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CURRENT REFORMS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION: DELUSION OR SOLUTION?

At the most general level, special education can be defined as "instruction that is specially designed to meet the unique needs of children and youth who are exceptional" (Winzer, 2002, p. 4). Founded on the proposition that all children and youth can reach their full potential given opportunity, effective teaching, and proper resources, the overarching aim of special education is to serve students who have differences that substantially influence the way they learn, respond, or behave.

Contemporary special education draws on a long and honourable pedigree (see Winzer, 1993). At the outset, those served conformed with the normative categories of deaf, blind, and mentally retarded. In its 200 year expansion, many more groups were identified and included within the special education experience, particularly those with mild problems in learning and behaviour, generally referred to as mild intellectual disabilities, learning disabilities, and behavioural disorders. Today, new categories such as Asperger's syndrome, Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) are gaining much currency.

Traditionally, students with special needs have been served in separate facilities that include special classrooms, special schools, and residential schools. Major challenges to such separate school addresses emerged in the 1970s. The reform movement in special education, first referred to as mainstreaming, is today generally encompassed under the terms *inclusion, inclusive schooling, inclusive education* or, occasionally, *progressive inclusion.*

In its philosophical and ideological guise, inclusion rests on very specific conceptions of social justice, civil rights, and equity. Most parents, teachers, and policy makers respond positively to the appeal of social benefits for children, the fundamental issue of human rights, and the veracity of the inclusive movement's ideological base. However, inclusion is better accepted in the concept than in the practice; when inclusive schooling is operationalised as school restructuring and a mandate to include students with special needs into general classrooms, contradictory and controversial responses are heard. Indeed, when inclusion is mentioned, few topics elicit such a broad range of emotions and opinions and few issues have received the attention and generated such a polarisation of perspectives among general and special educators, parents, policy makers, and other stake holders.

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Nevertheless, the concepts have piqued the interest of educators around the world and inclusive schooling today is a global agenda (Pijl, Meijer, & Hegarty, 1997). But it is not surprising that, as different nations seek the best methods to ensure rights to students who are exceptional, important sociopolitical and economic idiosyncrasies in the various national milieus in which special education is practiced have lead to the emergence of quite different models and different styles of organisation, governance, and financing (see Winzer & Mazurek, 2004). For example, in the United States almost 96 percent of students with disabilities are served in regular school buildings (Olson, 2004) although the degree to which such students are educated in general classrooms varies greatly across states and districts. Each Australian state approaches inclusion differently. Similarly in Canada, where rapidly changing provincial and territorial legislation and policy promotes inclusive education but the implementation of inclusionary practices varies widely from province to province and even among neighbouring school boards (Winzer, Altieri, Jacobs, & Mellor, 2003).

At the same time, there are many aspects of the inclusionary debate that move beyond national boundaries, that are not confined to countries with poorly developed educational systems, and that strike at the heart of the inclusive ideology. This chapter addresses some of these encompassing issues. The analysis presented is neither a celebration or a critique of current efforts to redress the historical limitations to equity for students with disabilities through the mechanisms of inclusive schooling, nor is it a condemnation of the schools' attempts to implement inclusion. Rather, based on the premise that it is essential to attend to the matter of how ideas are generated and related to educational practices, the aim is to examine both the meaning and the means of inclusion and, as the chapter reflects on the philosophical and pragmatic bases, highlight the gap between rhetoric and practice.

Note that in such a short chapter only two specific salient aspects are addressed. We situate the discussions in the contexts of teacher attitudes and the research base, but must ignore criteria such as resources and finances, teacher training, collaboration, and instructional strategies.

1. INCLUSIVE SCHOOLING FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

In many countries around the world, the 1980s witnessed an unrelenting assault upon the content, processes, and results of schooling that elevated school reform to a major movement. Reform, restructure, and reinvent became the rallying cries of the reform movement in general education and the literature was replete with a myriad of initiatives to change the structure and culture of schools.

Two main threads could be discerned woven into the fabric of the multiple reforms proposed. One thread sought to restore educational productivity, develop world class standards, and increased interest in the measurement of school outcomes using measurable indicators from large-scale assessments as an index of programs. It stressed improving educational outcomes for all students through greater accountability from schools and teachers; advanced academic achievement,

particularly in science and mathematics; enhanced literacy skills; and a decrease in dropout rates.

