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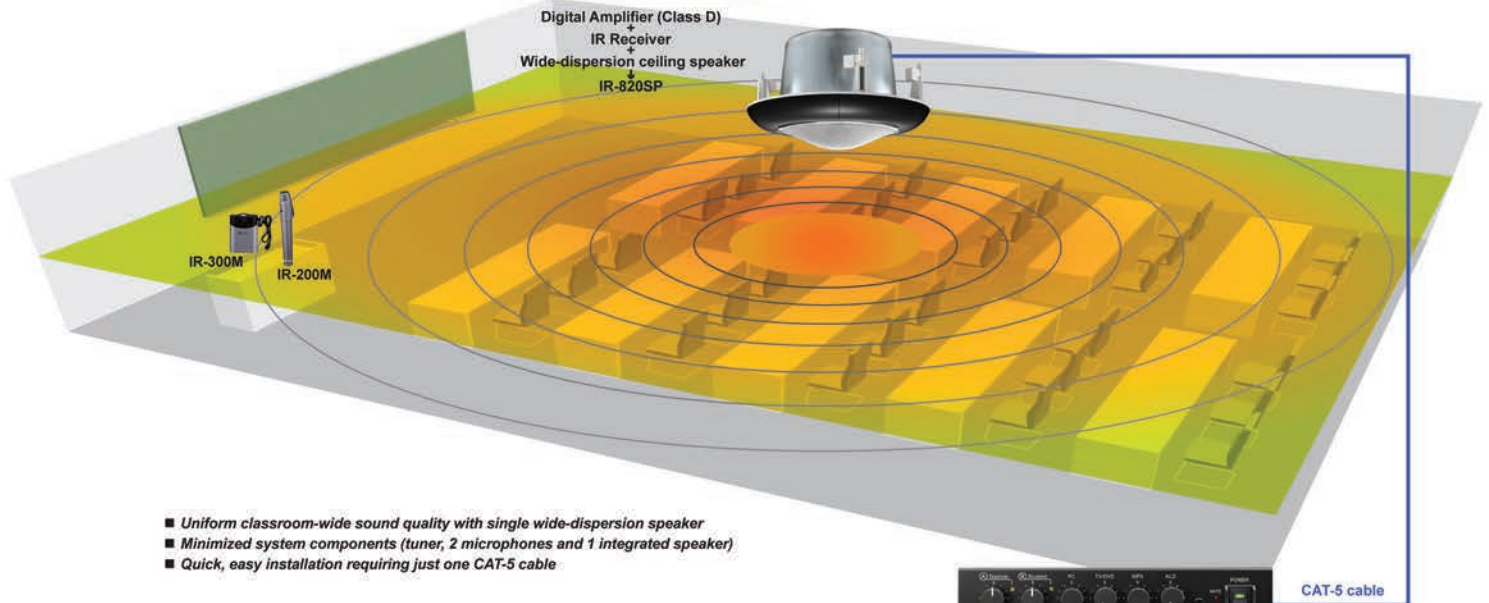


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Research + Inclusive Practices = Literacy Development  
for Boys and Girls



## Greetings From the President



Today, I had the privilege of speaking at a conference in St. John's, Newfoundland, on the issue of bullying in our schools. As I reflected on the speech and what I would say, I thought about all of the schools I have visited as the school principal of an alternate school whose role it is to support other schools in my district. Having visited and interacted with well over 50 schools and administrative teams, I spoke on the fact that the school population faces the same challenges that we see in the adult population, however, at a much more intensified level.

Schools are a reflection of the society in which we live. We face the same challenges that all of society faces, yet we deal with the most vulnerable, those with the most to lose if we make unwise decisions. The question that we have to ask is – Are we just purveyors of knowledge or are we the instrument shaping children and our society's future?

I ask educators to take part in the following exercise: Reflect on when you were a student yourselves. Relive a time and recall any subject that you loved in school, at any grade level, and remember what you were doing in that class during this very month, all those many years ago. I imagine that no one will be able, with any certainty, to state I was reviewing Robert Frost's, *'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening'*, or state that I was learning the difference between

meiosis and mitosis. You may, however, be able to tell me about the excellent teacher you had that taught you a certain subject or inspired you as a child, or about how wonderful it was to be a student in your childhood school. I maintain that school does more than pass on knowledge, we do that extremely well, but we are even better at helping shape our students, inspiring children and thereby shaping our country and the society in which they will live.

The current edition, *Inclusion*, is looking at topics that can be frustrating and challenging for all of us. As I have stated in a previous issue, I have been a principal with the Department of Justice, in Newfoundland and Labrador, and currently I am the principal of District School in St. John's, NL. District School is an alternate school and as such it might seem contradictory towards the concept of inclusion. It has always been the District School's goal to stabilize and return children back to their neighbourhood schools, quite often with support and appropriate programming, but always back into the mainstream, **if possible**.

It is both uplifting and astounding how far we have come in implementing the inclusion of all children over the mere 30 plus years that I have been involved in education. The days of segregated schools for developmentally delayed children are as abhorrent to us now as the Southern United States segregated schools were over 50 years ago. Every child has a right to be with their peers in the least restrictive environment and to have a program of studies and an educational plan that stimulates and develops them to their highest potential. Research is helping to lead the way by assisting school administrators with advocating and marshalling resources for their schools, and in allowing their schools to offer the finest level of education to every child in the school. Yet, in some of our jurisdictions we have as Robert Frost stated in his poem... "miles to go before I sleep".

In the current political climate, governmental and school board financial restraints are always obstacles that we must face and more importantly overcome. We are the voice of our schools and we need to advocate for every child regardless of cognition, exceptionality, or previous school history. Inclusion **when funded correctly**, when researched appropriately and when focused on each and every child is simply the right thing to do! Most children are best served within the mainstream. Children learn from their peers and programming that meets their needs in the mainstream. Philosophically this is where we want to be, however, there is a cost to this. Asking administrators to do the impossible without the resources that they need is neither appropriate nor fair to the child, the children that they are mainstreamed with or the school staff.

School administration teams take on many challenges and they sometimes face what seem to be insurmountable obstacles, only to find solutions to those challenges. Collectively, we have to be proud of the Canadian public education system, ranked as one of the highest in the world. However, we have to realize that inclusion at all costs is neither fair nor just! Sometimes the issues of the child have to be medically addressed before they are ready for education. In some instances we have to say that we are an educational institution not a treatment facility!

Again, I invite you to take at least 30 minutes of the day to read one article and discuss the concepts with a colleague. I am sure it will invigorate, inform and inspire you and hopefully give us some guidance and support in continuing to be school leaders.

*William J. Tucker* PRESIDENT, CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF PRINCIPALS

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# Inclusionary Practice

As I close a meeting regarding a student removed from school because of his unpredictably explosive and violent behaviour, I once again find myself pondering the complexity of educational leadership. Colleagues and I sat with the parents and the family social worker to share information and attempt to develop a plan for this child's return to school. What did we learn from one another? We discovered he does not have a family doctor making it near impossible to acquire the necessary referrals to specialists, that mental health services unsuccessfully attempted to assess the child and have yet to contact the parents for follow-up, and that additional educational resources are neither available nor suited to address his undiagnosed needs. He is in grade two, and because helping him trumps analyzing my recent Math assessment results, I will put off compiling the data to lead my next school-based professional learning day. Instead, I will compose letters to doctors and make phone calls to anyone and everyone in an attempt to solicit the help this family requires. Perhaps I will get my PD planning finished this weekend. Sound familiar? As administrators we confront these frustrating dilemmas with increasing frequency. Parents, communities and agencies look to schools for resolutions and often educators feel responsible for the deficiencies of a system that is trying to balance academic expectations with equality and social justice.

The onset of inclusionary practice is not new. The dismantle of the "special education classroom" rightfully occurred over two decades ago and the scope of inclusion grew to encompass more than just those students identified with cognitive challenge. To deem one's school inclusive, the educational leader must ensure social behaviour, learning style, gender, culture and ability are all accounted for in daily lesson planning. In addition, the school environment must allow all children to develop a sense of belonging. Most would agree that the demands on the classroom teacher are often insurmountable and the required administrative support necessary to mobilize this culture monopolizes a great portion of the administrator's working day.

Is it possible to develop an efficient and effective "one-size-fits-all approach" to inclusion? Certainly not. The employment of a common model would fail our students and the teachers who serve them. Authentic instructional approaches would diminish and lessen opportunities for the development of dynamic classrooms where student engagement is fostered. It would also eradicate the growth of data driven informed practice that individualizes education and improves student achievement. However, pedagogical theory does offer a framework that assists in the development of a strong foundation for inclusion. With the implementation of a functional model, school leaders can adapt and adopt other components that meet the specific needs of their building.

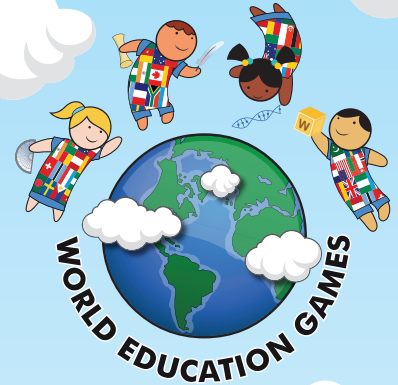
This issue of the CAP Journal is a collection of work that provides a checklist for administration. For veteran leaders it may confirm those decisions proven successful for your school. Hopefully you will find cause to celebrate how well you are serving your students. New administrators will find the articles helpful in developing a culture of inclusiveness. The readings can be a vehicle to cultivate great school-wide conversations regarding school improvement. All readers will be reminded of the importance of understanding and nurturing those relationships instrumental in maintaining a healthy work environment.

Every instructional day brings forth a sea of challenges but it is what makes us tick. As leaders we are the agents of educational reform and development. Uneventful days would leave us bored and searching for purpose. We have the opportunity to work with children and their families who challenge us to further our understanding. We must remain grateful for the privilege of working in a profession that provides a venue to perform a human service each day.

