

# **Inclusion in British Columbia's public schools: Always a journey, never a destination?**

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**Paper presented at the Canadian Teachers' Federation conference,**

***Building Inclusive Schools: A Search for Solutions***

**November 17–19, 2005**

**Ottawa, ON**



# Inclusion in British Columbia's public schools: Always a journey, never a destination?

Some sense of the disparate views on both the concept and the success of inclusion in Canadian public schools can be gained from the following quotes:

“So when we talk about an inclusive school system, or inclusion, we are not referring to a specific program, service, or methodology. We are referring to a school system that in both its design and its effect continually strives to ensure that each student has access to and is enabled to participate in the school community, to be part of the community in positive and reinforcing ways and whose identity is reflected in the operations of the school community.”

(MacKay & Burt-Garrans, 2004, p. 6)

“There is no longitudinal, validated research available that full inclusion can provide superior services for all children with disabilities regardless of the nature of the disability. There is, indeed, much research to the contrary.”

(Henteleff, 2004, p. 6)

“My view is society is fragmented and people's commitment to common values is weakening. It's happening in schools. You've got financial cutbacks and all sorts of diversity and stress, and all of those things conspire to make people kind of jittery, and look at each other funny.”

(School administrator, quoted in Gaskell, 2001, p. 21)

“The question must be posed: are we prepared to support the learning success of those who struggle most within the systems we have created? Unfortunately, the dream of having an individually appropriate education is still elusive to most and despite the rhetoric of inclusion of students who are at-risk, the reality is that we still have a long way to go before these students are truly, authentically included in our schools and our communities.”

(Lupart & Odishaw, 2003, p. 12)

“Well it (inclusion) hasn't worked. Classrooms are disrupted, teachers are stressed and students who need help don't get it. The BCTF won't say anything, and neither will the government, for fear of being accused of being callous and indifferent to special needs students. As far as I am concerned, the school system has given the mainstream model a fair chance. It doesn't work. Time to try the alternative.”

(Ian Cameron, *Victoria Times Colonist*, September 23, 2005)

Wayne MacKay and Yude Henteleff spoke at the same conference in Ottawa in November, 2004. Their comments and papers illustrate the contested perspectives concerning the desirability and feasibility of maximizing inclusion in Canadian schools. MacKay expresses an ideal of inclusion that is not shared by Henteleff, who argues for a range of services, including separate provision. The school administrator quoted by Gaskell (2001) reflects a perception that common values were breaking down in a fragmented society where inadequate funding exacerbated

divisions and suspicions, a context unlikely to promote inclusionary values and philosophies, which rely to some extent on greater social cohesion and acceptance.

Lupart & Odishaw, having reviewed the evolution of services to students after decades of inclusion, remain pessimistic that authentic inclusion is a pervasive reality in Canadian school systems. Cameron argues for the dismantling of inclusionary practices and approaches, with separate classes for students with special needs, while at the same time describing a teacher union stance which appears to be a figment of his imagination and bears no resemblance to any documented policy or position.

These authors collectively provoke the question: is it possible to consider whether the goal of inclusion can be achieved, or is it such contested territory that we may describe various views of the journey to date but argue that the destination will never be reached

This paper will explore this question by considering seven areas discussed in the literature on inclusion in Canadian schools, each of which provides information and a basis for analysis on the progress towards the destination of inclusion.

While much of the literature and data referenced in this paper have been collected from sources across Canada and internationally, and apply in varying degrees in different contexts, the seventh section, on funding and accountability, relies more heavily on B.C. data, and there are no assumptions that the arguments made about B.C. in this section apply in other provinces or countries. However, B.C. legislation and funding decisions since 2002 are so significant in terms of their impact on inclusion that any emulation may have similar impacts if applied in other Canadian provinces.