A quite separate reform strand set out to deal with new social demands on education. Reformers rejected reproductive notions of schooling whereby structural processes create inequity. Instead, they called for reconstruction of the entire education system as the solution to preparing at-risk, culturally and linguistically diverse, and other children for a global and technological society. They sought to create socially just and democratic communities by changing schools to co-ordinate and bridge programs and services so as to transform schools to places where all students belong and learn together. Equity for disadvantaged students, minority children, students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and students with disabilities meant that all should be educated together in general classrooms. In turn, teachers are called upon to nurture the affective and academic needs of all children, and the diverse needs of all children are accommodated to the maximum extent possible within the general education curriculum. The term that emerged to describe educational systems where equity was in place for all students was *inclusion* or *inclusive schooling* (see Dei, James, James-Wilson, Karumanchery, & Zine, 2000).

This school reform movement began with its focus entirely on general education practices and outcomes. Yet, in placing with new social demands on education, the reforming zeal did not pass special education by. On the contrary. By the early-1980s, it was accepted that special education was in desperate straits, tottering on the brink of chaos and failure, and in need of fundamental change. Critics nurtured a climate of skepticism and enumerated a litany of problems; rhetoric called for special education to “break the mold,” for “revolution,” a “paradigm shift,” for “fundamental reconceptualisation,” and “radical restructuring” (Kauffman, 1993, p. 10). To accommodate radical change, many educators and researchers co-opted the rhetoric of general school reform.

Ensuing discussions of inclusive schooling first appeared in the special education literature in the mid-1980s. Advocacy was rooted in a number of interrelated principles, the chief being a very specific conception of social justice and equity, bolstered by notions of civil rights and individual rights, and articulated from a moral stance. Thus, in its ideological guise, inclusion reflects recent large-scale political and social changes in attitudes toward disenfranchised and oppressed groups. The basic assumptions that undergird inclusion are fundamentally different from traditional conceptions of disablement and imply a conceptual shift that involves the way in which people with disabilities and their place in society are seen and how educational rights are provided. Ultimately, as Len Barton (1999) observes, inclusion "is about the transformation of a society and its formal institutional arrangements, such as education. This means changes in the values, priorities and policies that support and perpetuate practices of exclusion and discrimination," (p. 58).

Ideological principles that challenged exclusion immediately mutated into operational dilemmas. These were most cogently encapsulated in a student's school address, often referred to as “the least restrictive environment.” As advocates forefronted inclusion, they challenged policies formulated on the basis of difference

which excluded people with disabilities from complete participation in society and which streamed some students into the special education system for the majority of their educational experiences. Promoters of inclusion held that students' educational experiences should promote membership in a heterogeneous group that shares primary bonds – being children and learning together – rather than being relegated to membership in a group that has a disability classification as its common denominator.

It is in this sense that inclusion at the level of realisation is not a minor reform or mere tinkering to improve basic educational structures. Rather, it is a fundamental reform that aims to transform and alter permanently the structure and organisation of schooling. Inclusive schooling attempts to entrench the assumption that a common education for almost all children is possible. It means that children who used to be removed from the general education classroom for part or most of the school day to receive special education services must now be full-time participants and learners in the general education classroom. Such school restructuring implies basic changes in the sense of who will be responsible for and be able to instruct children with disabilities; it is a fundamental shift in who does what, to whom it is done, where it is done, and how resources support what is done.

From the outset, the concepts of inclusive schooling were met with welcome by some groups, with alarm by others. Certainly, the broad ideological principles were generally embraced unequivocally, as few wished a return to pre-1980s special education when separate special programming was the watchword. Nevertheless, in the process of turning theory into practice, the concrete manifestations of inclusion divided both special and general educators into two groups and spawned troubling debates on the primary mission of schools.

One stance is held by those referred to as *full inclusionists*, who believe in "serving students with a full range of abilities and disabilities in the general education classroom, with appropriate in-class support" (Roach, 1995, p. 295). Under this model, the boundaries between special education and general education teachers and practices are significantly de-emphasised, if not dissolved altogether, so as to create fully inclusive and equitable learning environments for all students. The type and degree of disability is not germane — all students belong in general classroom settings.

