting areas.

## 2. Physical Movement

For students with mobility disabilities, long distances between activity spaces, steps to rooms on multiple floors, slippery outdoor surfaces, heavy doors and narrow doorways can induce fatigue and feelings of exclusion. “What appear to be small details can have large consequences: even a seemingly low threshold strip can be a barrier (U.K. Dept. of Ed. and Employment 2001, 24).”

## 3. Wayfinding

Students with sensory disabilities (e.g. blindness, sensory changes attributable to autism, etc.) may have problems with direction and moving from space to space, which can lead to increased levels of anxiety and frustration. This in turn can lead to behaviour difficulties within the classroom. Aids to wayfinding include accessible design and location of signs (including Braille printing); differentiating areas within the school by colour, style, size, noise, smell, etc., and bringing students’ attention to these differences; design of prominent landmarks; and the removal of clutter which detracts from the individuality of an area.

## 4. Visual Aspects

According to the U.K. Dept. of Ed. and Employment (2001), there are three major factors that govern the way visual information is received: condition of the eye, quality of the light source, and nature of the object that is being viewed. This has a number of implications for the layout of a school, and the needs of students with different visual acuities and sensitivities may conflict. For example, some students may benefit from higher levels of light (e.g. low vision, the ability of Deaf students to read lips), while others may be sensitive to high lighting levels. These differences illustrate the need to consider individual student needs before classroom placement.

Arrangement of space, as well as the use of colour contrast within that space, will contribute to visual comprehension. Door handles, changes in floor levels and steps as well as hall directions benefit from a change in colour from one stage to another. For students with autism, the use of soothing and/or pale colours may reduce emotional stressors.

## 5. Acoustic Aspects

Similar to aspects of visual comprehension, auditory inputs depend on the condition of a person’s hearing acuity, the source of sounds, and aspects of the physical environment that affect sound. And again, different students may have different and conflicting auditory needs. School design must take into consideration the following factors:

- Frequencies of sounds (e.g. high vs. medium vs. low frequencies – some students may benefit from one of these but not others)
- Noise levels
- Reverberation of sounds within a room
- Absorption of sounds within a room
- The use of sound insulation

Schools must pay attention to sources of noise – for example, from ventilation ducts, the incursion of hallway noises into the classroom, as well as noise from outside the building (e.g. cars, airplanes). On the other hand, such noise can help students with visual disabilities to navigate and better understand their environment (U.K. Dept. of Ed. and Employment, 2001).

## 6. Sensory Environments and Temperature

For students with (for example) learning, communication and/or sensory disabilities, the use of a diverse range of sensory inputs can enhance the learning experience. This can include the presence of “scented plants, seating that is pleasant to the touch, and installations such as wind chimes that create interesting sounds (U.K. Dept. of Ed. and Employment 2001, 30).” The use of and attention to the haptic sense (e.g. the feeling of water running over ankles or pushing against a hand, other feelings felt through the skin and frame of the body) may also be beneficial to many students, especially those who have uncharacteristic learning styles.

Attention to temperature issues is important for students with circulation problems (who may need more heat) as well as for students who are hyperactive (who may benefit from lower temperatures).

## 7. Furniture and Equipment

The accessibility of furniture, equipment and work stations is perhaps the most widely recognized need of students with physical, learning and sensory disabilities. Provisions can include grab bars in toilets, adjustable tables and desks, the use of speakers within classrooms for students with hearing disabilities, and the modification of computer keyboards, mice, etc.

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