

Western Provinces Meeting on Inclusive Education
Friday, March 14, 2003
University of Calgary

Purpose of the Meeting

- ❑ To identify areas of common concern;
- ❑ To find ways to mutually support teachers/schools to assure that inclusion goes well;
- ❑ To stimulate regional action to bring more focus to support for inclusion;
- ❑ To develop strategies for training and professional development for teachers, principals and other staff in best practices for inclusion;
- ❑ To identify research and information sharing strategies relevant to inclusion;
- ❑ Other related matters.

Record of Issues Discussed in the Meeting

1. Where is Inclusive Education Now in your Province?

Manitoba

- The province doesn't mandate appropriate education for kids – hoping it will be implemented soon.
- Inclusive education is spotty – some good things happening in some places but it varies.

British Columbia

- Claudia's school district has been inclusive but it's sliding b/c of cut backs and lack of support. The board and district are supportive of inclusive education, but there is concern that it's slipping.
- Provincially—quite an inclusive province, but there are concerns
- Inclusive education is spotty – there are pockets of excellence
- BCTF working with parents and families and the community
- The context of BC colours everything that goes on in BC right now – cutbacks etc.

Saskatchewan

- Inclusive education is spotty here too
- There are segregated classes and schools in Prince Albert.
- Inclusive education depends on who the teacher is.
- SK policy supports inclusive education. Inclusive Education is not in the Act, but appropriate placement is in the Act.
- Students should receive their education in the regular classroom in their neighbourhood school.
- Good policy support in the Department of Learning – says Faith.
- SACL and Department of Learning are on the same page in terms of inclusive education policy.

Alberta

- AB Learning – policy says that first placement option should be in the regular classroom and neighbourhood school – great variability the way that policy is interpreted and played out
- Inclusive education – hit & miss
- If people are committed, inclusive education can happen
- Inclusive education is a process
- If parents don't know they have a choice, they aren't given one – it's a lot of work for parents
- Bruce U – scene hasn't changed in some time. Some districts have been inclusive for a long time, while others are sometimes inclusive and some times not (due to change of superintendent, for example) – hit & miss. Changes in leadership of district affect inclusive education. Politically, inclusive education is not on the top of government's agenda. While policy is positively predisposed to inclusion, it's up to a district to decide this. Two schools in one district can have vastly different approaches. A school might take one kid, but not another – the variability is extremely frustrating for parents. Teacher's Federation has softened up on their attitude toward inclusion – more likely to say “inclusion is a good thing BUT...” instead of “inclusion is a bad thing”. When there are reductions in funding, it happens to kids with special needs first. There are 5 inclusive post secondary options right now, and more to come – if we were successful at post secondary level, thought it would impact the high schools and how they include kids, but apparently has had little impact.

Summary of Provincial Scan

- Similar issues here as out east (Amherst)
- Everything is so locally based.
- How we conceive the big picture but deliver on a local level is a real challenge, but it seems like that's what we have to do – how do we organize ourselves, what are the partnerships
- We don't have a space for a national dialogue on education in Canada
- Education is a real divider for Canadian citizenship but there is no space to talk about it nationally – the challenge is to find someone to talk to federally, but they say “no, we can't help you b/c it's a provincial issue” – we should challenge this notion if we believe that education is fundamental to citizenship
- People get into inclusive schools b/c of local leadership and local partnership

2. What are the Critical Issues for Schools, Teachers, Parents & Governments

- **These lists are not necessarily critical. We put these lists together, but we haven't considered them critically yet.**

Group 1: Teachers

- Training, supports, resources
- Changing roles, time
- Collaboration – with families, multi-disciplinary

- Supporting implementation of strategies
- Complex demographics – increasing diversity of students, increasing complexity of “the job”
- Changing and conflicting role and expectations of teachers
- Pressure for outcome based and standardized testing outcomes
- Class size
- Lack of support at administrative levels – lack of consistent messages