Countering the view that all students, regardless of type and depth of disability, can be served in general classrooms, are *partial inclusionists* who hold that students should be placed in general settings where appropriate. They promote a full continuum of educational services which includes general classrooms, resource rooms, special classes, and special schools, all viewed as necessary to meet the needs of all students effectively. With a full continuum of services, educators base their decision on whether to place a student in an inclusive classroom or alternative setting on student outcomes. The focus is on selecting a setting in which the child can succeed and will be prepared to become a productive and active citizen.

2. CURRENT STATUS OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The inclusion of students with special needs into general educational environments has been a major feature of the educational map for almost twenty years. But, while the philosophy underlying inclusive schooling has moved from idea, to conviction, to dominant ideology in special education, shifting propositions and continually moving parameters characterise the implementation process. Recently, pragmatic and cautious voices have become more assertive in critiquing the liberal trappings and emancipatory dialogue of the full inclusionsts, and dismissing full inclusion as a utopian and impractical ideal.

A matrix of reasons underlie the flux seen in inclusionary efforts. First, from a research perspective, definitive answers on many aspects of the enterprise remain elusive. In spite of the fact that inclusion has been the target of many educational initiatives, and the subject of a plethora of educational studies, research has not yet identified the combination of theories, approaches, and activities that result in powerful outcomes for students and their teachers. Overviews, reviews, and meta-analyses "fail to provide clear evidence for the benefits of inclusion" (Lindsay, 2003, p. 6).

Second, school systems appear more prepared to implement the form of inclusion, but are less inclined to deal with the substance of it. For example, research in the United States and Canada finds that although inclusion for students with special needs entails a revisualisation of the organisational structures of schools on a grade scale, in general reform efforts have failed to have a great impact on traditional school structures. In the US, while initial reforms in special education have produced changes to physical access of buildings and classroom, there has been little change in curriculum or instruction practices to accommodate for cognitive access (Little & Houston, 2003). From Canada, Lupart (1999) observes that “the school structures and school support systems of most schools in Canada are hopelessly ill equipped to achieve the educational goal of fostering continuous progress and appropriate educational services for all students” (p. 220).

Finally, and very significantly, from the classroom perspective we learn that teachers’ experiences serve to deflate the alluring claims about the ease with which children can be integrated. Indeed, a growing body of research suggests that both general and special education practitioners are struggling in their efforts to understand and adopt practices that enable students with disabilities to be meaningfully involved in broad-based reform (Purnell & Claycomb, 2001).

This is not to suggest that the quest for inclusive education has been abandoned. Quite the contrary. The ideas and concepts of inclusive education remain high on the agenda in many countries. However, what these findings do suggest is that inclusion as an educational reform must be approached systematically, with careful regard of the capacity of individual systems to accommodate inclusionary mandates, with a clear appreciation of the centrality of teachers in the reform process, and it must be based on a body of empirical data.

These criteria lead inevitably to a discussion of three areas — the status of inclusive education in international contexts, the role of teachers in the process, and the emerging data base. The former area has been addressed elsewhere (see Winzer

& Mazurek, 2004). The following discussion focuses on teachers' roles examined through the filter of teachers' attitudes, and then turns to the extant empirical data on the efficacy of full inclusion.

3. WHAT TEACHERS SAY

Despite continuing controversy and multiple discourses, students with a range of disability labels and needs are being included into general education classrooms in more varied ways and in greater numbers than ever before. Yet, as noted, support for inclusive educational placements for children with disabilities is not without controversy regarding its benefits for all children or in its acceptance by all teachers. Indeed, when implementation is considered, the movement is beset with heated debates and ideological discontinuities, and there remain varied, often contradictory, discourses.

Of the multiple strands that must be woven to ensure successful inclusion, teachers' beliefs, values, and attitudes are central. Yet a compelling body of well-designed and well-conducted research within an empirical framework demonstrates that a proportion of contemporary teachers hold negative and unsettling views and do not see inclusion as a principle that should be pursued. A matrix of covert and overt interrelated factors infuence teachers' attitudes toward the concept of inclusion and toward students with exceptionalities (see Winzer, 2004).