I hope the journal proves interesting and valuable to you and your staff. Enjoy!

kindest regards,  
 Tina Estabrooks EDITOR

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# Leadership & Inclusion:

## Leading Inclusive Schools and the Three Block Model of UDL

by Jennifer Katz and Brent Epp

Global research shows that inclusion is increasingly proving to be a positive experience for all students (Bru, 2009; Curcic, 2009; Kalambouka, Farrell, Dyson, & Kaplan, 2007). With research that spans three decades showing that all students should be educated together in inclusive classrooms the challenge that remains is, how? What must classroom teachers, school administrators and school division leaders do to effectively support inclusive education? Research into the influence superintendents and school principals have on inclusive schools points to the understanding that the beliefs, values and commitment of school leaders are the foundation of inclusive schools (Theoharis & Causton-Theoharis, 2008).

In Canada attending class with same age peers is now the norm for a majority of students with disabilities - with nearly 80% of children with mild-moderate disabilities attending middle-high inclusive school settings. While students with severe to very severe disabilities are more likely than those with mild to moderate disabilities to be placed in low inclusion settings, just over half of students with severe disabilities attend school in middle-high inclusive settings. (Timmons & Wagner, 2008). This trend is encouraging because inclusive classrooms have been shown to benefit all students both socially and academically (CCL, 2009; Cole, Waldron, & Majd, 2004; Crisman, 2008; Katz & Mirenda, 2002).

It is in this context educational leaders, from superintendent to classroom teachers, are in need of an approach to create the academic and social learning environments that meet the global ideal of “providing education for children, youth and adults with special educational needs within the regular education system” (UNESCO, 1994, p. viii). Academic inclusion is described as access to learning in relation to the general curriculum in interaction with typical peers, and in the general classroom, delivered by the classroom teacher (Katz, 2012a). Social inclusion recognizes the need for belonging, acceptance and recognition, and requires the opportunity for full and equal participation in the life of the school (Katz, 2012b; Koster, Nakken, Pijl, & van Houten, 2009).





There is promising interest in implementing Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approaches that bring together research on inclusive practices, classroom teaching and the systematic and structural changes required to teach the widest possible range of students (Canadian Research Centre for Inclusive Education, 2012; Katz, 2012c). The Three Block Model of Universal Design for Learning (Katz, 2012a) provides this broad foundation for inclusive education. In the past four years, research in classrooms implementing this approach has shown that the Three Block Model of UDL has had significant, positive impacts on students' self-concept, respect for diverse others, classroom climate, and social and academic engagement (Katz, 2012c; Katz, in press). At the same time it has been shown to reduce social and academic exclusion, and aggressive behaviour (Katz & Porath, 2011; Katz, Porath, Bendu, & Epp, 2012). In the model blocks one and two (Katz, 2012a) address:

- ▶ developing community / social and emotional well-being
- ▶ inclusive instructional practice

Block 3 identifies the “systems and structures” including necessary policy, resources, staffing, and delivery systems that should be addressed in inclusive schools.

Irvine, Lupart, Loreman and McGhie-Richmond recognized that “striving for authentic inclusion amidst the day-to-day tensions school administrators’ face is not an easy task with school principals being required to address multiple responsibilities within their schools (2010). Thus, what principals require is a comprehensive framework that assists them in approaching this moral imperative. Kenneth Leithwood and Carolyn Riehl argue that leadership is especially important in schools that serve diverse student populations. They explain that to be successful principals must establish conditions that not only support student

achievement but also equity and justice (2005). They identify four priorities for the administrator striving to improve the practice of serving diverse populations that align well with the Three Block Model of UDL:

- ▶ Building Powerful Forms of Teaching and Learning
  - ✓ Ambitious learning goals for all students
  - ✓ Instructional program coherence/ common framework
  - ✓ Staff working collaboratively
  - ✓ Providing sustained training for staff in the use of the framework
- ▶ Creating Strong Communities in School
  - ✓ Among students, teachers, parents and others
  - ✓ Professional learning community
  - ✓ Maintaining structural conditions and resources to support community
  - ✓ Openness to innovation
- ▶ Nurturing the development of families’ educational cultures
  - ✓ Championing parent education programs
  - ✓ Coordinate social services for families
- ▶ Expanding the amount of student’s social capital valued by the schools
  - ✓ Families’ social capital
  - ✓ Student’s social capital

### Building Powerful Forms of Teaching and Learning

While implementation of inclusive practices are ultimately left to individual teachers in their own classrooms, it must be recognized that the responsibility for inclusion is ultimately that of the principal (Young, 2010). Edmunds et al. further argue that principals must be champions for changes that result in the best possible outcomes for all students (2009). Principals must support

teachers to develop the vision and capacity for inclusive practice, as “it is not simply the teacher’s task to teach, but to create powerful contexts for learning” (Joyce, Calhoun and Hopkins (as cited in Hopkins, 2011, p. 93). Professional learning communities (PLC’s) are essential to inclusive education (Ainscow and Sandill, 2010). Teaching diverse learners is challenging and ever-changing. Teachers and staff require an environment in which there is ongoing professional development supported by a sense of community, and in which innovation and risk taking are valued. The Three Block Model of UDL emphasizes developing students’ higher order thinking, and involving all students in activities related to the general curriculum (Katz, 2012a). As excellence for all is the goal of UDL, it seems an appropriate framework for providing school leadership with a coherent pedagogy for supporting inclusive education. In the model, an RTI framework is used to create teams who

### FIGURE 1: BLOCK THREE OF THE THREE BLOCK MODEL OF UDL SYSTEMS AND STRUCTURES

Inclusive Policy – No “Except!”

Administrators with expertise/vision

Distributed Leadership

Professional Development

Staffing for collaborative practice

Team planning time,

Scheduling in cohorts/teams

Resource/EA allocations to classrooms/cohorts, Co-planning/teaching/assessing

Budgeting changed from segregated practices/funding allocations

Assistive technology

Multi-leveled resources

co-teach, and provide service delivery to all students in the regular classroom using such inclusive practices as differentiation, inquiry, and other evidence based strategies. Clearly, however, implementation of a comprehensive framework for inclusive education requires significant professional development, and the guidance and strong leadership of the school principal.

When principals co-participate in professional development activities with their staff they communicate through their involvement the importance and value they attach to the instructional work done by teachers (McLaughlin and Mitra, 2001). Irvine et al found that when principals attended professional development activities on topics related to inclusive education these “professional development activities further enhanced the principal’s ability to provide leadership and guidance in that it provided them with new ideas as well as affirmation that he/she is doing the right thing” (2010, p. 83).

### **Creating Strong Communities in School**

Leaders have the ability to address the challenges educators face in inclusive environments. James Ryan says it is principals who “are unilaterally able to mobilize support for inclusion, implement inclusive practices and monitor teachers’ efforts towards inclusive implementation” (as cited in Edmunds et al., 2009, p. 1). However, building inclusive learning communities may require substantial restructuring, realigning and redesigning in order to redirect special education resources and supports back into teaching and learning within the general education classroom (Giangreco, 2010, Ainscow & Sandill, 2010 Loreman, 2010; Philpott, Furey, & Penney, 2010). Distributed leadership, or other such forms of shared leadership may also need to be used to achieve the changes that full and unconditional inclusion of all students will require. Philip Schlechty describes how in following this approach the leader invites school colleagues and others to share authority and then “expects those who accept the invitation to share the responsibility as well” (2000 p. 185). Michael

Fullan suggests that in moving forward school leadership cannot require superwomen, supermen or moral martyrs (2003, p. xv), but rather explains how principals must take a much more attainable, and exciting approach grounded in shared leadership.

Spanning boundaries is another important feature of reform for inclusive education. It’s been explained that principals should be interacting with other school leaders regionally to share innovative practices within and across schools (Fullan, 2003, Scanlan, 2009). Scanlan describes how serving students with disabilities is often “an isolated endeavor of individual school leaders working to reform a specific school rather than an effort undertaken by colleagues working across a system” (2009, p. 622). Scanlan suggests that it is the school divisions that must facilitate systematic reforms across schools (2009). Ultimately divisional leaders will either send the message throughout their schools that inclusive practices are expected and permanent or that inclusion is still being seen as a passing trend that won’t outlive the tenure of an individual principal.

### **Nurturing the development of families’ educational cultures**

There is no question that teachers and administrators face challenges adjusting to ever increasing levels of diversity (Ryan, 2003) but Ryan rightly points out these challenges pale in comparison to the challenges that are faced by diverse students and their parents (2003). In his book, *The Moral Imperative of School Leadership*, Michael Fullan explains that publically funded schools must serve the cognitive and social needs of every child especially those who have not been well served in the past (2003). It is therefore crucial that school systems move towards inclusive practices such as the Three Block Model of UDL that improve teachers’ ability to address diversity in their classrooms.

Fullan explains how such a re-culturing involving changing the norms, values, incentives, skills and relationships within the organization requires a strong emotional commitment from principals and others (2000). To participate in the inclusive educational leadership needed to address

diversity, leaders must commit to making actual change in the social conditions of students and advocate for those who have not always fared well in school and society (Ryan, 2003).

Leithwood, Patten and Jantzi found that familial influences can have a high degree of effect on student learning. They found that involvement of parents in their children’s education improves achievement. They also recognized that children from low-income or minority families have the most to gain when schools involve their parents (2010). They clarify that parents themselves do not have to be well educated for this gain to occur. What Leithwood, Patten and Jantzi conclude is:

Engaging the school productively with parents, if this has not been a focus, may well produce larger effects on student learning in the short run than marginal improvements to already at least satisfactory levels of instruction (p. 698).

Irvine et al. also found that communication with families is essential to student success (2010). If school leaders apply these findings then they will be spending a considerable amount of time and effort in the nontraditional leadership role of engaging parents in their child’s education. The work of leaders in creating an inclusive school community using The Three Block Model acknowledges the importance of family, community, mentorship, pride and responsibility (Katz, 2012).