## 1. The history and evolution of Inclusion

Andrews & Lupart (2000) describe a series of changes in societal thinking and education systems over two centuries that have evolved to the development of the philosophy of inclusion promoted currently in many Canadian school systems. They describe the *institutionalization* of the 19th century accompanied by a medical model of diagnosis and referral, followed by a period between 1900 and 1950 where *segregated schooling* became the norm. They describe an increase in *categorization* in the 1950s and '60s, separating high and low incidence categories, with most of the students categorized as low incidence still being educated separately, and high incidence students educated in separate classes but not separate schools. Subsequent shifts in thinking came with notions of *integration* (1970s), stressing education in the least restrictive environments, while *mainstreaming* (1980s) promoted the placement of high incidence students in regular classes. They consider inclusion to have emerged more commonly in the 1990s, where all students are included in the full range of academic and social aspects of neighbourhood schools.

Lupart & Webber (2002) note the movement toward what they state as 'progressive inclusion' in a context of school reforms. They argue that school reforms in the 1980s and 1990s were dominated by beliefs in the value of competition, where efficiency and measurable outcomes became priorities. Thus they believe that the move toward inclusion coincided with pressure for success measured in outcomes often reflected in standardized tests. System accountability, therefore, appeared linked more to outcomes which many students with disabilities might not attain, an argument explored by Froese-Germain (2004):

“When accountability is reduced to measuring, comparing and ranking students, teachers and schools on the basis of test results, special needs and other

vulnerable students suffer most because they end up essentially being treated as academic liabilities.” (p. 5)

The evolution of inclusive education and the dichotomy between ‘excellence’ and ‘equity’ have been explored by Lupart (1999), who identifies five factors that have limited progress toward full inclusion:

- separation of ‘regular’ and ‘special’ education
- top-down, quick-fix changes and reforms which have included minimal consultation with educators in schools
- conflicting perspectives on what would improve schools
- simplistic beliefs that support for the philosophy of inclusion readily translates into classroom practice
- the need to end the isolation of, and non-communication between, general and Special Education teachers.

The exploration of ‘excellence’ and ‘equity’ is important in considering the evolution of inclusion, because inclusion stresses equity and the academic and social development of all students in schools. The argument for ‘excellence,’ in contrast, has arguably focused on developing a meritocracy, where some students succeed while others fail. Accountability systems that promote ‘excellence’ may limit support for inclusion because many students with exceptionalities will not reach the standards required. This may be an oversimplification of what exists in most Canadian provinces, which generally attempt to address both sides of the excellence/equity dilemma.

A new perspective on this debate can be found in the literature that considers the economic and social needs of post-industrial societies in the 21st century. Some of this literature can be found in publications from international organizations (OECD, 2003), from national organizations with an economic orientation (Conference Board of Canada, 2003), with a pan-Canadian (CMEC, 2003) or national focus on educational issues such as that in England and Wales (OFSTED, 2004), and from authors writing for organizations with an overtly inclusive and national Canadian agenda (Bach, 2000; Crawford & Porter, 2004) who are collectively and increasingly using the ‘societal needs’ argument in addition to a long-standing focus on human rights. The argument is that for economies to prosper, all human capital should be mobilized effectively, not just that human capital which tops a meritocratic hierarchy. In addition to the economic focus, a second argument is made that to promote and develop civil societies in increasingly diverse and predominantly large urban communities, there must be respect for the wide range of diversity. Such respect addresses issues of race, gender, sexual orientation, and exceptionality, and implies inclusion of all. As one example, the development and maintenance of multilingual capacity builds both respect for diversity as a social goal, but may also promote international trade.

One other connected strand of literature also implicitly addresses the issue of inclusion, while addressing the economic and social needs of societies. This is the literature on Multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996). This literature argues that for post-industrial economies in a globalized world, with massive changes in technology and communications, there exists both the necessity and considerable opportunities to build on the assets of diversity to address both economic and social needs. Such needs might be met by a changed focus on curriculum and new pedagogical approaches, perhaps epitomized by the ‘New Basics’ curriculum developed in Australia (Kalantzis et al, 2003). While the Multiliteracies literature’s emphasis in terms of diversity has largely been cultural and linguistic, their concept might easily incorporate a

consideration of the issue of inclusion of students with exceptionalities. Some evidence that this focus can be realistically incorporated has emerged in the SSHRC-funded project “From literacy to multiliteracies: Designing learning environments for knowledge generation in the new economy.” Within this project, research groups (Fowler et al, 2005) have explored approaches where visuals and technology are being utilized to include a wide range of students in learning. These case studies reflect a view that all students can learn if approaches respect the diversity of learners’ needs and utilize pedagogical methods that engage all students.