At the pragmatic level, there is relative consistency overall in the attitudes held by general classroom teachers toward different aspects of inclusion. Such consistency has tended to endure over forty years of empircal research and is found in many Western educational systems (see Winzer, 2004). For example, Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) examined 28 survey reports of 10,560 teachers from the United States, Canada, and Australia from 1958 to 1995. They found that a majority of teachers supported mainstreaming, and a slight majority were willing to implement it in their own classes. However, a substantial minority of teachers in the study believed that students with disabilities would be disruptive to their classes or demand too much attention. Only a minority of teachers agreed that the general classroom is the best environment for students with special needs, or that full time mainstreaming/inclusion would produce social or academic benefits relative to resource room or special class placement. To rehearse just a small amount of the research on teacher attitudes, an early Australian study (Gow, Ward, Balla, & Snow, 1988), found that neither regular or special education teachers were positive about integration, and identified inadequate staff training, lack of appropriate curricula, and inadequate support services as some of the factors working against integration at that time. More recently, Australian teachers have reaffirmed their increased difficulties, stress, and lack of support in relation to classrooms including students with disabilities (e.g., Forlin, Haltre, & Douglas, 1966; Forlin, Tait, Carroll, & Jobbing, 1999). Australian teachers find the inclusion of students with special needs to increase their workloads (Bourke & Smith, 1994; Chen & Miller, 1997) and to cause added stress (Forlin, Haltre, & Douglas, 1996; Pithers & Doden, 1998).

In the United States, Coates (1989) found that "teachers do not agree with the basic tenets [of inclusion] or with many of the underlyIng assumptions" (p. 535). In a later study of general educators (D'Alonzo, Giordano, & Vanleuven, 1999), the investigators found skepticism and mixed opinion about the potential benefits and an overwhelming expectation that problems would be inherent in a unified system of education. Teachers in studies by Hardy (2001) and Allsopp (1997) stated openly that inclusion procedures would be too costly in terms of time and effort to implement independently. In Canada, a study of 1,492 Canadian teachers found that more than two-thirds of the sample believed that inclusion is beneficial to students. However, the teachers also articulated the weaknesses in the shifting propositions, identified critical problems in implementation, and showed a persistent uneasiness about the practice (see Galt, 1997).

At the level of principle, one enduring fulcrum of negative teacher attitudes is the intersection of inclusion and disability opposed to higher standards and increased accountability, which translates into a debate on the role and purpose of education on today's society. Hudson (1998) foregrounds the dilemma succinctly, asking "Should the primary goal of public education be the integration of disabled students with the required curriculum modifications, or should educators be striving for higher and more academic performance standards and more stringent discipline policies?" (p. 254).

As teachers walk an equity/excellence tightrope, they have become mediators of contrary expectations. Daily, they address a dilemma between the prevailing philosophy and social forces of change on the one hand, and an image of teaching and traditional modes joined to increased responsibilities and accountability on the other. The roles are seemingly dichotomous — that of providing appropriate instruction and meeting accountability criteria and that of providing equitable access and providing intensive instruction.

Some teachers wish to be gatekeepers to a normal environment. They do not view classrooms as sites for cultural transformation and may hold a conception of inclusion as incompatible with the academic needs of the general student population. For example, research suggests that teachers may feel that techniques promoting inclusion success interfere with the demand for extensive coverage (Armani, Mastropieri, & Scruggs, 2001; Bulgren & Lenz, 1996; Scanlon, Deshler, & Schumaker, 1996).

Another component of teacher discomfort arises from the complex challenges of difference and commonality. General educators were told for decades that they did not know how to teach students with disabilities and many teachers remember when these students were removed to segregated classrooms. Today, a substantial number of educators are unprepared to comply with the broad array of requirements, are minimally equipped to provide for the needs of those not responding to group instruction, and do not possess the breadth of knowledge or the competencies to meet the individual needs of students with disabilities. Teacher resistance, therefore, is often couched in lack of skills, unwillingness to implement alternative instructional strategies and approaches, and concerns about workload and supports.

Teachers regard students with disabilities in the context of procedural classroom concerns and many teachers express feelings of inadequacy in dealing with some

children with special needs. Overall, teacher willingness to teach students with disabilities, consistent with their support for inclusion, appears to covary with the severity of the disability and the amount of additional teacher responsibility required (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). Generally, the more severe the disability, the more negative the attitudes teachers have toward inclusion (Wisniewski & Alper, 1994). Teachers express concern that students with disabilities, particularly severe disabilities, will adversely affect normally developing students (Bradley & Switlick, 1997).