### **Expanding the amount of student’s social capital valued by the schools**

Having all students experience interconnectedness and being a part of the larger diverse society are indicators of social inclusion (Katz et al, 2012; Wotherspoon, 2002). The evidence is compelling that access to classrooms, peers, curriculum and other markers of inclusion are deeply important to students with disabilities for their social and academic gains (Theoharis, 2010). In the classroom all students should be provided schoolwork at which they experience success and from which the students gain academic knowledge and skills that are socially and

culturally valued by others. In this way inclusion will have the effect of raising a student's social capital in the school. All students, regardless of their strengths or weaknesses should have the opportunity to participate and contribute to the social and academic life of their school. Students can all learn that every member of the classroom brings valued skills, perspectives and background knowledge with them to their social relationships and to their academic learning (Katz, 2012). Social emotional learning, including understanding and appreciating other's strengths and challenges with the purpose of improving classroom climate, is the foundation of the Three Block Model (Katz, 2012).

## Conclusion

The outcome of combining evidence based instructional practices into one comprehensive model is beginning to be understood. Dr. Katz has shown that the Three Block Model produces significantly positive results in terms of student engagement, autonomy and increasing student interactions with both peers and staff. Students taught in classrooms using the model increased feelings of belonging and demonstrated more willingness to include others. Overall classroom climates have improved with increased pro-social behaviour and a reduction in disruptive behaviour. There also appears to be no significant difference in the effectiveness

of the model for boys or girls, the first language of students, urban or rural settings or the amount of experience of the teacher. The evidence has shown the Three Block Model of Universal Design for Learning to be effective for all (Katz, in press). Block Three includes a significant role for principals and school leaders in setting the direction, raising the expectations and providing the context for the inclusive framework to be implemented. As Leithwood and Riehl attest leadership is especially important in schools serving diverse students and leadership for diverse populations needs to be practiced differently as well (2005). CJ

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# The Philosophies, Politics, and Practice of Inclusion: Pathways for Facilitating *Reflection* and *Dialogue* in the School Community

by Katy Arnett

As any educator can attest, ‘inclusion’ is complex to understand and discuss meaningfully, imbued with emotion, nuance, and conflicting conceptions, constructions, and consequences. ‘Inclusion’ has been a part of public education for about a generation, and just as was the case when it was first proposed and promoted in the late 1980s/early 1990s (Valle & Connor, 2011), education stakeholders in this second decade of the 21st century are still grappling with how to best define, facilitate, and promote inclusion within the public schools. Though there has been progress on many levels, resulting in the education of students who had been previously excluded from the public schools, there still remains a considerable need to discuss and reflect upon the various elements of ‘inclusion.’ As Valle and Connor (2011; p. 207) remind us,

“Inclusion needs tending. It is not something we put in place structurally, then sit back and hope for the best. It is not about a particular teacher’s practice or a particular child. It is about everyone working consciously and collaboratively toward the common goal of nurturing a vibrant inclusive community. And achieving that goal requires shared leadership that routinely and thoughtfully takes stock of how actively its inclusive community pursues and enacts new knowledge and innovative practice.”

Thus, taking a cue from Valle and Connor, this article seeks to provide a variety of pathways for productively reflecting on and discussing ‘inclusion’ within a school community. Through a synthesis of various strands of research on ‘inclusion,’ I will explore three major facets of this construct (philosophy, policy, practice) that offer multiple reasons for the tensions experienced by most stakeholders and outline some ways in which stakeholders may be able to advance the dialogue. There are actually many more facets implicated in discussions of ‘inclusion,’ (e.g., placement, parents, pupils, practice, programming, purse strings, protocols, predictions, peers, preparation) but in the interest of space, I am focusing on the three I have come to see as most critical elements of the dialogue, because of the direct impact they have on the students who have been ‘included.’



<sup>1</sup> Throughout this manuscript, single quotes will be used to present certain terms. The use of quotes is designed to denote that the term is actually reflecting a construct, rather than an absolute idea.

I am approaching this discussion through the lens of a former inclusive classroom teacher turned inclusive teacher educator, whose scholarly focus has been on the educational experience of students with and without disabilities in second language learning contexts. My scholarly life straddles the 49th parallel, so I spend a considerable amount of time negotiating multiple conceptions and representations of ‘inclusion.’ For this discussion, I am considering the inclusion of students with disabilities, rather than the broader conceptions that acknowledge issues of cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity because we have not resolved what ‘inclusion’ means for the population of learners first attached to the construct.

### Philosophy

Though there exist many definitions of ‘inclusion,’ the general idea expressed in all definitions is that all children benefit socially and academically from being a part of the ‘general’ education classroom, even if the students in the classroom have different academic goals and needs (Friend, 2011; Valle & Connor, 2011). When ‘inclusion’ was first promoted in the 1980s, it was as an alternative to ‘mainstreaming,’ though it is not uncommon to find many current documents (including those produced by Ministries and Departments of Education) that use the terms interchangeably and as synonyms—leading to confusion. The philosophy of inclusion is very different than that of mainstreaming; mainstreaming maintains that students should have access to the general education classroom when it is believed that they can handle the demands of the classroom—socially and academically—without assistance (Friend, 2011). Mainstreaming was the dominant philosophy in the 1970s and early 1980s, and was viewed as something to be ‘earned’ by the students with the special education needs. When students with special education needs were ‘mainstreamed,’ it typically led to the students working alongside, but not

with their peers without special education needs because the students who were mainstreamed were not typically viewed as being the ‘responsibility’ of the classroom teacher (Friend, 2011). ‘Inclusion’ (sometimes presented with the qualifier ‘full’) was proposed to replace ‘mainstreaming’ because it was felt that students with special education needs were not adequately benefiting from the ‘general’ education environment (socially and academically) because the students were not typically integrated into the classroom community.

Another philosophical consideration of relevance to discussions of ‘inclusion’ is the notion of ‘ableism,’ which has come to be defined as the belief that individuals with disabilities are inherently inferior to individuals without disability; this belief is anchored to the idea that a disability represents a fixed deficit within the individual, rather than existing as another trait, like hair colour or eye colour. Ableism has been proposed to be the most insidious and pervasive type of “ism” within North American society (Hehir, 2005) and consequently, so entrenched in our social thinking that the belief is the “norm” and not questioned or considered when considering notions of inclusion. Scholars in the field of Disability Studies in Education (DES) (e.g., Brantlinger, 2009; Hehir, 2005; Valle & Connor, 2011) have contended that for ‘inclusion’ to truly be successful in all elements of schooling and society, the construct of ‘ableism’ needs to be confronted and challenged more readily. Commonly, scholars in this field remind the audience that statements like, “She never seems disabled to me,” are indicators of ableism; if the word ‘gay’ was substituted for ‘disabled,’ for example, the statement would be viewed as highly offensive, but when the adjective has been linked to disability, it is accepted and agreed to without question (Valle & Connor, 2011). I spend a lot of my time negotiating a content area (French second language classroom) that has had the concepts of ‘suitability,’ and ‘appropriateness’ attached

to it for nearly 40 years; this is another way in which ableism is evidenced in education. It is worth noting that empirical research has corroborated that teachers who view a child’s disability as a fixed entity (thus reflecting an element of ableism) are less likely to engage in interactions in the classroom that include the student (e.g., Jordan, Lindsay, & Stanovich, 1997). While it would certainly be a difficult discussion to navigate, it may be worthwhile to determine the extent to which teachers are aware of how ‘ableism’ permeates North American society.

The final philosophical issue causing tension within ‘inclusion,’ particularly for the individuals with disabilities, stems from the ways in which ‘disability’ has been defined and then positioned within society. Since the 1950s, a “medical model” has been applied, meaning that a student presents symptoms, is evaluated by a specialist, and then “diagnosed” with a cause for the challenges. Supports are “prescribed” to “remedy” the deficit (Valle & Connor, 2011). So, for an individual to have a ‘disability,’ there must be a ‘deficit’ and the ‘deficit’ must be ‘treated.’ Yet, when introduced to classrooms and/or other societal configurations, there are often proclamations that “disability does not define this student,” or “this student is just like everyone else,” which immediately negates what this student/individual has been told about his/her disability. On the one hand, the individual has been told that he/she is lacking something that “qualifies” him/her for a particular group membership, and then in the next breath, he/she is told that the “label doesn’t matter.” How might students with disabilities internalize such a conflicting message?

### Policy

In Canadian education, there are two main influences on policies that consider the educational experience of students with disabilities. First, there are Sections 15.1 and 15.2 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Government of Canada, 1982), which serve to guarantee

equal protections and equal benefits for all members of Canadian society and provide for specialized programs to support individuals who may be disadvantaged, respectively. Next, the *Emily Eaton v. Brant County Board of Education* Supreme Court Decision of 1998, has been pointed to as the end of thinking that “equality rights constructs create a legal presumption in favour of inclusion” within the ‘general’ education classroom and genesis of questioning the pedagogical benefit of the student’s educational experience (Howard, 1999; p. 26; Van Nuland, 2011). Any discussion of the Brant case can quickly inspire consideration of another aspect of ‘inclusion’ – “placement” – and its role in defining ‘educational benefit,’ for students, but that is beyond the scope of this article. Nonetheless, there are several elements of educational policy regarding ‘inclusion’ that illuminate the challenges of establishing ‘pedagogical benefit,’ or as termed in the Brant case, “the best interest of the student” (Van Nuland, 2011). Specifically, this section will consider the variations in how certain disabilities are defined through policy, variations in how inclusion is defined within policy, and the role of teachers’ unions in promoting inclusive policies, with a goal of demonstrating the challenge of framing ‘pedagogical benefit.’

Wiener and Siegel (1992) have pointed out that when it comes to special education policies, the differences among the provinces are linked to how each province also considered its unique mix of language, culture, and socioeconomics. The greatest variation in special education policy for many years has focused on differing definitions of and constructions of how to identify language-based learning disabilities (Kozey & Siegel, 2008). The fact that there has been variations from province to province as to which combination of IQ score and actual classroom achievement (among or instead of other indicators) are required to “qualify” for special education support for a learning disability points to a very socially-constructed conception of a particular disability category (Kozey & Siegel, 2008; Valle & Connor, 2011). This occurs even though the “diagnostic

process” adheres to the aforementioned medical model of disability that implies a very cut-and-dry process with very clear definitions and parameters; in fact, there is a fair amount of subjectivity in the diagnosis of many disabilities.

