



**Report on the
Saskatchewan Association for Community Living's**

**Forum on the
Preparation and Continuing Professional Development of Teachers,
Educational Assistants and other Personnel
Who Work With Students with Intellectual Disabilities**

Facilitator: Dr. Gordon Porter, Roeher Institute and the CACL

Friday, November 28th, 2003 - University of Saskatchewan
College of Education, Educational Psychology & Special Education

Background:

The Saskatchewan Association for Community Living (SACL) invited representatives from Saskatchewan's department of learning, teacher's federation, and associations that represent the interests of teachers, educational assistants, educational administrators, and school trustees as well as representatives from our post secondary institutions that deliver training to our educators. A list of invitees is attached with a notation beside people who attended.

Dr. Gordon Porter facilitated the event. Dr. Porter is an internationally known lecturer and consultant on inclusive education. He is an Assistant Professor of Education, University of Maine at Presque Isle. Dr. Porter also Co-Chairs the Canadian Association for Community Living's (CACL) Joint Working Group on Inclusive Education. Please refer to the attached paper by Dr. Porter; *Meeting the Challenge: Inclusion and Diversity in Canadian Schools*.

The intent of the Forum was to provide the opportunity for stakeholders involved in the training and professional development of educational personnel to a) identify the critical factors for educational personnel to create and sustain inclusive schools and b) create a collaborative work plan for the enhancement and development of training programs and professional learning opportunities for personnel who are involved in the education of students with intellectual disabilities.

The Saskatchewan Association for Community Living is committed to working with educators in the development of commonly shared goals to ensure successful inclusive schools. Therefore, the SACL is looking to enhance and develop new partnerships with the educational community. This forum is one of several strategies that SACL is co-coordinating in order

to engage stakeholders in the mutual support of opportunities for training and professional development of best practices for inclusion.

As a member of the Canadian Association, SACL will also be looking to our educational partners to participate in a National Inclusive Education Summit November 24-26, 2004 in Ottawa. The purpose of the summit will be to bring major national educational partners together to lay the groundwork for a national strategy on inclusive education. Please refer to the attached document by the CACL; *A National Initiative on Inclusive Education*.

Summary of Discussions:

How well are Saskatchewan schools meeting the challenge of student diversity and inclusion?

- They are struggling.
- There is a will to try.
- There are inconsistencies across the province.
- Schools and their communities need good data to prove best practices are necessary.
- Effective practices require supporting resources.
- There is a need to move away from the medical model that views the student as needing to be fixed in order to fit into the system.
- We need to teach our educators about tolerance, human rights and citizenship of people with disabilities.
- Special education is not “a special ed issue” it’s a regular school issue.
- We need more opportunities for due process within school systems.
- We continue to separate students for academic performance which reinforces the value of academic achievement over all else.
- All students would benefit from the creativity of structured success programs.
- Segregation is not about the unique needs of students.
- Need to understand the fear of the unknown by parents when they don’t know what the closure of a segregated school might mean for their children.
- We need to value diversity.
- We continue to have a problem differentiating between the accommodation of a student’s diversity by designing an
- individualized educational program and the systemic exclusion of students due to their diversity.

Do you think Saskatchewan's teachers and educational assistants are adequately prepared to meet the inclusion challenge?

Pre-Service Training:

A. Teachers

Background:

Special education teachers and professional support staff who are responsible for individual assessments, program planning and program delivery must possess qualifications acceptable to the Minister. Resource teachers, learning assistance teachers and special class teacher should have regular classroom teaching experience and must possess a Bachelor of Education and a minimum of 18 credit hours in special education.¹

In the fall of 2004 the Post Degree Certificate in Education: Special Education will be available from the U of S, College of Education, Technology Enhanced Learning, Saskatoon. It will be an on-line program offering 9 courses to students who have completed a Bachelor of Education with advanced academic competencies in the discipline of Special Education.²

All students in the College of Education are required to take four core classes that are taught by the Department of Educational Psychology & Special Education. These classes are worth 3 credit units each and include a) Learners (258), b) Exceptional Learners (390), c) Interpersonal Communications and Personal Development (415) and c) Classroom Dynamics and Student Behavior (437).