No Canadian province has a fully inclusionary system of education, and Porter (2004) estimated that 40% of students with intellectual disabilities were still educated in special classes or segregated schools. British Columbia legislation does not mandate full integration in all situations (Lupart & Pierce, 2003), but places the expectation on school boards that they will place students in integrated settings “unless the educational needs of the student with special needs indicate that the educational program for the student with special needs should be provided otherwise.” (B.C. Ministerial Order 150/89, the Special Needs Students Order). Pudlas (2001) reviewed the evolution of services for students with exceptional needs in B.C.’s education system from the founding of a school for the deaf in 1888 to the report of the Special Education Review by Siegel & Ladyman (2000), arguing that “resistance to and misunderstanding of inclusion remains.” (p. 42) Wiener & Siegel’s (1992) paper provided a historical overview of learning disabilities in Canada, finding both positive and problematic service levels for students with learning disabilities.

A 2002 research project focusing on inclusive educational approaches in two B.C. school districts was conducted by the B.C. Teachers’ Federation<sup>1</sup>. This research produced 45 reports which combined a range of data collection and reporting: historical trends and evolution of services; enrolment and staffing data; teacher and parent perceptions reported in focus groups and surveys; and case studies of schools and teacher roles. This research identified an educational system struggling to meet exceptional students’ needs, a situation exacerbated but not solely caused by the incumbent government’s actions, which reduced spending and staffing in areas of Special Education, Learning Assistance, and ESL.

## **2. The legal context of Inclusion**

MacKay & Burt-Gerrans (2004) outline the four areas of the legal framework relating to disability and education: the Canadian Constitution (and in particular the Charter of Rights and Freedoms); provincial education statutes; provincial human rights legislation; and judicial interpretation of each of the above areas. They argue that a variety of court cases have stressed the need for individual student accommodation, with expectations that school districts will remove systemic barriers to such accommodation. But the authors argue that the legislation and ‘marathon’ court cases have not clarified the legal responsibility of school districts to provide inclusive educational approaches:

“While special needs programming has come through a marathon of court cases and tribunal hearings as well as a barrage of new language and commitments to equality, the path for governments is still mired in uncertainty and, what some might call, a hazy fog.” (p. 31)

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.bctf.ca/education/InclusiveEd/ResearchProject/>

Mackay & Burt-Gerrans use the metaphor of a lighthouse beam penetrating the fog to analyze the progress towards inclusion. They state that the beam produces both glare and reflection. The glare (perhaps epitomized by parent and advocate calls for individual accommodation) is, they believe, much more visible than the reflection, which reveals “barriers inherent in the operations of societal institutions” such as schools which, they suggest, are not primarily designed to include all students. While the glare has been the greater focus of analysis and debate, they convincingly argue that the systemic structures and processes require greater focus and consideration if the journey towards full inclusion is to be completed.

A very different analysis of the legal context is provided by Henteleff (2004). Before examining legal decisions and history, Henteleff argues that full inclusion is a discriminatory concept, because it limits the choices concerning placement and approach that some people with disabilities may wish to make. He argues that separate provision of educational services can in some cases provide a better option than full inclusion, especially in educational systems where optimal levels of training, conditions, and funding are rarely adequately realized. His analysis includes a consideration of both systemic factors and “clusters of educational expertise” which he believes necessary to make inclusion a reality. He provides four systemic factors that he considers crucial to the success of inclusive approaches:

- manageable class size
- adapted curriculum to meet diverse needs
- pre-service teacher training and in-service
- availability of specialists to support classroom teachers.

