FROM INTEGRATION TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: DOES CHANGING THE TERMS IMPROVE PRACTICE?

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Educating students with special needs in regular schools

This article was well-written and inspiring. The author clearly lays out his purpose from the beginning: to clarify the difference between integration and inclusion, and to make a case for inclusion.
To help clarify the definition of the two terms, Thomazet gives a brief history of special education in the USA so the reader will understand how the different models of delivery arose, and why integration is not the best approach. He then makes a compelling argument for adopting the term “inclusive education” as a completely different philosophical approach to the education of children with special needs.
“With this approach, it is not the child who is included but the school and the teaching which are inclusive. The special needs are therefore no longer those of the child, but those of the school, and thus go beyond the limits of integration.”

(Thomazet, 2009, p. 553)
France

- **1970s** – official priority to educating children in an ordinary context – “integration”
- **1980** – practical application of this principle
- today, special schools remain

Quebec

- **1970s** – closed most special schools
- in reality, admission to regular school - a special section of a school

Purpose: to give all children as “ordinary” an education as possible
Wolfensberger and Thomas (1983)

**3 Models of Integration**

**Physical integration** – students with special needs have a place within the school but still segregated from the rest of the students;

**Pedagogic integration** – students with special needs are present in the regular classroom, take part in the regular curriculum, but there may be adaptations or modifications to the objectives;

**Social integration** – lying somewhere between the other two models, social integration involves the students with special needs mixing with the “typical” student population during non-academic activities, such as clubs.
To illustrate the different forms of education programs for children with special needs, Thomazet then gives a brief outline of special needs education in the USA during the transition from segregation to inclusive education. In the 1970s, US federal government was not concerned with education for students with special needs (SN) – being the responsibility of the states, education was not the domain of the federal government. Civil rights were, however, but at this time there was no constitutional guarantee of free, accessible education for all. Because of this, more than one million children with SN did not attend school in 1973.
In 1975 Congress passed a law – The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) – this was to ensure that all children had the right to a free education in the least restrictive environment possible. Though ostensibly this meant that children with special needs were to be educated in regular classrooms, the key term was “the least restrictive environment possible”.
Outcomes of EHA

- environment as ordinary as *possible*
- integrated *when able to follow the regular curriculum*
- dependent on fitting the child to the program

In practise, the children were integrated when they were able to follow the regular curriculum. The focus of the programs was on fitting the child with SN to the curriculum rather than adapting classrooms for differentiated learning.
What arose was a form of integration that Thomazet calls “mainstream-integration.” In other words, children were mainstreamed into regular classrooms for the activities they could do with the other children, and the rest of the program was integration — a pull-out teaching program that was housed in the school but separate from the regular classrooms. Children with SN also had dual IEPs that outlined their goals in each of the areas.
Time for a change!

The mainstream-integration model was followed until the mid-1980s, however Thomazet reports that it did not make any progress in improving integration, nor did it show positive learning outcomes for the children involved.
In 1985, Madeleine Will, US Assistant Secretary of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, presented at a conference on special needs programs. Thomazet mentions her presentation briefly in his paper but with little detail. In 1986, the year after her presentation, Madeleine Will published a summary paper outlining the conclusions from the conference. In it she listed the weaknesses of the existing pull-out system (see above) and made suggestions to improve the education system for children with special needs (next slide).
Her suggestions:

- building-level administrators empowered to assemble teams
- coordinated services *based on need*, not eligibility
- supported experimental trials in classrooms
- parents who function as informed parties to decision-making
- curriculum-based assessment

“In classes with individualized programs, momentary learning problems are not viewed as failures but rather as opportunities for further instruction.”

(Will, 1986, p. 414)
1986

Regular Education Initiative (REI)

A movement that recommended the fusion of special education and ordinary education

“Some go so far as to say,... that pupils who have special needs are the product of a traditional school programme which is incapable of adaptation.”