Schools

- Demographics of community and expectations
- Governance – school based vs. centralized
- Community culture & beliefs
- School leadership
- Differences in implementation of policy at various levels
- Funding
- Access to additional supports e.g. therapists
- Economic disparities between communities
- Funding mechanisms – transfer of money between schools, school divisions as students move
- Planning cycles in schools and school divisions

Parents

- Lots of stress! Lots of hard work!
- Lack of knowledge about choice
- Lack of continuity from year to year
- Lack of standards
- Access & support not guaranteed
- Power imbalance
- Transition issues – creates risk
- Collaboration with schools is time consuming
- Parents don't have the legal right to inclusion

Government

- Accountability frameworks lacking and variable
- Funding and competition for \$\$ at provincial level
- Political will to support inclusion – competing interests / lack of local capacity
- Use funding as leverage to promote inclusion
- Role of the government is changing

Group 2:

- Information – access, support, post secondary options
- Inconsistency
- Fears
- Resistance by teachers – fears, lack of info, lack of support, knowledge & skills, attitude, philosophy, beliefs & values, educational paradigm
- Leadership – schools, boards, principals, parents, superintendents

- IEP/ IPP – accountability, parents partnership, concrete goals & outcomes, how to deliver them – implementation & writing, long term planning, transitions to jr./sr. high school and to post secondary
- Government issues – accountability, family friendly agenda, funding, policy & legislation, purpose of testing
- Students not getting proper recognition of course and school completion

3. Strengths – What is Going Well?

Group 1:

- Solid knowledge base
- Technology
- We know how!!
- Pockets of excellence is increasing
- Where inclusion is supported, it is working and all students benefit
- Improving communication at all level and between stakeholders
- In some places there are good networks of supports – need to build on these and need to share the knowledge more
- Beginning to tell the successful stories
- People and teacher associations & federations are sources of strength

Group 2:

- Examples of excellence – solid knowledge base
- Time & perspective – it can be done
- Building Canadian and international research base
- Some Policy foundation – provincially
- Human rights foundation
- Some awareness of post secondary education
- Societal – social acceptance improving, universal designs / building codes, youth experience of inclusion
- Networks – growing political alliances and groups committed to inclusive education

4. Critical Needs – What are the areas of priority for action?

Group 1:

- Ensure that the knowledge base is available to teachers, parents, administrators & school trustees
- Spread the word!
- Spreading the excellence from province to province
- **Focus supports for teachers** – includes financial resources - **CRITICAL**
- Leadership at all levels
- Parents must be *real* partners in education
- Collaboration of supports of the players in the system
- Family friendly processes
- **Identify centres of excellence – where is it happening, why is it working and showcasing it for others – how you work with families - CRITICAL**

- **Advocacy of families – ongoing need - CRITICAL**
- **Sharing the power with families – there needs to be an open door – parents are valued & welcomed in the school - CRITICAL**
- Inclusion is about more than school (schools reflect society’s values)
- **Records of success – need data –critical analysis of the past - research- CRITICAL**

Why are we still talking about the same things? These are the same needs we identified 20 years ago. What is the missing piece of the puzzle in making real, substantive and sustainable change?

Group 2:

- **Infiltrate - push the agenda - CRITICAL**
- Need inclusive policy at school board level
- Need inclusive practice
- **Need forum to look at models - CRITICAL**
- **Leadership - CRITICAL**
- Look at locally based strength and capacity
- Think globally act locally
- **Need adequate pre service and inservice training - CRITICAL**
- **Honouring parent involvement - CRITICAL**
- Need adequate resources
- **Need to move away from some of the existing service delivery models to models that are responsive, flexible, creative, supportive, linkages, connectedness, individual - CRITICAL**
- **Need information strategy – include “what works”, not reinventing successes - CRITICAL**
- Responsible inclusion
- Clearer **accountability** framework based on responsibility for outcomes - **CRITICAL**
- **Reporting card system on inclusion - CRITICAL**

Discussion

Are there other things at play that have limited our ability to achieve more in moving ahead the inclusive education agenda? Have we missed something? There are so many resources, books, materials, but it isn’t enough to convince the public or educators that we need to make change. What is there about our limited success to date? What happens if we remain a marginal movement – implication for strategies?