One of the great fears of teachers is increased behaviour problems from special education students in general; particularly, there is considerable resistance among teaches to including students with behavioural disorders. Both prospective and experienced teachers report more positive attitudes toward students who learn easily and who do not inhibit learning of their peers (Wilczenski, 1992). Many general education teachers specifically disagree with the placement of students with intellectual disabilities and behavioural or emotional difficulties in the general classroom (Taylor, Richards, Goldstein, & Schilit, 1997). Indeed, teachers respond to accepting students with behavioural disorders with varying degrees of fear and skepticism (Heflin & Bullock, 1999).

Concerns about teacher skills are most acute in relation to novice teachers. Tomlinson and colleagues (1997) noted that novice teachers typically have a narrow understanding of student differences, use an apparently random selection of solutions for commonly occurring classroom problems, and apply a relatively limited range of instructional strategies with children. At the same time, many veteran teachers broadly resist pedagogical changes and mandates to differentiate curriculum and instruction for a wide range of learners (Behar & George, 1994). For example, Vaughn and colleagues (1998) found that most teachers pointed out that they chose to teach in general education or in specific content areas, not in special education.

The attitudes of teachers toward particular students seems to be more important than the general attitude toward inclusion, which makes the nature and degree of a child's disability germane to issues of placement and curriculum. Some teachers have a continuing inclination to label and pigeon-hole children; they hold to traditional views of persons with disabilities where the problem is within the child. Research shows that many educators hold negative attitudes, which create expectations of low achievement and low social status and support inappropriate behaviour of students with disabilities (see Antorak & Larrivee, 1995).

Attitudes and interactions demonstrate a "psychological state of mind" that predisposes a person to action (Wilczenski, 1992). Attitudes and pedagogy are entwined, so it follows that attitudes intrude directly into the classroom domain while attitudes and expectations are frequently barriers to equity in schools (Duke, 1997).

General educators' willingness to include students with special needs in their classes is critical to the successful implementation of inclusive educational practice. But negative attitudes isolate teachers from students with special needs. When such students are included, teachers may tend to prioritise their responsibilities as first toward normally developing students, with the enforced entry of those with special

needs seen as a burden. Children with special needs may then be locked into a mainstream education system, where they constitute a perpetual minority, which is not primarily concerned with their interests.

Not only can differing levels of responsibility be seen in the degree to which teachers resist including students with special needs into their classrooms, but also in the type and number of students teachers refer to special education and the immediacy with which teachers initiate a referral once a student's problems have become apparent (see Treder, Morse, & Ferron, 2000). As well, teachers who hold relatively negative attitudes toward inclusion use effective inclusive instructional strategies less frequently than teachers with positive attitudes (Bender, Scott, & Vail, 1995).

4. THE DATA BASE FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Education has a long history of adopting new ideologies, curricula, and teaching methods with little or no empirical evidence of effectiveness. In special education, public policy changes clearly have always been driven by beliefs regarding what is considered best for persons with disabilities, not by scientific data (Bryan, 1999).

The advocacy for full inclusion began with a priori moral and desirable premises (ending discrimination and segregation) but moved from there to illogical conclusions grounded in the postmodernist stance that eschew hard boundaries between belief and evidence. Advocates adhered to the notions that logical enquiry is just a matter of social practice and that disability is socially constructed. While such a stance produced boundless propositions, images, key words, phrases, and metaphors, it also reduced theories to assertions, sloganised the language, and greatly simplified the paradigms.

Full inclusionists seized the moral ground and forwarded rationales, replete with slogans, mottos, and calls to arms, which were essentially value oriented, philosophical, and conceptual. Scientific evidence was displaced by subjective interests and perspectives. Advocates found challenges to be unnecessary distractions and often rejected the need to empirically test efficacy, arguing that the weight of ethical arguments outbalanced the necessity for data. Because the issue of what constitutes the best education could only be answered by moral inquiry, questions of location and equal rights were elevated above scientific authority. Inclusion was not a matter for scientific study, but should be promoted on the basis of moral and ethical considerations (see e.g., Biklen, 1985; Lipsky & Gartner, 1998). Sasso (2001) observes that the overriding common purpose of the postmodernist advocates was to “dismantle special education at any cost, to undermine the epistemic authority of a science of disability, and to valorise ‘ways of knowing’ incompatible with it” (p. 185).