Other disabilities also typically encounter varying definitions/constructions, including Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Autism Spectrum Disorders. For example, I’ve learned through my work in Canada that some provinces classify ADHD as a type of learning disability, while other provinces classify it as a type of emotional/behavioural disorder, which is different from the U.S., which classifies it as a type of “Other Health Impairment” (Hutchinson & Martin, 2012; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2011)<sup>2</sup>. A student who lives in a province that classifies ADHD as a type of learning disability is going to have a different experience from a child whose ADHD is treated as a type of behavioural disorder, because of the social connotations that have come to be attached to those broader, politically defined categories. It has been documented that students who have emotional and behavioural disorders are the most likely to be educated outside of the ‘general’ classroom because of fears about behaviour and safety; many teachers are scared to teach students with emotional and behavioural challenges, and even proponents of inclusion do not want their children in the same classroom as students with this type of need because of the negative connotations associated with this label (e.g., Guetzloe, 1994, 1999; Hedge & MacKenzie, 2012). Thus, political definitions of disability can have broader consequences for learning and for defining pedagogical benefit. After all, one of the points of the Brant case was that the general education classroom cannot be presumed to be in the best interest of all students, but if it is also the case that a child’s education is influenced by how he/she is ‘classified’ in the system, the ‘best interest’ of the child may be more politically defined than first thought. In that case, it is worthwhile to engage in discussions about how disabilities have been defined and

categorized within your province or territory and what that means for gauging a student’s “best interests”.

The political definitions of inclusion are also an important consideration for the learning experience. Typically, in Canada, definitions of inclusion are skewed to focus on the social benefits of inclusion, rather than the academic benefits, even though the Brant case has been cited as trying to push schools in that direction (Howard, 1999). The definitions of Manitoba, element. Further, all provincial policies on inclusion acknowledge to some degree, the need for schools to work to ensure that every child has the same access to learning opportunities, but benefit is less directly mentioned. Yet, it was concerns and questions about the framing of the academic benefit of inclusion that permeated a report on inclusion in the province of New Brunswick (Porter & Aucoin, 2012).

Though it is possible that the Brant case has caused stakeholders to steer away from the academic benefits in any definitions of ‘inclusion,’ there are perhaps other reasons for which the policies have been vague. First, as was shared in the previous section, ‘inclusion’ replaced ‘mainstreaming.’ Initially, ‘inclusion’ was about ensuring academic ‘benefit,’ not just ‘access’ in the classroom (which was the goal of mainstreaming), but admittedly that message was muddled, since ‘inclusion’ and ‘mainstreaming’ were often (and still are) presented as synonymous experiences. Next, there actually is not a lot of empirical research examining the academic benefits of ‘inclusion,’ so there is not a lot that teachers could be told about how to help their students benefit. There are plenty of studies that confirm the social benefits (e.g., Staub & Peck, 1998; Waldron & McLeskey, 1998), but the academic benefits are harder to tease out. Some of this difficulty rests in the challenge of structuring the research to actually test this issue, while also being respectful of the legal obligations to

<sup>2</sup> It is also worth noting that in Canada, there is still reference to and considerations of Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), while the U.S. has reclassified ADD into a different type of ADHD (Hutchinson & Martin, 2012; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2010).

students with disabilities. The final reason for which ‘academic benefit’ is perhaps a nebulous construct to define is related to the way in which many jurisdictions have come to define ‘learning’ within the past generation.

Outcomes-oriented curricula have been a common feature of the educational landscape of the U.S. and Canada since the 1980s. In such curricula, ‘Learning’ has come to be defined as reaching a particular standard, achieving a particular goal; achievement of learning outcomes for all has been heralded as a way to ensure that ‘no child is left behind.’<sup>3</sup> The province of Alberta, for example, has probably been most associated with this idea, because of its rigorous standardized tests linked to their Grade 12 marks (Dehaas, 2011). When juxtaposing this aspect against the construct of ‘inclusion,’ the challenge of shaping ‘academic benefit’ becomes clear. Regularly, I hear variations of the following question from teachers: “How much learning is evidence that a student has been included in my classroom?” And then in the next breath, I often hear teachers answer themselves in a way that gets at this ‘outcomes’ achievement issue. From my experiences, it seems that teachers come to feel that if the evidence does not show that the ‘included student’ has met the standards, then ‘inclusion’ has not worked. Yet, in nearly all definitions of ‘learning,’ there is an implication that ‘learning’ is about changing, adding to, and deepening what you know (i.e., making progress)—which most teachers will tell you does occur for nearly every student—rather than hitting a certain mark at a certain point in time. So the questions become: What definition

of ‘learning’ is presented by the curriculum? How does that definition help and/or hinder the way in which we define ‘pedagogical benefit’ for a student? If the student does not “meet the standard,” for whatever reason, is that a reflection of a flaw with the student or with the system?

Finally, as was pointed out by Winzer and Mazurek (2011), teachers’ associations/unions across Canada can be looked to

as a critical component in the evolving acceptance and promotion of inclusive teaching philosophies and pedagogy, but also as a force in the creation of additional policies about inclusion as it took hold in the schools. In many of the publically disseminated documents from the unions, Winzer and Mazurek found that nearly all provincial teachers’ associations had some role in the creation/shaping of the definition

<sup>3</sup> The Brant case did consider ‘equality of outcomes’ in its decision. It was found that special education and separate settings must exist to help students who may not be able to easily access and benefit from the curriculum of the ‘general’ education classroom so that they can be guaranteed their ‘equality of outcomes’ (Van Nuland, 2011). To be clear, in raising the construct of ‘learning outcomes’ here, I am interested in considering the implication of a universal definition/explanation of ‘learning,’ as conveyed by the ‘outcomes,’ for determining evidence of ‘inclusion.’ I am not taking issue with the idea of ‘equality of outcomes.’



## Resources for Building a Healthy School Community

Principals are a key stakeholder and below are a few ways you can help make your school community a healthier one:

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We are looking for your input as we revise our Administrator’s Guide to health promoting schools. Please tell us: what works? What’s missing? How can it be improved?



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of special needs in the provincial policies, and many current association documents outline specific guidelines for planning, credentials, and staffing for the purpose of supporting inclusion, as well as the maximum number of students with special needs who can be included in a single classroom. As one of my colleagues recently shared with me, such specificity is needed because, “The nature of teaching has changed, so too should

teachers interacted with students in each group. They found that the teachers who viewed disability as something they could not change or somehow influence engaged in less academic interactions with the students who were exceptional, when compared to the teachers who believed the opposite—that they, as the teachers, could help the student learn and succeed in the classroom. Further, the teachers who held more positive

so, to allow him/her to observe another class. Also, if it’s not already the practice at your school, it could be worthwhile to send home media release forms at the beginning of every year, asking for parent permission to videotape in the classroom for the purpose of helping teachers improve their practice; the videos could be viewed and discussed in a meeting of a professional learning community (PLC).



# The concept of ‘differentiation’ has also been heralded as a way to support inclusive teaching practice.



the affordances made to ensure we have conditions in the workplace that will actually allow us to attend to ALL students so that they might not only socially benefit, but also learn within these environments.” The quote also beautifully captures the aforementioned distinction teachers are making between the social and academic benefits of inclusion.

Various teachers’ unions have authored reports and position papers on inclusion, including the Nova Scotia Teachers Union (2009) and the British Columbia Teachers’ Federation (Naylor, 2005). The themes presented in these papers include those shared in this paper, as well as those of professional development, funding, and placement. It is also important to recognize that the unions’ work on inclusion has often been a reaction to the initial policies on inclusion that have been implemented without their consultation (Winzer & Mazuruk, 2011).

## Practice

Many of strands explored within the two previous facets of inclusion have touched on the issue of teacher practice. This section of the paper will address in greater depth some of these facets of the ‘practice,’ of inclusion.

Jordan, Lindsay, and Stanovich (1997) conducted a study that sought to connect teachers’ views of students who were exceptional, at-risk, and typically-achieving with the ways in which the

views of disability actually interacted more with the students with disabilities or who were at-risk, than with the students who were typically achieving. However, the difference in quantity across the student populations is not necessarily indicative of a compromised education for the typically-achieving students, which is an oft-cited concern of parents of this student population (Guetzloe, 1999). The teachers who were found to be more inclusive in their teaching practice spent more time asking questions that required longer answers and prompting students to facilitate understanding, before moving to the more challenging questions that pulled in the students who understood the material at a faster pace (as well as the students who needed some help understanding) (Jordan et al., 1997). Their research showed that inclusive teaching practice was facilitated through the use of questioning that helped to build students towards more complex and challenging ideas, rather than take for granted that the students immediately and clearly understood the concepts under study before moving onto more complex questions. Thus, it could be supporting teachers in explorations of their questioning strategies, whether through videotaping or observation exchanges with colleagues in the building, could help promote inclusive practice within the school. Perhaps, as the principal, you could cover a teacher’s class for an hour or

The concept of ‘differentiation’ has also been heralded as a way to support inclusive teaching practice (e.g., Tomlinson 1999; 2001; Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). This approach to and model of teaching requires that teachers give consideration to students’ current skills and knowledge bases and create tailored learning task options to help students meet the learning goals in the way that works best for their needs and skills—which could be argued as an instructional countermove against ‘ableism.’ ‘Differentiation’ is thought to be emblematic of ‘inclusion’ because it promotes helping students access the content from their particular starting points and embark on a learning path that will help them benefit from the class and meet the goals (Heacox, 2003). On many levels, teachers like the idea of ‘differentiation,’ but it is still not largely executed in practice, which has implications for ‘inclusion.’

Informed by his own experiences trying to promote differentiated instruction, Pennington (2009) points out a dozen reasons that teachers do not differentiate regularly to help their students, including limited time for planning and preparing the variety of activities and assessments, limited support/practise with differentiation to inspire comfort in using it, and teachers’ concerns over preparing students for various exams and assessment experiences. Paliokosta and Blanford (2010) found in their case study



of three 'inclusive' schools in England that 'differentiation' was implemented on a limited basis because of communication barriers between the teachers and resource personnel who would help to personalize some of the resources/paths, time constraints, and limited physical resources. Thus, if there is not already a culture of resource-sharing in the school, consider creating a bulletin board (real or virtual) where teachers are encouraged to share activity frameworks and examples of ways they have integrated differentiation into their teaching. Talk with teachers about ways to facilitate communication in a harried day; perhaps some of the increasingly popular mobile technologies could be harnessed as resources.