Theory of social change – if you can drive policy and legal cases, that will drive change
 This theory may be inadequate – what assumptions are we working with about how change takes place?

Inclusion – a moral issue? A professional practice issue?

This is not an either / or situation – but there are practical things we can do in the ACL movement to make things better.

It is only within our lifetime that public education is for everyone.

Where are our hinge points – which ones will make a real difference. For e.g., should we go after that parents have a choice where the child should be educated and not the system. We could do this strategically...but, you might blow inclusion out of the water because people may not choose inclusion.

Increase the capacity of families.

There are a deeper set of arguments and issues to look at and to think about.

Role of parents in advocacy roles in keeping a vision out there to work towards is critical. The reality of a government day to day life is that it's only possible to work incrementally.

Triggers for change: the dissonance between knowledge base and practice -- that if you claim to value all kids, and then send some of them away, that is a contradiction.

A movement needs to have a place for a conversation around the deeper fundamental issues in order to move forward.

We need to learn how to work on both levels – having the deeper conversation AND work on the practical aspects.

What has happened to the ACL advocacy voice?

No representation here from adults with disabilities who have been through the system

6. Actions

How are we going to launch, and sustain a moral/ public conversation about education in this country?

To engage and foster in conversation about education.

Knowledge Information Strategy

- Scan and map where information is currently housed and existing centres of excellence – critically assess gaps and accessibility
- Strategy to identify “exemplary schools”
- Design a network
 - national
 - regional
 - Delivery: CMEC, separate NGO, Canada Learning Institute, university connections

Leadership Strategy

- Family movement
- School councils – an increasing reference point for many decisions
- School trustees
- Leadership of ideas
- Educational/ teachers leaders
- Community agencies
- Government leadership

(Do we have the right vehicle for political leadership?)

Why isn't inclusive education on anyone's leadership agenda? Need to consider this before we start to develop a strategy

To design a leadership strategy, what should we do?

1. need political pressure
2. support system for change
3. We need to get people like Michael Fullan, Dean of OISE/UT, to include inclusive education in his work. We must invigorate the discussion dialogue.
4. Disseminating information and research
5. Identify emerging academics and building connections with them and partnering with them in ways that they can use (e.g. money)
6. Infiltration and collaboration (ie getting into teacher federation conferences and journals) in Special Ed and Diversity
7. Organization capacity-building to address inclusive education e.g. within teacher federations and professional organizations

Participant List

Alberta

Bruce Uditsky, Executive Director, Alberta Association for Community Living
Anne Hughson, Associate Professor, University of Calgary
Orvella Small, President Elect, Alberta Home and School Councils' Association
Pat Maas, Calgary Family Voices Family Education Committee & Inclusion Facilitator, Developmental Disabilities Resource Centre
Andrew Kryzan, Parent & Calgary Family Voices Education Committee
Felicity Foster, Calgary Family Voices Education Committee
Lorraine Stewart, Alberta Learning

Manitoba

Lee Tavares-Jacobek, Inclusive Education Consultant, ACL -Manitoba
John Van Wallegem, Director of Research & Planning Branch, Department of Education, Manitoba

Saskatchewan

Wanda Lyons, Acting Director, Special Education Unit, Department of Learning, SK
Gloria Mahussier, Board Member, Saskatchewan Association for Community Living
Faith Bodnar, Executive Director, Saskatchewan Association for Community Living

British Columbia

Claudia Semaniuk, Chair, BCACL Board & Consultant, Surrey School Board
Nancy Hoyano, Education Committee, BCACL & works with Educational Assistants
Charlie Naylor, Researcher, BC Teacher's Federation

CACL

Michael Bach, Executive Vice President
Zuhy Sayeed, Vice President, CACL and Co-Chair, Joint Working Group on Inclusive Education
Gordon Porter, Co-Chair, Joint Working Group on Inclusive Education
Denise Silverstone, Project Coordinator, CACL