Summary of the Discussion:

- While our special education teachers are trained in current best practices, many of our classroom teachers were trained years ago and are therefore not always adequately prepared to include students with disabilities into their classroom.
- The College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan has endorsed the Department of Learning's *Final Report on the Special Education Review; Directions for Diversity (January 2000)* however,

¹ Children's Services Policy Framework. Department of Learning. 2002 (V.6.1i)

² <http://edpsecertificate.usask.ca/information.html>

- the College is currently limited in its delivery of special education courses to classroom teachers. For example, there is only one course taught that consists of 39 credit hours. The timeframe limits the training that can be provided to prepare classroom teachers to become inclusive educators. There is a need to infuse “inclusion” as a principal element in all the College’s courses (e.g. educational foundations, educational administration, etc.).
- There isn’t enough time to prepare teachers in-training for the specifics of teaching students with particular disabilities.
 - Teachers in-training require opportunities to spend time with children with disabilities and their families to better understand their role as a member of an inclusive school team.
 - Teachers require further training on how to;
 - effectively supervise educational assistants,
 - implement classroom based assessment,
 - provide multi-level instruction and
 - access classroom supports from the community
 - We need to improve our kinesiology programs to prepare a good physical environment for students with disabilities.
 - Need greater communication among teachers in the field, faculty and interns.
 - Internship Manual needs to be revised to include the endorsement of inclusion.
 - We need to enhance the coordination of pre-service training of teachers with other programs, educational institutions, professional organizations and the Department of Learning.

B. Educational Assistants

Background:

SIAST’s Kelsey Campus offers an Educational Assistant (E.A.) Certificate Program that is 80 hours or 38 weeks. The program provides 15 courses in supporting the teaching/learning process and providing safe and effective personal care interventions. The students also learn about the field of exceptionalities.³

The E.A. Certificate program is not currently a standard requirement of School Divisions when employing educational assistants.⁴

³ SIAST Program Calendar. Community/Human Services Programs, page 38.

⁴ Children’s Services Policy Framework. Saskatchewan Learning, 2002. page V.6.1iii

Summary of the Discussion

- A great many teachers don't know the wealth of knowledge and the capacity of E.A.s to support the education of students with disabilities.
- The E.A could be taking on a larger role in supporting the education of all students in the classroom.
- Need to enhance the coordination of pre-service training with other programs, educational institutions, professional organizations and department of learning
- The standardized training and certification content needs to include but not be limited to;
 - * understanding the role of the E.A. in supporting the student's learning needs and resources within the context of an inclusive classroom and school environment (not from a medical model perspective or cause).
 - * styles of learning
 - * how to reinforce learning (e.g. cooperative learning)
 - * how to support self-determination by the student
 - * team work with teachers, parents, and the community supports
 - * communication
 - * basic personal care
 - * cultural awareness

Professional Development

A. Teachers

Background:

The Professional Development Unit (PDU) of The Saskatchewan Teacher's Federation (STF) provides in-service education to teachers in addition to resource materials (e.g. So You Have a Special Student... Teacher Supports Found Here! & Diversity in the Classroom Series Documents)⁵

The Special Education Unit of The Department of Learning offers in-service support to teachers through ACCESS (assistance, collaboration, consultation, support services). ACCESS is made up of a team of

⁵ www.stf.sk.ca/prof_growth/spdu/index.htm

consultants that provide professional development and individual consultation for teachers of students with low incidence disabilities.⁶ The Saskatchewan Educational Leadership Unit (SELU), Department of Educational Administration designs and delivers professional development training for teachers and administrators.

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The Saskatchewan Association for Community Living (SACL) offers resources, training and supports to educators, support personnel and administrators throughout the province. The John Dolan Resource Centre houses an extensive print and audio-visual collections that is utilized regularly by elementary and secondary educators as well as teachers and E.A.s in-training. SACL also distributes publications specific to inclusive education such as *“School to Life Transition Handbook: Five Steps to Successful Planning (1999)”* and *“Parent’s Guide to Inclusive Education (2003)”*. These publications are free to parents and can be purchased for a minimal cost to others. Examples of presentations and training delivered by the SACL include; Successful Inclusive Schools, Transitions, Employment Opportunities, Supportive Decision Making, Gentle Teaching, Multi-Level Instruction (planned for Fall 2004) and Alternative Communication Strategies (being discussed with Sask Learning and a School Division). In its role as an advocacy organization, SACL has also recently partnered with a School Division to design a Protocol for Advocacy.

Summary of the Discussion

- There are limited professional days allocated to teachers and educational assistants.
- Teachers are hungry for more information to do better by their students.
- There is a need find answers to such questions as student outcomes related to educational assistant proximity to a student.
- Challenges facing School Boards include time and resources for in-service training for their staff. For example, the allotted funding of 15 days of training is for curriculum development and implementation as well as inclusive education.