After all, if teachers are expected to provide different paths to the same learning point as one way of enacting 'inclusion', it can come down to having a variety of resources and space for communication available to facilitate the creation of those paths. The challenges, like the time constraints and limited resources, make teachers question the 'practicality' of differentiated teaching practice as inclusive teaching practice, which sometimes begets the question of

the 'practicality' of 'including' students in the classroom, which in turn, tend to beget questions about philosophies and policies about 'inclusion,' which is why this construct can be so complicated to explore.

### Conclusion

As a concluding note, it is important to more succinctly consider the philosophy-policy-practice link in the 'inclusion' of a student with a disability that has been woven into this paper. As alluded to in the works of Jordan et al. (1997) and Valle and Connor (2011), differences in how teachers view a 'disability' (e.g., as something fixed and unresponsive to support, or as something that is dynamic and responsive to support) will shape how the teacher does and does not strive to address the student's needs. This message is partly coming from the policies themselves and the philosophies they convey. Most of the provincial and territorial policies that define 'disability' take what is known as a 'deficit orientation,' in that the students are defined and described by what they are 'lacking' in their skills and abilities (which the word 'disability' also conveys); the students are defined by limitations, and

often the limitations are presented as absolutes in the policy (Arnett & Mady, 2010). The conflicts and contradictions among these three facets of 'inclusion' often mean that we end up in circular discussions about 'inclusion' in school, which does not really serve any stakeholder well. Yet, teasing out 'micro-facets' within the larger themes within the confines of ongoing discussion in the school community could be a productive way to "tend" to 'inclusion' and advance the dialogue. **CJ**

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# Nurturing Classroom Teacher/ Resource Teacher **Relations:** **A Pathway to Inclusive Practice**



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When I embarked on my doctoral research in Nova Scotia, I was interested in learning how classroom teachers in middle school settings described their relationships with exceptional students. Being “exceptional” included (but was not limited) requiring curriculum adaptations, having Individual Program Plans, and/or needing behavioral interventions. I devised many questions related to how teachers might see their roles with these special needs students, and anticipated rich discussions on how teachers saw themselves interacting with students who learn differently.

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Though these discussions certainly took place during my year of interviews with teachers, an unanticipated and significant result emerged. Much of the data collected consisted of classroom teachers discussing their interactions with resource specialists and teacher assistants. When I asked classroom teachers to talk about exceptional students, they directed the discussion towards support personnel more than half of the time. This article will discuss one particular theme that resulted from my research; how classroom teachers saw resource teachers as specialists, and how that contributed to seeing exceptional students as someone else's primary responsibility. This theme has relevance to how inclusive policy is implemented in schools, and how site-based administrators can enhance inclusion by focusing on classroom teacher – resource teacher relations.

### Contributing Factors

Local policies teachers in my study relied on described resource teachers as capable of offering additional assistance to special needs students which classroom teachers would not be expected to (NS Department of Ed., 2002). As a result of their specialized skill set, resource staff was sanctioned to provide specialized intervention to special needs students in such areas as physical mobility, literacy, numeracy and/or behavior. This stood in contrast to the generalized assistance classroom teachers were expected to provide. Resource teachers were positioned by policy as providing more focused support, geared to the specific needs of exceptional students.

Such policies put classroom teachers in complex positions in relation to the resource teachers who were present in their rooms supporting special needs students. Resource staff were their peers; having usually been fellow classroom teachers in past years, perhaps at the same grade level. Both were present for the same reasons; to assist students. At the same time, there were clear differences in how the two groups were positioned by policy. Resource teachers were identified as having 'specialized' knowledge that could be construed as trumping what classroom teachers might be able to offer within their generalized practices. At the same time, it was the classroom teacher that remained primarily accountable for assessing and reporting on special needs students (Province of NS, 1996).

Policy documents described what the classroom teacher/resource relationship should resemble. Phrases used depicted the relationship as between two peers. An equal power relationship should exist; one with mutual respect and a sharing of perspectives. Collaboration focused on meeting students' needs (Province of NS, 2006). Though this depiction had potential to lead to more inclusive environments, it omitted many of the pressures classroom teachers faced. The policies assumed certain things, including time being readily available for proper collaboration, and ongoing communication being seen as a priority by both parties. Whether collaboration was possible within existing time constraints, and whether mutual motivation existed, was more complex than policy assumed.

### Resource teachers as specialists

These contributing factors resulted in a major theme emerging from my research. Classroom teachers saw resource teachers as having access to specialized information they did not, often describing them as 'Inclusion Specialists'. This led to resource staff being seen as primarily responsible for exceptional students, because they were supposedly better informed on what worked best for them. Classroom teachers consistently described resource teachers as separate from themselves; they had received more specialized training in how to work with exceptional students. As one research participant described, "*Qualifications are different because they have more expertise when it comes down to learning disabilities and so forth*".

Such understandings directly impacted how classroom teachers described their relationship with exceptional students. In many cases, the fact that resource teachers were seen as having a specialized expertise became a justification for a lack of interaction between the classroom teacher and the student. It was not much of a stretch from identifying resource teachers as "experts" to designating them as being primarily responsible for certain students' programming. As another participant stated, "*There are certain situations where the qualified teacher has to be there because they understand the learning disability that the regular classroom teachers do not*". Having access to the resource teacher was often misinterpreted as absolving a classroom teacher from direct responsibility for the exceptional student, and rationalized non-participation in the student's programming.

This led to some strong opinions on what the classroom teacher's role should be in programming for exceptional students. In some cases, a hands-off approach was put forth as self-evident and common sense. One classroom teacher described programming as "*not even under my direction*". Such rigidity limited opportunities to discuss more inclusive interactions between classroom teachers and exceptional students, where the teacher worked with the exceptional student in the classroom setting. Instead, things were sometimes described as "*under the direction of the Learning Center*".

Identifying resource teachers as specialized often had altruistic intentions. This made the notion of "*leaving it to the experts*" much more complex than classroom teachers simply avoiding exceptional students or feeling unqualified to work with them. It made a reliance on resource teachers seem like the "*right thing to do*" for exceptional students; a way to ensure they had their needs properly met. In some ways, this mode of thinking reinforced existing practices of integration, as teachers felt truly justified in having resource staff take exceptional students out of their rooms.

This created a unique dynamic. It allowed teachers to continue to describe themselves as caring and student centered while, at the same time, excluding some students from the classroom setting. Pull-out resource support was described as "*the best thing for them*"; a "*better way to have their needs met*". This sense of altruism served to further reinforce and justify classroom teachers not taking direct responsibility for exceptional students.

## Recommendations for Administrators

It is of paramount importance to have qualified resource staff supporting students (and classroom teachers) in a school setting. They are an integral part of an inclusive model of schooling for exceptional students. The problem is not the presence of specialized staff, but the unintended, peripheral effects of classroom teachers sometimes delegating responsibility for exceptional students. These recommendations are based on conclusions from my research.

1) Ensure resource teachers use ‘classroom friendly’ language. On numerous occasions, classroom teachers described themselves as uncomfortable with the specialized language they perceived resource teachers used. In many cases, it was the use of specialized language that led to an “us and them” dynamic being described. When resource staff collaborates with classroom teachers or present during sessions, it is paramount they use general terms classroom teachers are comfortable with. Refraining from diagnostic, medicalized terms is highly advised. Using language seen as non-threatening was identified as crucial in ensuring: a) classroom teachers felt part of the process and b) classroom teachers saw resource teachers as peers. Both perceptions led to classroom teachers taking more risks in working with special needs students.

2) Find ways to deliberately mix classroom and resource teachers in informal settings. Whether it is arranged seating at staff meetings, or other intentional attempts during or after the instructional day, spending informal time with resource teachers was described as

a major contributor to increased comfort for classroom teachers. This is significant because the more classroom teachers saw their resource counterparts as peers and non-threatening, the more they saw exceptional students as their own responsibility. Inclusion was described as less intimidating when they knew resource staff personally and felt comfortable with them.

3) Highlight and reinforce effective models of co-teaching. Effective models of collaboration between classroom and resource teachers should be publicized and lauded by school administration. Classroom teachers must see that it is valued and possible within their work setting. When teachers felt there was an expectation of collaboration, with the accompanying support, they were more likely to expand their perceived sphere of social responsibility for exceptional students. A caution, however, teachers who reported being ‘forced’ to co-teach with resource personnel described themselves as spending less time in meaningful interactions with special needs students, and overburdened when they had to do. Co-teaching must be fostered without being forced.

## Conclusion


To state the obvious, inclusion is a complicated undertaking. A peripheral affect of having resource specialists in schools is how it affects classroom teachers’ willingness to engage directly with special needs students. My research found that perceiving resource personnel as specialists had a significant effect on classroom teachers willingness to engage meaningfully with exceptional students. School administrators can foster inclusion in their schools by realizing the importance of relationships between classroom and resource teachers, and deliberately nurturing these relationships. This will increase classroom teachers’ comfort with resource staff, which was shown to significantly increase their motivation to take primary responsibility for special needs students. **CJ**

### AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY


Dr. Chris Boulter is a principal of Grade Primary to 8 school in Nova Scotia, and a part-time faculty member at several Atlantic universities.

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# *Supporting and Supervising* Educational Assistants in Your School<sup>1</sup>

by Joyce Mounstevan, Ph.D and Isabel Killoran, Ph.D

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Education in Ontario has been undergoing many shifts lately, especially as it relates to children with special needs or those who are at risk of marginalization. Bennett and Wynne (2006) outlined the new philosophical underpinnings of special education delivery in Ontario. One of the key objectives identified was that “all staff has the knowledge and skills to provide supports and interventions to meet the needs of students in a timely and effective manner”. This objective, along with the clear statements around increasing the accountability that school boards must have for the academic achievement of all students, including those with exceptional needs, heralded the belief that special education was not a separate entity.

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As more children are included in the general education classroom, many boards have significantly increased support staff. In Ontario, from 1998 to 2006 the increase in Educational Assistants<sup>2</sup> (EAs) has been 68.4% (Zegarac, 2008). Consequently, many principals find themselves managing and supervising additional support staff. In order to do so effectively, the roles and responsibilities of educational assistants must be clearly understood by all stakeholders.

