**Inclusion in Canada Classrooms: A Position Paper**

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EDUC 635: Educating Exceptional Students

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November 17th, 2022

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Inclusion is always a hot topic for discussion, especially in the education world. It seems as though each province has a different way of describing inclusion and many educators anecdotally report that they feel the definition gets misused or misinterpreted in educational settings and policy. Does anyone truly know what inclusion means? To further highlight the confusion of this term, this paper will be exploring several government documents and academic sources that touch on the topic of inclusion. In addition to this, it will also include a thoughtful proposal to make the term “inclusion” more inclusive.

The definition of inclusion varies across literature and the broad definition is that inclusion is feeling like one belongs and has a purpose among a community (Dali et al., 2021). While reading through different provinces’ Special Education Policy documents, one would see terms such as “equity”, “regular classroom”, “safe”, and “individualized” (BC Ministry of Education, 2016; New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2015); Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2019; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2017) as key terms often surrounding the idea of inclusion or inclusivity. These terms are used in different ways to help define inclusion, highlighting its importance to the education field; although, Ontario’s document only notes the word “inclusivity” five times within 246 pages. A similar finding among these documents is that inclusion in schools should have children placed with the same aged peers in a regular classroom but support their specific needs. Most of these provincial documents support students having individualized or small group instruction based on the child’s learning abilities however it is not always clear as to when or how. Sokal and Katz (2015) explain that inclusion is having all children participate in a typical classroom and not be separate from their peers. By just reading these statements, one would assume that if a child is in a “regular classroom”, with some individualized supports, then inclusion has been achieved. However, Whitley and Hollweck (2020) explain that regular classroom integration and inclusion are not the same thing. In an educational setting, inclusion needs to be clear, concise, and consistent. If a child is not receiving what they need to succeed, then inclusivity has been forgotten.

If Canada had a clear definition of what inclusion meant for all students, then as a country we could change the way we treat exceptional learners, as well as students of different ethnicities and cultures. Provinces should use language that implements a “child-centered” approach, making inclusion much easier to understand. As it stands right now, “inclusion” seems to be an idea floating about as a byproduct of a current educational buzzword because it does not have a clear, concise, and consistent definition. The ideas suggested under many inclusive definitions and models can no doubt be of aid to students who need it, but teachers from all across the country need to be on the same page regarding what it means, and more importantly, how to actually implement its strategies. An idea is one thing, implementation is another. Having each individual child as the central idea to learning and then creating accommodations and modifications for them specifically would be much more beneficial than just sticking them in a room and calling it “inclusive”.

Currently, teachers have many documents and policies to read and follow but somehow the special education policies seem to be pushed on the back burner and left for special education teachers to take the role of educating their colleagues. It should be mandatory for general education teachers to be knowledgeable about the topic of inclusion and understand the strategies for creating an equitable environment.

The world is constantly evolving, and education is arguably the public field that needs to always have up-to-date pedagogy and teaching practices at play to best educate our students. Post-secondary education programs need to include inclusionary practices in all aspects of their education courses to ensure student teachers are graduating with a proper understanding of the term and its benefits, but more importantly, how to implement it. This, however, comes full circle with creating a universal term across the country to provide the best education system possible for all learners. Provinces need to collaborate to improve the idea of inclusion and its proper meaning. By doing so, not only will it create a better learning environment for all learners, but it will set an example for our future generations on the proper ways to be inclusive.

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