⁶ www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/k/pecs/se/

- The culture of education is changing to one of “a learning community”. Educators are no longer isolating themselves within their own classrooms, rather reaching out and sharing their best practices with their peers.
- Teachers, educational assistants and parents require the opportunity to train together, while learning how to work with students as a team.
- More targeted, specific, accredited training on inclusion is needed.
- Effective practices require supportive resources.

B. Educational Assistant

Background

The Para Educators Network of Saskatchewan promotes professional Development opportunities for its members (e.g. a code of ethics, organizational dialogue with other educational stakeholders, an annual conference).

The Saskatchewan Educational Leadership Unit (SELU), Department of Educational Administration also designs and delivers professional development training for educational assistants (e.g. The Educational Assistants In-service Workshop Series. It consists of 5 modules delivered through five one-day workshops.)

Please refer to the supports and services offered by the SACL as discussed under Professional Development for Teachers, the Background section.

Summary of the Discussion:

- The educational assistants often look to on-the-job training to prepare them to work with specific students.
 - They would like to further their learning regarding the specific needs of their students
 - Opportunities for E.A.s and teachers to learn together is needed.
- There is a need for additional funding for on-going professional development (PD) opportunities at the school, division and regional basis.

What do School Leaders need to ensure all schools succeed with the inclusion of students with disabilities?

1. Have a clear understanding and commitment to inclusive education.
2. Create and maintain support for a successful inclusive school environment.
3. Provide resources for ongoing in-service training for all staff in the school to ensure everyone understands and is committed to valuing and welcoming all students.
4. Assess the needs of the school within the context of its community.
5. Invite the community to participate in the success of inclusive education.
6. Enhance foundational services, especially in rural Saskatchewan.
7. Know what resources are needed to support their students in inclusive environments (e.g. physical & curriculum adaptations, instructional opportunities, transition planning, etc.) and work to provide those supports.
8. Provide in-service for all school staff to ensure schools are a safe place for all students (e.g. positive behavioral programming.)
9. Inform all parents on how the school promotes & maintains respect for & the safety of all of its students.
10. Designate funding for planning and in-service for their teaching and support staff (e.g. use of teacher substitutes.)
11. Utilize successful teachers as classroom mentors.
12. Create a collaborative manual for teachers to use in their classroom.
13. Designate funding for special education teachers to support the assessment and education of students with disabilities and their support for classroom teachers and educational assistants.
14. Build systemic support for critical analysis of the benchmarks of successful inclusion
15. Continually examine established and new best practices for inclusion (e.g. the supportive role of the E.A., peer involvement, team teaching, parent involvement, cooperative learning, adaptive planning, co-teaching, collaborative team work, educators and students modeling behavior that reflects best practices for inclusion, etc.).
16. Recognize and showcase excellence and innovation to promote inclusion.

What do Teachers need to make inclusion successful for their students?

1. Sound knowledge of a successful inclusive school environment.
2. A clear understanding of policies of School Division and Dept. of Learning.
3. A clear understanding of the culture of the school and school community.
4. A clear understanding of, a commitment to and the skills & knowledge to seek support in collaborative team building and maintenance with educational support personnel, parents and community support personnel.
5. A clear understanding of and skills to practice authentic assessment of students.
6. A clear understanding of and skills to practice differentiated instruction & curriculum.
7. A clear understanding of and skills to put into practice recommendations from occupational & physical therapy (e.g. sensory integration).
8. Opportunities to share practical problem solving & planning with peers.
9. A clear understanding and opportunity to practice pre-referral strategies:
 - * Problem solving
 - * Shared planning
 - * Critical thinking
10. Include Parents as partners in the personal program planning process.
11. Include Educational Assistants in the personal program planning process.
12. Be clear on the role and function of the Educational Assistant.
13. Include community as team members (government and non-government agencies & organizations serving students and families in their community/region/province)
14. Know how to seek out parental support.
15. Know how to seek out the support of mentor teachers.
16. Know how to seek out community supports for the student, classroom and school.

What do Educational Assistants need to make inclusion successful for their students?

1. To continue to seek support for the standardization of training and professional development opportunities.
2. Seek out mentoring support from their colleagues within their school division and through their Association.
3. Dialogue with and participate in training offered by organizations that support students with intellectual disabilities and their families.
4. Create strategies for open and on-going communication with educational colleagues and especially with parents.