To investigate the roles and responsibilities, a large-scale research study was completed. Over 2100 Ontario EAs completed an on-line survey, while approximately 50 participated in focus groups. Consistently, EAs commented on feeling undervalued and overworked. Many reported that they were taking much of the responsibility for the teaching of the students ‘under their care’ and that teachers looked to them to have knowledge about the particular exceptionality or syndrome that the student had. EAs expressed their frustration at not being considered full members of the classroom team. The purpose of this article is to look briefly at the role of the administrator in the supervision and support of educational assistants within the school community.



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<sup>1</sup> The following discussion originated in Mounstevan, J. (2010). *Educational Assistants: Defining their roles and responsibilities*. York University, Unpublished Dissertation. The full discussion of the findings can be found there.

<sup>2</sup> Educational Assistants are also referred to as paraprofessionals and teaching assistants.

## The role of the administrator in supervision.

Ultimately, the responsibility for the supervision and assignment of all support staff within a school belongs to the principal. There is very little Canadian research on educational assistants and even less on how the administrator fits into the relationship the EA has with teachers and students. Consequently, we turned to the United States for research in this area. In the US there has been recent movement to look more closely at the roles and responsibilities of the EA. A few states have moved towards writing statewide standards for ‘paraprofessionals’. Our research did not uncover province/territory wide education or experience standards for educational assistants. However, some boards have independently written clear job requirements, which have translated into a standard for hiring. With a diverse pool of EAs, delivering support that is contextually unique, it can be difficult to think of supervision needs homogenously. Although the tasks an EA performs may appear to be individualized there has been quite a lengthy discussion about the common areas that need to be addressed when supervising them.

French (2003) outlines seven executive functions of EA supervision:

- 1) Orienting paraeducators to the program, school and students
- 2) Planning for paraeducators
- 3) Scheduling for paraeducators
- 4) Delegating tasks to paraeducators
- 5) On-the-job training and coaching of paraeducators
- 6) Monitoring and feedback regarding paraeducator task performance
- 7) Managing the workplace (communications, problem solving, conflict management)

Unfortunately, it would appear that principals are not involved in much discussion about EA supervision until they find themselves in the position of having

to do so. In a survey of principal preparation programs, Hess and Kelly (2007) examined the content of 56 programs in the United States and reported on some of the core syllabi. Although there was no mention of EAs in any of the course syllabi, there was discussion about the principal’s role in hiring, evaluating and developing personnel, which should include EAs

Morgan, Roberts, and Ashbaker (2000) surveyed a group of 96 principals about their role in the hiring and evaluation of paraeducators along with their knowledge of policies and training for paraeducators. Their results indicated that no more than half of the principals were responsible for the hiring; however, more than half of the respondents were responsible for evaluating EAs. Less than half of the principals were aware of written policies relating to paraeducators for their school, although more than half were aware that their school district did have written policies. Less than a third of the respondents stated that their school had a training program for paraeducators.

Similarly, in Ontario leadership training programs for school administrators there is scant content that indicates that they are responsible for the allocation and supervision of educational assistants within their school. Many principals may assume that the teacher is supervising the educational assistant and although there is no legislation in Ontario defining the roles and responsibilities of the educational assistant, the Ministry document, *Individual Education Plan (IEP): A Resource Guide* (2004) clearly states that the educational assistant “helps the student with learning activities under the direction and supervision of the teacher”. However, in practice this may not be happening. Earlier research has shown that teachers are not instructed in the supervision of EAs during their preservice or additional qualification courses (French & Chopra, 1999; French & Lee, 1988; French & Pickett, 1997; Morgan, 1997). The decisions about which classrooms will have the support of an EA are usually made without a great

deal of input from the teacher and the choice of which EA the teacher will work with is a union/management decision in Ontario.

## Things that make a difference to the EA

Although the Educational Assistants often felt devalued and alone in their school, they did have several suggestions for improving their experience.

### Being a valued member of the team.

There are many decisions made in schools, in which EAs have no say, that impact the work of an EA. An example is the decisions that are made at school by the team when the educational assistant is not present. This was a common theme in the data collected. Educational assistants claimed that they had almost exclusive responsibility for the supervision and teaching of a student although decisions about placement or the Individual Education Plan were made without input from the EA. Participants were asked to indicate the meetings they routinely attended. Almost 40% of the survey respondents reported that they attended no formal meetings and only a quarter attended the individual education plan (IEP) meetings. During the focus groups some of the EAs commented that not only did they not attend the IEP meetings, they were also not permitted to see the IEP.

This exclusion from meetings was translated by the EAs as teachers, administrators and, at times, parents having a lack of respect for them. Lack of respect was also perceived by the EAs in some of the more subtle ways that it manifested in schools. Some of these included having no individual mailbox in the school office, not being included in the commencement booklet under the listing of staff, and not having a photograph on the staff bulletin board outside the main office.

### Being Supported.

The power of the administrator to open or close doors for the educational assistant was illustrated in several different ways.



## Educational Assistants

In terms of access to training, some of the participants saw their administrator as a solid support and felt that they had access to training because of the positive relationship they had with their administrator. Support from the administrator was cited as one of the make or break issues in the working conditions of the educational assistants. Although the EAs may not have daily contact with the administrator, it was still a relationship that they felt was critical to their success in supporting students.

### Where to go from here

It is not unusual in a large school to have eight to ten EAs assigned to support students with exceptionalities. Gerlach (2009) clearly identifies the principal's responsibility to set a school climate in which paraprofessionals have a professional identity and are part of instructional teams. It is important that the school administrator delineates his/her expectations in terms of roles and responsibilities. This is only achieved when there is a clear understanding of the legal, liability and ethical issues associated with each role (French, 2003).

A shared understanding between the administrator, teacher, and EA of expectations and supervision protocols is essential from the outset of an assignment to a class or school. A preliminary discussion to outline and clarify the protocol will contribute greatly to the development of healthy communication and a team atmosphere. A written protocol provided by the school board that outlines the way in which supervision is carried out is essential if the discrepancies in practice are to be avoided.

The preparation of administrators for the supervision and management of EAs assigned to their school as a component in the Principal Qualification Program would be a welcome addition. With this background, administrators would have a better foundation to create a protocol for supervision of EAs within a school if their board has not already done so. Working towards creating a learning community that is inclusive of all staff will benefit students as well. Educational Assistants, who work with our most vulnerable students, are integral in supporting students' success. CJ

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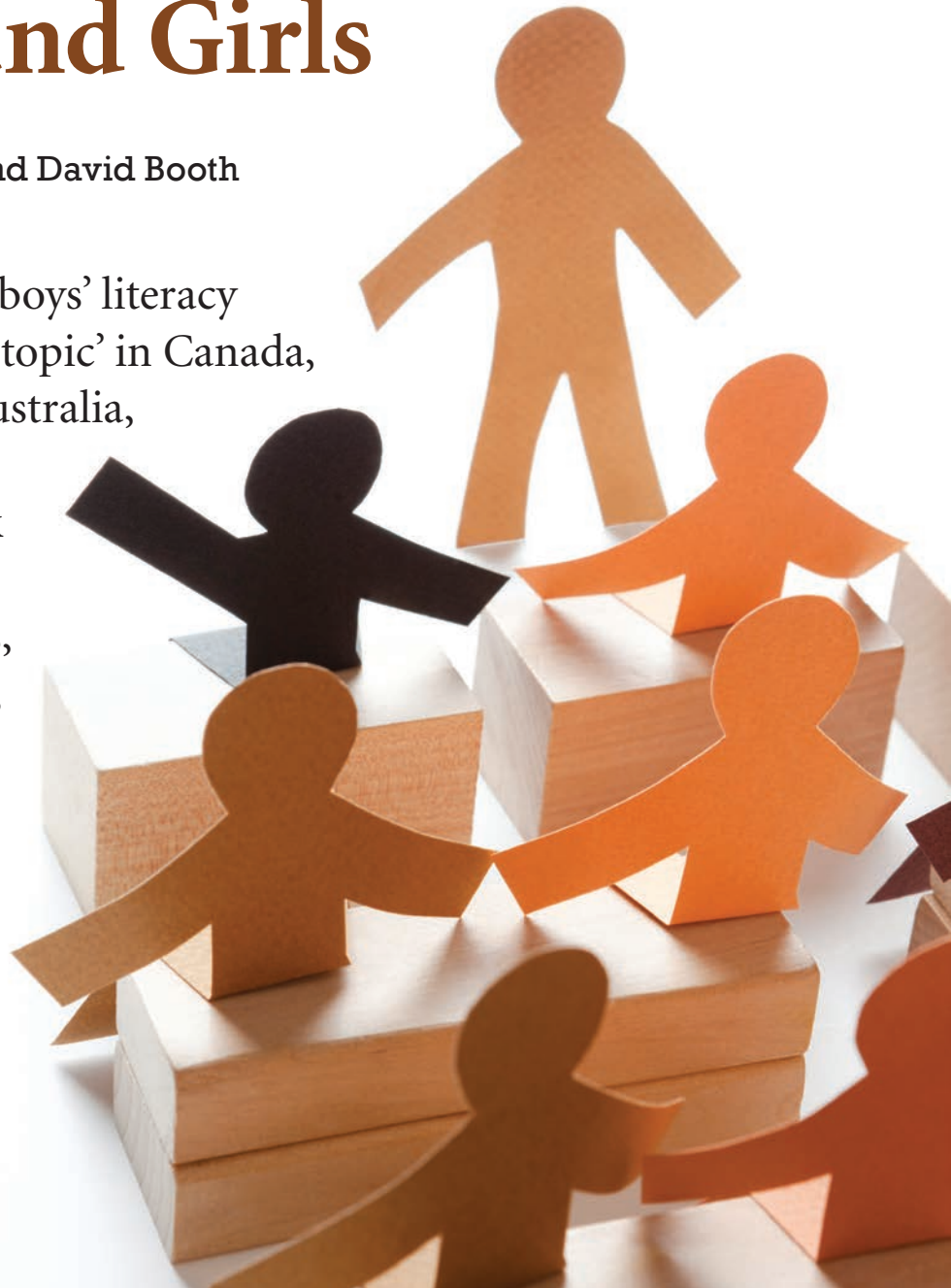
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# Research + Inclusive Practices = Literacy Development for Boys and Girls

By Susan E. Elliott-Johns and David Booth

Critical examination of boys' literacy attainment is still a 'hot topic' in Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. Our work in this area indicates governments, ministries, universities, researchers, authors, teachers and school leaders continue to focus on research, practice, and the quest for better understandings of gender and literacy.