Postmodernist throught, as interpreted by promoters of inclusive education, is currently being scrutinised, challeged, and deconstructed (e.g., Mostert, Kauffman, & Kavale, 2003; Sasso, 2001). Many current writers decry the contention that the new paradigm has outdated the scientific study of education as we have known it. They argue instead that reform initiatives demand empirical analysis of policy

change; that efforts to change schools, to be effective, must be based on knowledge generated by research rather than unsubstantiated beliefs or feelings; and that doubts about inclusion will be removed in direct proportion to demonstrations that inclusion can work.

Pursuing this thought, it would be useful when arguing the case for inclusion to be able to cite research in its favour. Yet public policy has exceeded, but not expanded, our knowledge base and there is an alarming absence of empirical evidence (see Fieler & Gibson, 1999). Surveys of the school domain in inclusion are being mapped but remain generally dim and ill-defined. The current empirical research is modest in terms of the effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) of any type of inclusive model; the experiences of children with special needs in general classrooms; or the combination of theories, approaches, and activities that result in powerful outcomes for students and their teachers. There is scant research on how teachers develop the competences that enable them to effectively teach diverse students in the general classroom. Specifics about how to instruct students with special needs in general settings are scarce, and few factors can be formatted as guaranteed improvement packages. Direct comparisons between special classes and inclusive classes are rare, the data show a range of practices, and so far there are no comprehensive studies available on students' academic gains, graduation rates, preparation for post-secondary schooling or work, or involvement in community living.

Furthermore, research findings that are beginning to emerge are not encouraging. Despite the increasing frequency of inclusive placements, positive outcomes for students with disabilities have not been consistently associated with inclusive reforms. Outcomes appear to be the most problematic for students with mild disabilities (Cook, Semmel, & Gerber, 1999). For example, one recent study found that when students with disabilities aged 6 to 12 are in a regular classroom for language arts instruction, teachers report that they are less likely than other students to participate in many class activities (US Department of Education, 2000-01).

Empirical research in the field so far fails to support the efficacy of inclusion for students with learning disabilities (see Heflin & Bullock, 1999). One study of students with learning disabilities (Zigmond, Jenkins, Fuchs, Deno, Fuchs, Baker, Jenkins, & Cauthino, 1995) failed to find academic benefits for students; rather, it found achievement outcomes to be "neither desirable nor acceptable" (p. 539). A later study (Klinger, Vaughn, Hughes, Schumm, & Elrbaum, 1998) found that students with learning disabilities in general classrooms made less than appropriate academic gains, even with atypically high levels of support.

To some, the solutions to poor academic outcomes are clear. They contend that special classes and resource rooms contribute more to the academic achievement of some types of students with special needs, especially those who are learning disabled or emotionally disturbed, than do general classrooms (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1995; Klinger, et al., 1998; Zigmond et al., 1995). Such an argument equates with selective and partial inclusion, the retention of a continuum of educational services, and well-trained special educators.

5. DISCUSSION

Some people speak of inclusion as if it is a universally accepted movement in special education. Certainly, in many countries, the rate of inclusion has increased consistently and substantially in the past decade, additional themes are taking their flavour from the inclusive paradigm, and previously unconvinced groups are sharing its meaning. Yet, despite the broad sweeps provided by policy statements of international organisations, the tireless presentation of the political language of inclusive schooling, and a well accepted conceptual and philosophical base, the meanings of inclusive schooling for children and youth with disabilities are not uniformly embraced. The field of social antagonisms has two sets of players. On the one side are those who hold that the general classroom is apt for all students. On the other are those who argue for selective inclusion founded on the particular needs of an individual student. Whatever the stance regarding operation, most people agree with the ideological underpinnings of the reform movement in special education. Indeed, inclusion suits the tenor of the times; its popularity rests on its concordance with wider social notions. As Thomas (1997) observes, it “chimes with the philosophy of a liberal political system and pluralistic culture” (p. 106).

