MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF INTEGRATING STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS: UNDERSTANDING, BUILDING AND IMPLEMENTING INTEGRATION AS INCLUSION

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A major trend in North American education is the integration of students with special needs. Current research indicates the most effective approach to integration involves educators embracing student diversity as an expected and valued characteristic. This paper defines integration as inclusion. Integration as inclusion is built upon the belief that every child is unique, every child is valued and every child can learn. The specific responsibilities and required actions are outlined for all participants who share responsibility for meeting the unique and diverse needs of all students in the school body. Two methods for altering the educational programmes of students with special needs are presented. One student's story of actualizing integration as inclusion is described.

Integration as Inclusion: A Concept of the 90's

Integration is upon us; it is a concept challenging educators in the 90's. Rapid changes in Canadian society and culture are resulting in students arriving at school with very different needs than in prior decades. Schools are required to serve a broad student population with diverse needs. The academic goals and outcomes previously seen as the goals of education are no longer the only measures of student success. Along with academic goals, attention is being directed toward the social/emotional and career development of students. The goals of education are designed to provide the opportunity for each student to develop attitudes, skills and behaviours relevant in adult living. The underlying beliefs which support the implementation of these educational goals are that every child is unique, every child is valued and every child can learn. While the educational programmes for students will vary, the learning needs of each student are acknowledged to be of equal value. If we as educators embrace the fundamental belief that every child is unique, every child is valued and every child can learn, and we act upon the belief, we create an educational environment in which integration is inclusion (Sawatsky, & Jacobsen, 1992).

The trend toward integration began with changing the placement of students with special needs from segregated settings to mainstreamed settings. The *practice* of placing students with special needs within regular education settings is often interpreted as integration. In many cases, this placement occurs without the necessary inservice and resources to provide an appropriate individual educational programme which supports the unique and diverse needs of each student. When a student with special needs is enrolled in a regular classroom setting and the teacher does not have access to inservice and education opportunities, consultative support, the allocation of time for planning and implementation of programmes and the financial foundation for resources, effective integration cannot occur. In effect, failure to provide the supports to the regular environment results in increased educational, social/emotional and physical isolation for the student with special needs.

Integration as inclusion requires that the attitudes and beliefs of the educators and the needs of the individual student appropriately guide the programming for students with special needs. Integration as inclusion means:

a) matching the identified needs of the student to a setting in which the educators have the beliefs, attitudes and skills to provide an enabling environment, and

b) providing a setting in which the educators and the students are supported by appropriate resources.

Embracing integration as inclusion involves more than the placement of students within a setting, a regular classroom. Integration requires the provision of opportunities for students with special needs to share full and equal membership in a school body in an active and meaningful way. Full and equal membership is dependent upon the entire school body, educators and students, holding the belief that each student is of equal value, that each student has an equal right to an enabling education, and that each student's needs are equally important. Full and equal membership follows from *embracing human diversity as an expected and valued characteristic* (Raynes, Snell & Sailor, 1991, p. 326).

Integration is not simply the practice of placing a student in a regular classroom setting. It is a process whereby the participants share responsibility in ongoing decisions regarding

the planning, implementation and evaluation of students' educational programmes and the various settings in which learning takes place. Integration as a process requires shareholders who believe that integration is inclusion to make it happen. In other words, it is not simply a physical setting; it is an environment which is created by the attitudes, beliefs and actions of all participants involved in the education of the student.

Building integration: An environmental attitude

Integration as inclusion occurs in an educational environment in which the contribution of all participants is essential. Educators are the builders leading to the development of the attitude of inclusion. Each educator has the power to create the environmental attitude which facilitates inclusionary education, full and equal membership for all students. An inclusionary environment incorporates everything the participants say and do which affects the growth and development of the student. Current research indicates that the most effective approach for meeting student needs is based on the collaborative efforts of all participants involved (Bauwens, & Korinek, 1993).

Integration as inclusion incorporates the concept of *shared responsibility* for all students within the school body. West, Idol and Cannon (1989) have defined shared responsibility *as allowing all parties to have equal access to information and the opportunity to participate in problem identification, discusssion, decision-making and all final outcomes*. The concept is operationalized when all educational personnel have general responsibility for the education of all students and individual educators are assigned specific responsibilities. The integration process begins with consideration of the entire student body and progresses to decision-making regarding individual students. This process allows for determining the appropriate placement in a programme designed to meet unique needs of each student.

In many discussions, the concept of shared responsibility is directed specifically at the relationship between specialists and regular teachers. In creating integration as inclusion, the need for sharing responsibility extends to include the Ministry of Education, administrators, educators, parents and peers. Each of the participants brings to the problem-solving process different perspectives and different responsibilities. As the varying perspectives are incorporated into the decision-making process, the needs of all students will be met. Table 1 identifies the participants, specific responsibilities and the required actions leading to inclusionary education.

It is by joining together in collaborative/consultative processes, that the participants can provide sustained educational opportunities which enable students with special needs to experience success and achieve the level of their potential.

Implementing integration as inclusion: The practice

There are many different tools that are required to build an educational environment in which the needs of all students are met. The unique needs of each student define which particular educational practice is appropriate and necessary to facilitate student success. No single programme or service is suitable for every student. Careful consideration of the student's specific needs and cognitive potential leads to the selection and provision of instructional methods and curriculum materials. Two methods for altering the educational programmes of students with special needs are *adaptations* and *modifications*.