(Thomazet, 2009, p. 555)
Mid 1980s

Appearance of the term “inclusion”

*change the student* → *change the schools*

1990

Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) - Revised 1997 & 2004

*Movement toward having all children educated in increasingly “normal” settings.*

UNESCO followed suit in 1994 with a statement that it was necessary for special needs education to form part of an overall education strategy that would require a major reform of ordinary schools.
Guiding principles that arose for inclusive education:

- school is a place for all children
- inclusive practices better meet the needs of ALL students
- process leads schools to seek effective practises
  e.g. project-based learning
  universal design

Researchers from other countries, including Canada, joined the debate, and slowly came to agree on a number of guiding principles for inclusive education.
Ethically, it is the right thing to do. We need to practise what we teach.

- democracy
- equal rights

After clarifying the difference between mainstream-integration and inclusion, Thomazet explains why inclusion should be embraced by educators. First, he writes, it is the right thing to do. As educators, we cannot give lip service to democracy and equal rights in schools while modeling something completely different.
WHY Inclusion?

It is time to work on structural changes for the school system.

• move from 20th to 21st century model

“It is indeed paradoxical that school which should be a preparation for entering life and society is often less open than society itself.” (Thomazet, 2009, p. 559)

His second argument reflects a growing debate in education related to moving away from the 20th century model of education, the hallmarks of which are standardized testing, lock-step, compartmentalized instruction, and grouping children by age rather than needs. Those that argue against the 20th century model believe that it is an artificial system that is entirely unlike real life and which, for a number of children, is a recipe for failure. The model has not kept up with the legislated reforms of education. Schools are essentially working with the same basic model with costly and ineffective “add-ons” to accommodate the new legislated expectations.
WHY Inclusion?

Stop ‘medicalizing’ people’s differences.

- group according to learning needs, not by diagnosis

Thomazet’s third argument is that educators need to stop ‘medicalizing’ people’s differences. The pathway for parents to receive support for their children with developmental disabilities is through the doctor’s office, as if their different learning needs constitute a medical condition. The label given to the children is a diagnosis, which is the only way to qualify for funding. However, the labels do not come with a recipe for how best to support the child’s learning, so a parent’s next step is to take the child to a psychologist for more assessments of their weaknesses. Thomazet sensibly argues that children should be grouped according to their learning needs, not by their diagnosis. Children who share the same diagnosis can have vastly different learning needs. This is certainly noticeable among children with autism, who range from completely non-communicative to highly functioning and gifted. There may be a common repertoire of behaviours and deficits, however the particular collection of needs, and the degree of support required, is different for every child.
WHY Inclusion?

Children learn to accept differences.

- normalize diversity
- maybe we can stop telling kids “it gets better”

“...education cannot be allowed to portray an image of society which excludes, if not in speech, at least in deed.”

(Thomazet, 2009, p. 559)
WHY Inclusion?

New model will better serve the learning needs of all children.

Thomazet’s final argument for inclusion is that this model will better serve the learning needs of all children. Once educators become accustomed to differentiating their teaching practices, they will come to realize that there are no “average” children – all have unique strengths and weaknesses, and an inclusive model helps to provide a supportive learning environment for everyone, whether the needs involve added support or enrichment.
This article was extremely valuable in clarifying the different models of special education and some of the history of their development. Though the focus was primarily on the history as it took place in the United States, the articles covered in this course have outlined some similar struggles in Canada. Certainly in the province of BC there exists special education in all its forms, however this article provides a convincing argument for pursuing a more inclusive model as the standard.

Thomazet’s article is clearly designed to persuade the reader that inclusion is a better way to educate all children. He develops a compelling case for inclusion as the morally superior approach to education. Some concerns raised by those working in the public school system while considering the adoption of this approach include cost, training, and flexibility of teachers. Their concerns are valid. Other barriers to the adoption of a fully inclusive model include large class-sizes, inadequate training of teachers to effectively work with children with special needs, inadequate resources, inflexible classroom placement, lock-step instruction, and staffing according to seniority rather than finding the best fit between the support person and the child. Thomazet does not address the logistics of inclusion. Rather his purpose appeared to be aimed more at adjusting society’s value system around education in the hope that this will lead those in power to make the changes necessary to make inclusion possible.