But, it is not sufficient that inclusion be promoted only by a democratic political process. Implementation must be complemented at the professional level through the demonstration of democratic and inclusive procedures. Yet, school restructuring is fraught with obstacles. For one thing, enthusiasm for inclusion seems to increase with the distance from general classroom practice (Garvar-Pinhas & Pedhazar-Schmelkin, 1989; Ward, Center, & Bochner, 1994). Among teachers, the practice of inclusion is not entirely uncontested and concerns over practical implications on a wide scale have resulted in much divisiveness. Although enthusiasts have advocated for radical changes in teacher responsibility, they have not shown that general educators can actually support these changes or are willing to make them.

Teachers may ponder the ethical question of equal access, but they consider it in the frame of their own classrooms. Their perspectives are grounded in a social context forged within the parameters of classroom walls. For some teachers, inclusive schooling situates them in an uneasy space between inclusionists' visions of school reform and the lived world of the classrooms they experience daily. They may be sympathetic to the cultural, social, and political issues that surround the inclusive education debate, but find inclusion's simple statement of intent alien to their professional knowledge of the complexities of school life. As educators negotiate the demands for equity on the one hand, and excellence on the other, the question becomes whether teachers can hold meritocratic assumptions about schooling as well as ameliorative perspectives about disability, and can they do so in an era of expanding responsibilites and increasing calls for accountability.

Inclusion complicates the task of reaching common educational goals for all learners. Students with special needs often cannot meet the demands of the general curriculum. Achievement in many academic domains is problematic for learners with mild disabilities, and the academic competencies of general education are not within the purview of children with severe and profound disabilitiers. Even the most equity-minded teachers may contend that teaching that does not produce learning is

not education, mere attendance at school is not education, and a primary measure of effectiveness for instructional programs is students' academic achievement.

While negative teacher attitudes and teacher resistance form one barrier to inclusive practices, the lack of empirical data presents a second tension. The currency of special education is research findings and theory generation. Accordingly, with only a precarious link between research studies and best practice, many of the disagreements about the progress of inclusion hinge on the lack of empirical evidence.

Too often, those who advocate inclusion do not underpin their arguments with research: they would have us do what is morally right rather than what is empirically sustainable. To negotiate the maze created by postmodern deconstructivism, an empirical base is critical. Rather than philosophical arguments, what is required is scientific evidence that is data-based, replicated over time, and revolves around facts rather than ideologies.

6. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The imperative that school systems should provide for students with a range of needs can be supported from a relatively coherent set of basic assumptions. Therefore, as a social and educational principle, inclusion can be advocated unequivocally. However, when implementation is considered, the movement toward inclusion is not as straightforward as the powerful rhetoric in the literature suggests, They remain varied, often contradictory, discourses and a lack of unequivocal empirical support.

In the past decade, the emancipatory promises of full inclusion have come under heavy attack. The rhetoric of apologists who are uncompromisingly flattering in discussing the momentum of the inclusive movement is being challenged, deconstructed, and replaced with more cautious voices. These point out that, disquieting as the thought may be to promoters of full inclusion, it may actually be impossible to realise fully their ideals given the constraints and pressures under which teachers are working. Additionally, not all schools are amenable to a single solution; indiscriminate educational reform is tantamount to begging for failure.

Most importantly and tragically, the crack between policy and practice can swallow children until it is recognised that not every classroom is necessarily an effective learning environment for students with disabilities. Indeed, in many areas, inclusion is now regarded as an organisational rather than an educational intervention: it is not a place where students with disabilities receive services but a way to deliver services effectively. Hence, the opportunities made available by the setting, not the setting itself, become important. The critical issue is not where children sit; rather, the major placement objective is where students can receive the most effective education.

It is not possible to predict the future course of the inclusionary movement. Not only is the script for educational reform constantly being revised, but current research provides only a crude indication of the success or appropriateness of inclusion. At this point, the extant research literature cannot tell us whether inclusion

is effective or ineffective. The solution to such uncertainty cannot be simply to dismiss the challenge to conduct proper and comprehensive empirical research into the efficacy of full inclusion. Quite the opposite. Inclusionists argue for their vision and practices from a moral/ethical basis. In consequence, they have a further moral and ethical responsibility — to empirically demonstrate that the children whose needs they claim to be meeting are in fact having their needs met.

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