Schools are also working hard to implement different strategies to improve the literacy performance of all students and, while scores have improved for both girls and boys, girls continue to outperform boys on standardized assessment procedures. In other words, the gender gap persists. However, this gap does appear to be stabilizing (after increasing for a short period) and many boys achieve extremely well in all areas, while some girls underachieve. The heart of the issue frequently revolves around a minority of students (Younger & Warrington, 2005).

Clearly, approaches ignoring differentiation among boys in their literacy successes and failures offer limited possibilities for implementing effective change. Rather, in order to better understand the literacy gap between boys and girls (especially for those concerned primarily with the results of test scores), it may be helpful to examine the research and different explanations for problems that many boys are exhibiting in literacy attainment – including issues such as gender identity, social and cultural issues, changing definitions of literacy, school cultures, technology, teaching styles, curriculum documents, the place of standardized evaluations, and teacher education. Such critical factors are often intricately interwoven and can influence school performance (Brown, 2006; Francis & Skelton, 2005; Lingard, Martino, Mills & Bahr, 2002; Martino & Kehler, 2007). For example, legitimate concerns, supported by research findings, include the premise that reading achievements of some boys need to be examined. However, if we consider the impact of a range of factors on the literacy performance of boys in general, a more differentiated picture emerges, and this picture demands answers to questions about which groups of boys and girls are most disadvantaged, how and what forms this disadvantage may take, and why this disadvantage occurs (Collins et al., 2000).

Hammett and Sanford (2008) argue it is also essential that efforts to support and improve boys' levels of achievement in literacy should not, inadvertently or otherwise, disadvantage girls. While their

intent is by no means to disparage attempts addressing literacy learning initiatives for boys, they regard the need for practices that engage *all* children in learning as essential. Hammett and Sanford recommend context-appropriate curricular and pedagogical activities, not band-aid innovations that group boys into one homogenous mass that does them serious injustice. Not *all* boys are failing standardized tests, doing less well than girls, or hate to read. Therefore, it is very important that we ask, “Which boys are/are not learning?” and thus avoid a one-size fits all approach to instruction. Spence (2008) reminds us that, “Too often, we deal with generalities without recognizing the diversity in our students” (p. 9).

Furthermore, Sanford (2002) emphasizes the need to consider redefining “*what counts?*” as classroom literacy teaching and learning. She examined intersections and gaps between school literacies (i.e., mostly print-based texts) and out-of-school literacies (often non-print texts, media and technology-based texts), and pointed out the intersections that frequently exist between gender, school literacy, and out-of-school life literacy.

Martino and Pallota-Chiarolli (2003) also suggest boys may consistently engage in literate practices outside school that are not reflected in poor literacy test results, and that they may be advantaged with electronic forms of literate practice useful in the changing post-industrial labour market (p. 23). Tapscott (2009) picks up this argument in his book, *Grown Up Digital* (p. 106):

Net Geners who have grown up digital have learned how to read images, like pictures, graphs, and icons. They may be more visual than their parents are (Sternberg and Preiss 2005). A study of Net Gen college students showed that they learned much better from visual images than from text-based ones. Students of a Library 1010 class at California State University tended to ignore lengthy step-by-step text instructions for their homework

assignments, until the instructors switched their teaching methods to incorporate more images. The results were dramatic: students' scores increased by 11 to 16 percent. (Roos, 2008).

When working together to develop inclusive literacy practices in schools, it may be helpful for both teachers and administrators to focus attention on findings from research that assist in planning students' literacy learning. Be sure to think about both *achievement and attitude* as these have implications for our understanding of student behaviours (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). For example:

### In terms of achievement:

- ▶ Boys take longer to learn to read than girls do
- ▶ Boys read less than girls
- ▶ Girls tend to comprehend narrative texts and most expository texts significantly better than boys do
- ▶ Boys tend to be better at information retrieval and work-related literacy tasks than girls are

### In terms of attitude:

- ▶ Boys generally provide lower estimations of their reading abilities than girls do
- ▶ Boys value reading as an activity less than girls do
- ▶ Boys have much less interest in leisure reading and are far more likely to read for utilitarian purposes than girls are
- ▶ Significantly more boys than girls declare themselves non-readers
- ▶ Boys spend less time reading and express less enthusiasm for reading than girls do
- ▶ Boys increasingly consider themselves to be nonreaders as they get older; very few designate themselves as such early in their schooling, but nearly 50 percent make that designation by high school

(Adapted from Smith & Wilhelm, 2002, p. 10-11)

So, how might consideration of factors related to *achievement and attitude* influence the development of inclusive literacy practices in *your* school?

Paradoxically, research shows that as teaching strategies improve and distractions decrease, results for both genders increase, with girls benefiting more than boys. Thus the achievement gap may also actually increase, making the closing of this gap a difficult and complex goal.

Research specific to boys' literacy attainment makes clear the need to create inclusive literacy school cultures for *all* students, i.e., boys *and* girls. Promoting and supporting inclusive literacy cultures

is essential for enhancing boy friendly school environments and, thereby, greater learning for all. But how does research on boys' literacy inform inclusive school literacy practices for all?

Figure 1 summarizes some key ideas from our research, and examples of practice across six classroom-based studies. Action/Reflections are also included as starting points to assist in the work of teachers and principals engaged in building inclusive literacy cultures in their own classrooms and schools. The detailed examples of classroom practice that follow describe ways schools and researchers came together to examine issues of gender in education, and

worked towards organizational planning to support all students, across grade levels, as literacy learners. As demonstrated, classroom practice informed by research and school-wide efforts is needed not only to understand the critical nature of recognizing individual differences, but also active acknowledgement of strength in diversity across instructional practices and inclusive school climates:

### 1. Individual Differences, Variety and Plurality: Exploring New Text Forms

A pilot project involving two classes of 30 students, 16 boys and 14 girls in grade nine who demonstrated limited reading proficiency on a battery of state tests, was



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## Literacy

conducted in Tampa, Florida. The school literacy team decided to incorporate a new set of class texts, a series of ten different books with a graphic, magazine-style format and contemporary selections, representing a very different choice compared to the traditional anthologies they had used for the last several decades. Using these books each day, the classes explored the major parts of reading (independently and collectively), vocabulary building (context clues, word attack skills, and other vocabulary strategies), literature circles, writing, and comprehension (using multiple intelligences, written responses, and portfolios). Strategic reading instruction helped students to focus

on specific techniques in order to strengthen comprehension. Interviews were conducted with the school principal, the teacher, and the students asked them to comment about the content, the graphics and formats of the books, the success of the student activities, and the efficacy of the skill-building components of the program. Results of the interviews revealed that the students and staff found the selections engaging, the design of the books invitational, and the activities both useful and interesting to the students. The students (both boys and girls) responded enthusiastically to the books and participated in unprecedented ways. There appeared to be little gendered

differences in the appreciation of the books and selections; for example, the favourite book for both boys and girls was *Martial Arts*.

### 2. What Counts as Literacy? Initiating a Boys' Reading Club: Moving Deeply into Text

In an all boys' school, the grade 7 and 8 language arts teacher organized a volunteer boys' book club to improve their literacy skills and academic self-esteem. This initiative also included the development of an Internet-based literature circle that allowed participants to write responses to the reading material online. Based on students' suggestions, the teacher selected

**FIGURE 1: CONNECTING RESEARCH TO CLASSROOM PRACTICE**

RESEARCH	ACTION/REFLECTION	PRACTICE
1. Individual differences, variety and plurality (Booth & Green, 2009)	How is strength in diversity reflected in policies and practices in our classrooms? Our school?	Exploring new text forms: e.g., a school in Florida purchased a variety of contemporary graphic, magazine-style resources for grade nine students with reading difficulties.
2. "What counts" as literacy? (Rakuc, 2008)	Are changing definitions of literacy and multiple pathways to becoming literate part of program planning at our school?	Initiating a boys' reading club: A teacher organized a volunteer boys' reading club using Internet based literature circles.
3. Re-thinking goals (Crawford, 2009; See also Smith & Wilhelm, 2002; 2006)	How much consideration is given to the <i>What?</i> and <i>Why?</i> of teaching (e.g., curriculum and program planning), and the <i>How?</i> (e.g., teaching styles, inquiry-oriented instruction around essential questions, and effective uses of technology for teaching and learning).	Inquiry as a way of learning: Embedded computer access in a grade six classroom changed the nature of their inquiry projects on social issues.
4. Increasing understandings of the gendered nature of behaviour (Booth, 2009).	What kinds of characteristics are explanatory of boys' engagement with literacy both in and out of our classrooms? Our school?	The voices of boys: in an educational film made by David Booth, twenty-two boys from one urban school, representing grade one through grade six, were interviewed about their literacy lives.
5. Avoiding habitus' (Marshall, 2009; See also Smith & Wilhelm, 2006).	How is this reality taken up and woven into the fabric of the learning environment in contemporary schools and classrooms?	Going graphic in reading and writing: Eighteen grade ten boys, all readers who were experiencing difficulties in literacy, were involved in reading a series of graphic texts.
6. Whole school planning approaches for teaching and learning through a 'gendered lens' (Booth, 2001; See also Spence, 2008)	How do we utilize analyses of performance data? Can we identify practices fostered across all curriculum areas? At all grade levels? Across the broader school community?	Gendered language arts classes: In a grade seven and eight class in an alternative school, the boys and girls were separated by gender for language arts instruction.