Table 1
Integration as Inclusion: All Participants Share Responsibility

Participants	Specific Responsibilities	Actions Required
Provincial Ministry of Education Programme Guidelines Resources	The Mission Statement, The Mandate of Education	legitimize the movement towards integration
School Board and District Administrators on which school-based services are built	philosophical stance, policy, positions and allocation of resources the educational programmes	determine 'where' students are placed and determine 'who' provides
School-based Administrators	educational leaders who model the attitudes, beliefs and actions which support inclusion of *all* students in the school environment	clearly articulate a philosophy of inclusion; support the process of integration through participation and provision of adequate resources
Support Services Staff	Specific skills and knowledge which enhances the teachers' expertise	share in the responsibility for inclusionary education through collaboration, problem-solving, designing and implementing educational programmes
Classroom Teachers	managers of student education	model a belief in inclusion; present an educational programme for meeting unique needs; embrace student diversity
Parents co-educators	actively participate in the child's learning process and the planning and implementation of the educational programme	
Peers	'full and equal' members in the school environment	accept and respect all students; actively engage in meaningful learning opportunities
Outside Agencies	provide information about individual students	participates in collaboration with parents and school personnel

Adaptations involve adjusting the form of input or output of the student's information and knowledge. Adaptations may be defined as alterations to the instructional activities or the means by which the student acquires the information and knowledge, and the means by which the student is able to demonstrate his/her knowledge (Jacobsen & Sawatsky, 1990). For example, a student with visual impairments may require the text to be Braille or to be read aloud (input).

Another example would be a student whose motor output skills interfere with the mechanics of writing or the rate of production. This student may require that written language be recorded through dictation or through the use of a computer (output). Adaptations facilitate appropriate educational programmes for students who have the cognitive ability to comprehend the content of the curricular area.

For students with average or above average potential who have special needs that inhibit learning in a typical way, adaptations facilitate the learning of age appropriate information and knowledge. The student with special needs learns the same content information as all other learners and participates in many typical learning activities. Adaptations allow these students to be included in classroom discussions, individual and group projects and cooperative learning activities as full and equal members. Adaptations do not give the students with special needs a competitive edge, but rather they eliminate the competitive disadvantage caused by the disability (HEATH Resource Centre, 1985/1986).

Modifications may be operationalized as a significant change in content, quantity or complexity of information. The conceptual level of understanding, the vocabulary or the factual information to be acquired is less that the regular course expectations for the normal achieving students. Modifications include implementing curriculum which is less broad, more literal and concrete or presented at a pace slower than for normal achieving students (Jacobsen & Sawatsky, 1990). This kind of change is appropriate for students of lower average ability or who learn at a slow rate as a result of their disability.

Students with below average potential may also be included in classroom activities in an active and meaningful way. Educators need to recognize when a student is able to benefit from participating in classroom activities and when alternate settings are more appropriate for the individualized learning activities. For example, it may be appropriate for a student with a mental handicapping condition to participate in a theme or curricular area by collecting and sharing materials that are concrete and literal in nature. The information and knowledge learned would be tied directly to real life experience or to community involvement. The typical learners participating in the same theme or curricular area may be involved in small group cooperative learning, may listen to presentations, may write a research report or may give an oral summary.

Actualizing Integration as Inclusion: One Student's Story

Joshua is a well-adjusted twelve year old student who has been diagnosed as having cerebral palsy, moderate mental handicap, visual impairment and poor speech production. He uses a wheelchair for mobility. Joshua is becoming proficient in computer use facilitated by screen magnification for the visual impairment. Although he has difficulty with fine motor movement, he is able to access the computer with a standard keyboard. Joshua is able to speak

well enough to be understood by his teachers and his peers. He is highly motivated and thrives in the social environment of the regular classroom.

Joshua's educational programme was changed from enrollment in a district special class to enrollment in his neighbourhood school in his Grade four year. This followed a provincial and district philosophical position encouraging the integration of students with special needs into their neighbourhood school. To help prepare Joshua for integration, he made a visit to his neighbourhood school the prior year in order that he be acquainted with the physical layout, the enrolling teacher and the student support staff. In anticipation of his enrollment, the school allocated resources for teacher inservice, changes to the physical plant, and sensitivity workshops for Joshua's peers. The school-based team supported the classroom teacher in developing strategies for inclusion. The district and school-based Student Support Services Staff worked together with the classroom teacher and with Joshua's parents in planning an appropriate individual educational programme.

The process of integration with the participation of the school-based personnel, parents and district support is on-going. Over time, the teacher and students have overcome the fears and apprehensions related to the new experience of having a multiply handicapped student included in their classrooms. As the commitment to including Joshua continued, they began to value his unique contributions and to embrace his full and equal membership in their school body. The students perceive Joshua as an equal peer and accept him like every other peer.

Integration for Joshua is inclusion. A visit to the classroom during the conclusionary activity of studies on China illustrates inclusionary practice. The typical learners in the classroom were involved in studying Chinese culture. Joshua's participation in this theme study included a field trip to China town where he had opportunity along with his peers to eat Chinese cuisine. He collected concrete materials such as chopsticks, napkins, menu, and pictures for creating a simple journal report. Each item was displayed in this journal with a simple explanatory sentence. Joshua was able to describe the items and his experiences collecting the items. As an introduction for the Chinese culture class presentations, Joshua gave an oral and visual report using the journal. The activity was modified to be appropriate for Joshua's abilities and skills. However, it was honored as equal in value to the reports presented by his peers. Joshua was included in the learning activity, in the social interactions and in the recognition for achievement in an active and meaningful way.

Conclusion

The outcome of integration as inclusion means providing meaningful alternatives for student success. Inclusionary education is built upon the belief that 'every child can learn' strategies and skills which are individually suited to his/her needs. The long term effect of beliefs, attitudes and actions which are inclusionary of all students can be that individuals, the school and the larger community embrace every student as having unique strengths and needs and diversity is valued. We all share in the responsibility.

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