

Introduction To The Special Issue - What Is Inclusive Education In Canada?

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The idea for this special issue germinated from a meeting held before the May 2010 Canadian Society for the Study of Education Conference in Fredericton. At that time a number of researchers across Canada interested in the area of educating students with exceptionalities in the regular classroom gathered to discuss the possibility of creating a Canadian voice for inclusive education. While all Canadian educational jurisdictions recognize the critical contributions of classrooms to an inclusive society, each province and territory has evolved an approach to inclusive education that responds to its particular needs. As a result, there remains considerable variation across jurisdictions and limited opportunities for provinces and territories to learn from each other. Students with learning exceptionalities represent 9-15% of the Canadian school-aged population (Canadian Council on Learning [CCL], 2009; Timmons, 2006). Valle and Connor (2011) note that it is still a popular belief of educators that students are more or less deserving of an education based on “ability” yet if we substituted other forms of diversity, it would be unimaginable (e.g., First Nations students, poor students, or girls). As researchers and educators, our collective hope is to promote pedagogies that recognize and interrupt ableistic teaching practices in order to support, impact, and foster such things as genuine reciprocity between students labeled with and without exceptionalities. The purpose of this special issue was to collect some of the current literature on the topic of inclusion in Canada, including learning stages from K-post-secondary. We attempted to balance diverse methodologies and topics to enable the reader to get a full snapshot of Canadian research in this field today. The first sets of papers investigate inclusive education in the experiences of students, teachers, and families in K-12 classrooms. They are presented in order of age ranges in the study.

Michelle Villeneuve and her colleagues present research emerging from their partnership between health and education investigating transitions in to elementary school in Ontario, Quebec and Nova Scotia. This paper focuses on the qualitative data of 3 cases in Ontario, but provides key issues in how parents perceive the collaboration in that extremely important process. It is essential that our students with exceptionalities have a smooth transition in to the school system and the collaboration between home and school is essential. Villeneuve et al provide some insights into outcomes and how we can create more supportive ties.

Martine Pellerin presents a 2-year collaborative action research project that investigated the use of digital technologies to support inclusive practices in Early French Immersion (EFI) classrooms. This paper is based on research **with** the teachers in the classrooms. Such research is fundamental in our understanding of theory to practice. In an applied field such as education, it is extremely important to work with those who will implement our findings.

A major area of concern for our education system is the mental health of our students. We know that being marginalized can occur because of a mental health issue and this can exacerbate such issues. Recent surveys indicate as many as 20 per cent of children aged four to 17 years old have clinically important disorders at any given time and yet only 5% of those children will get the clinical support that they require (Manion, Ferguson, & Short, in press). This leaves many children who receive support only from the school system. While we do not advocate teachers being clinicians, they do need to understand how their actions influence the lives of their students. *Jennifer Dods'* paper provides the adolescent student voice in this area.

Sheila M. Bennett and Tiffany Gallagher bring together many voices in their project on school and workplace experiences of students with intellectual disabilities. By examining questions related to inclusion in school and the workplace from the perspectives all of all involved, they provide a much fuller picture of similarities and differences in the attitudes of the groups.

CJ Dalton provides insight into lived experiences of student with mild or moderate hearing loss throughout their educational experience. As we have grown in our field of inclusive education, we understand the need to hear diverse voices, especially those who are living with exceptionalities. By better understanding better their experiences, we can ask more meaningful research questions that will support the students for whom we ask the questions.

Universal Design for Learning is a strategy for including students in the learning environment of their school. While the Center for Applied Special Technology (2008) presents a version of UDL that focuses on the instructional practices, the paper by *Jennifer Katz* presents her three block model of social emotional learning, instructional practices, and systemic structures. Her paper is one of a series of research projects that she has undertaken to illustrate the effectiveness of the use of this model in K-12 classrooms and its effects on the academic and social engagement of students.

The next set of papers investigates research in inclusive education from a systems level with respect to policy and professional development issues.

Donna McGhie-Richmond and her colleagues present a truly collaborative project between a school district and university researchers. The group has worked together over the years to document the inclusive process and practice in the school district. Given the importance of the teacher for the success of inclusive classrooms, it is crucial to understand their perspectives and how they influence the process and implementation of the education of students with exceptionalities in the regular classroom. This multi method research provides some interesting insights especially in terms of differences that exist between secondary and elementary classroom educators.

Building on the theme of teacher support, *Isabel Killoran and her colleagues* provide a perspective on the professional development of teachers and how we can use systemic methods for ensuring that we are creating opportunities for our teachers to be the best educators possible in the inclusive classroom. Their study brought together people who are key in the area of teacher education to discuss the gaps in knowledge and skill and to provide strategies to bridge those gaps.

Kathy Howery and colleagues bring the bigger picture for school district change by documenting the process followed for using a pyramid of supports model to reach all students. This method is truly representative of inclusive education as we focus on the learning of all students and not necessarily the labels associated with learning. Policy implantation is an area that definitely needs focus in the field of inclusive education and Howery et al provide some insights into this process.

As indicated in the call for proposals, the term inclusion is not defined well in the literature and depending on what literature one reads, it is used to represent very different perspectives. The final paper in this special edition is written by *Christopher DeLuca* who grapples with this issue in his paper on an interdisciplinary framework. He presents a framework that is not rooted in any one marginalized group. This may be very useful as we move forward in our quest to ensure that all of our students are valued and feel that there is a place for them in school and therefore, society as a whole.

References

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