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copies of a novel for students to read that allowed for in-depth analysis of social justice issues, as well as issues of masculinity. During weekly lunchtime meetings, the boys talked about the book in an open-ended, natural conversational setting before working online to complete digital elements in the literature circle structure. The graphic novel selected, the use of a literature circle format, and the engagement of technology together provided an entry point for many of the participants, (especially reluctant readers, English language learners, and students with behavioural exceptionalities). By allowing students to read material that appealed to them and to share their ideas with one another in small groups and online, those students who struggled with the classroom language arts program were seen to be able to contribute most to the club. The teacher commented:


*After we completed reading the novel as a group, the students responded to online questions on a website that incorporated elements of a literature circle. As*

*students posted their responses online, other participants read and commented on their peers' work, asking further questions and building upon an exchange of ideas. Students were also encouraged to make contributions to the site and post responses independently throughout the week. The electronic conversation ensued throughout the term with all of the students sharing their responses to the text.*

**3. Rethinking Goals: Inquiry as a Way of Learning**

One grade six class was involved in independent inquiries concerning relevant social issues. The students were involved in most of the decisions that affected their research, working on social issues that concerned them. Embedded computer access changed the whole nature of the inquiry projects. In this classroom, the students shared daily access to laptops as part of a two-for-one laptop program. As with many classrooms across Ontario,

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this group of students was actively engaged in deep inquiry regarding social and global issues; the difference, however, seemed to be in how the students were managing information from their daily Internet access, creating a transformational learning environment. The students chose their own topics; used different research modes and resources; assessed the information they found as critical readers; and prepared and presented their data and findings as professional researchers. The teacher commented:

*Internet research provides opportunities for students to critically evaluate the purpose and validity of texts in ways that more likely reflect real-life experiences with information. With computer access, the students are developing creative and unique ideas and solutions – again, exactly the type of thinking needed in today’s globalized society. Students interpret text and images (video and still) simultaneously....*

Students who choose their inquiry, their goal, and, in many cases, their presentation mode are much more likely to engage and learn in an environment that fosters the skills and strategies that they will need to survive in the world beyond the classroom. Similarly, boys who may be reluctant to engage in learning within the classroom are often involved in their own learning on their own time. At home they seek out scenarios that provide them with the information they want or need outside school – Internet gaming, video games, social networking sites, television, even books – all representing learning that is available to them when they are not in our classrooms.

#### **4. Understanding the Gendered Nature of Literacy Behaviour: The Voices of Boys**

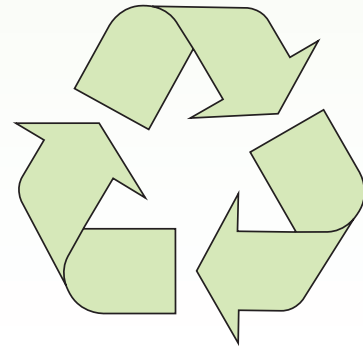
In a recent educational film, twenty-two boys from one urban school, representing grade one through grade six, were interviewed about their literacy lives. The school is a nurturing and exciting community. For example, the library, the computer room,

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Their reading became a social activity as they read a section and moved around to find someone else reading the same section so they could talk about it and share.



the art on the walls, and the collegiality of the teachers all reveal that children thrive in this setting. The school culture welcomes the students, and the students and the teachers define the culture. The literacy coach in the school selected a range of boys with different abilities in order to represent the nature of the student body. The interviewer met the boys one by one and chatted with them about reading, writing, and classroom literacy events. There were no prearranged questions; and the interviewer followed the student leads as topics arose. The issues that emerged from the boys' comments as they talked about their literacy lives offer further insights and information about their attitudes, their choices, and their literacy behaviours that included:

1. Being read to in class by teachers and at night by parents;
2. Visiting the public library every Saturday with friends, playing on the computers and taking out graphic novels and mangas
3. Feeling that boys read adventure books while girls read Barbie stories;
4. Working in the computer room making zines about the Maya;
5. Seeing parents reading newspapers in English and in other languages, as well as books students bring home from the school library;
6. Being allowed to play computer games only on weekends;
7. Writing stories as a group and submitting them to a publisher;
8. Writing book reports every week and finding the activity difficult;
9. Reading the twenty books in different genres needed for the Silver Birch contest.

#### 5. Avoiding 'Habitus': Going Graphic in Reading and Writing

Eighteen boys in Grade 10, all readers who were experiencing many difficulties due to behaviour, absenteeism, or general lack of interest, were involved in reading a series of graphic texts. They began by exploring the various text modes and forms they meet in their lives- newspapers, video games, computer sites, comics, magazines, graphs, charts, billboards, e-mails, textbooks, maps. Engagement was the goal, with graphic novels the key. The concept of the graphic novel was introduced by the teacher with a Power Point presentation on the style, art, terminology, font usage, and sound effects. The teacher then selected the graphic text, *The Pride of Baghdad* by Brian K. Vaughan, artwork by Niko Henrichon. The novel is a short, concise, true account of a series of events that took place in Baghdad in 2003. The United States bombed Baghdad, destroying the Baghdad zoo, killing hundreds of animals and releasing into the streets the ones that survived. The story is told from the point of view of the pride of lions who, at the beginning of the tale, are longing to be free. After the air raid, they escape and are free to roam the streets of Baghdad. Students researched the Internet where they found various news reports, along with statements from some of the American soldiers who lived in the bombed-out zoo for a short time and who were given the task of rounding up the animals. On-line, the boys uncovered a court martial concerning questionable behaviour from one of the soldiers. Students then read the novel at their own pace. Their reading became a social activity as they read a section and moved around to find someone

else reading the same section so they could talk about it and share. Some of the boys attempted drawings while they read. The teacher commented:

*The interaction, the responses, and the readings were successful, and the boys talked about a variety of the situations in the book. Once all of this was over, I sat down and asked them the question: "What is freedom?" The boys found this question difficult to answer given their personal experiences in comparison with the novel. We moved to the computer lab and began research. We researched women's rights in Afghanistan, child labor, and child soldiers from many countries. The boys worked in small groups and informally shared their new learning with the others. Their work in this unit changed their literacy identities, and opened new horizons.*

#### 6. Whole School Planning Approaches: Gendered Language Arts Classes

In a grade 7 and 8 class in an alternative school, boys and girls were separated for Language Arts instruction. In her work with the boys, the teacher had them writing in a variety of modes, especially poetry and script writing. She felt poetry was an effective means for helping them to capture their thoughts and feelings at this stage of adolescence. For example, the emotional swings, the observations of the adult world, the new awareness of strong emotions all seemed to fit inside the shapes of the mentor texts that she modeled and shared with them. The scripting units



resulted in each boy having completed two scripts, one drawn from personal experience, the other a satirical comedy. In the spring, the boys and girls joined together, held readings of their plays with members of the class as actors, selected the six plays that should be produced, rehearsed the productions, and shared the work in an evening of plays attended by parents. At the end of the school year the boys stated they felt their success as writers was aided by the separate literacy classes and that they felt secure as contributors to a class poetry booklet which was distributed at graduation. Every student in the class was represented in the collection with several of their poems.

### Promoting Positive Learning Environments Conducive to Literacy Learning for All

In summary, effective literacy instruction across the curriculum for all students (both boys and girls) must be incorporated into contemporary classroom programs. Educators need to understand and refine relevant research to serve their classroom practices, and authentically model literacy behaviours across school lives. Lehman (2009) emphasizes that

teaching and learning with literature discussions, literature circles, responses to literature, reading aloud, and the integration of nonfiction and multicultural literature selections are all part of successful classroom environments that promote proficient literacy skills and positive attitudes to learning.

Booth & Rowsell (2007) also argue three critical elements need to be in place to support students' work in classroom (and whole school) environments that are conducive to literacy learning:

- 1. Choice and access:** Students must have access to texts, in print and on-line, that they *can* and *want* to read
- 2. Time:** Students require essential *time* to read, to enjoy reading as well as to practice their developing skills and strategies – both at home and at school.
- 3. Reading instruction:** *Teachers need to teach reading.* Systematic, direct and focused instruction at all grade levels should include how to choose texts, how to become fluent and expressive readers who *understand* what they are reading and can talk about it when they do not. With

proficient instruction and time to read, all students – boys *and* girls – will have opportunities to continue growing and developing as readers (and writers).

### Towards More Inclusive Approaches to Developing Literacy: “On your Marks, Get Set.... Go!”

In summary, increased knowledge and awareness of the fundamental issues related to boys' literacy attainment and the need to champion more inclusive approaches to developing school literacy suggest the question: How might findings from the kinds of research discussed here be used in *my* school to further, to inform, and to enhance the development of more effective classroom practice and student learning? Perhaps an idea or two presented here will inspire a starting point! **CJ**

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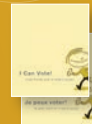
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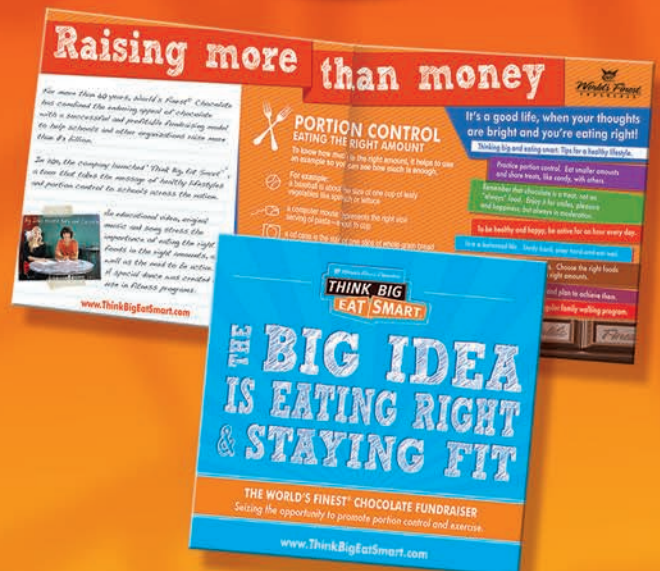
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<sup>1</sup> September 2010 Ipsos Reid poll of 1300+ adults (including 500 parents of children aged 4-13).  
<sup>2</sup> Survey of Nutritional Professionals. An online survey of 450 registered dietitians (RD) by the Hershey Center for Health & Nutrition.  
<sup>3</sup> "British Medical Journal", chocolate consumption and cardiometabolic disorders, 7 studies, involving 114,009 people, studies up to Oct. 2010.