In addition, Henteleff lists the six clusters of educational expertise required by every classroom teacher that he also believes necessary to achieve success:

- full comprehension of exceptional conditions and appropriate accommodations to meet such conditions
- ability to apply Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and to function within the system that creates them
- skills in managing students in complex activities and through transitions
- skills in making systematic observations of students and in making appropriate referrals
- expertise in creating social structures in classrooms appropriate to diverse needs
- understanding of family dynamics and capacity to interact with parents.

He also references a range of research that supports the continuation and utility of ‘pull-out’ services for students, especially for those with learning disabilities. Henteleff states that Canadian courts have supported this argument, in cases such as *Eaton v. Brant County Board of Education*, where the Supreme Court justice stated that:

“Disability as a prohibitive ground differs from enumerated grounds such as race or sex, because there is no individual variation with respect to these latter grounds. Disability means vastly different things, however, depending on the individual and the context. This produces amongst other things the ‘difference dilemma’ whereby segregation can be both protective of equality and violative of equality, depending on the persons and the state of disability.” (p. 8)

In other words, separate provision can be discriminatory but it need not be, depending on what services are required for a given area of disability. Henteleff offers three reasons why inclusion has been promoted while the courts have allowed for separate provision in appropriate

circumstances. The first concerns what he believes to be confusion about the meaning of equality, where inclusion is synonymous with equality in the view of its proponents. The second deals with what he believes to be the mistaken assumption that inclusion is the only way to achieve social integration. His third argument for the promotion of inclusion concerns fiscal savings that he argues accrue to governments if they provide inclusive services.

Both MacKay's and Henteleff's papers illustrate that there are disparate views about inclusion within what might be termed the 'disability community' – those with disabilities in receipt of services, and/or their families, and the community organizations that advocate on their behalf. One group, perhaps represented by national and provincial Community Living organizations, argues vehemently for inclusion as a fundamental human right and supports litigants' law suits in pursuit of such rights. A second group, represented in part by those supporting students with learning disabilities, argues that the very goal of the proponents of inclusion contravenes their fundamental right to access separate educative services.

### **3. Educational and social benefits for students because of Inclusion**

The literature concerning educational and social benefits of including students with special needs in general education classrooms has been extensively reviewed in two papers by Katz & Mirinda (2002a, 2002b). In terms of educational benefits for students with special needs in inclusive settings, they found positive effects for inclusive settings compared to separate provision, with more engaged behaviour leading to improved gains seen in inclusive rather than separate settings, a finding supported by Willms (2002) but challenged by Heath et al (2004), who argue that much of the research claiming benefits for students with behavioural difficulties from inclusion is "outdated or methodologically problematic." (p. 242) Katz & Mirinda also found no evidence that students without special needs were impacted negatively by the inclusion of students with special needs. They identified seven instructional contexts and teaching techniques as promoting academic achievement in inclusive classrooms: instructional arrangements; co-operative learning/peer tutoring; instructional adaptations; parallel or differentiated instruction; collaborative planning; curriculum and performance-based assessment; and community instruction. They argue that "a large body of research has identified effective instructional options for inclusive classrooms," intimating that it is not the lack of knowledge about appropriate strategies that is at the root of any dilemma with successful implementation of inclusive settings.

In terms of the social benefits, they conclude that substantial evidence exists that social benefits accrue to all students in inclusive settings, particularly in terms of social and communication skills, friendship networks, and parent and community attitudes. However, a more critical analysis of social acceptance of students with disabilities by non-disabled peers was conducted by Sparling (2002). Her review of existing literature found greater acceptance by peers in elementary schools than in secondary settings. She found that limited acceptance was influenced by the nature of the disability, lack of knowledge about disabilities, peer pressure, school and community culture, and teacher attitude. In B.C., teachers reported positive attitudes among all students towards students with exceptionalities (Naylor, 2002), and reported positive academic benefits for students with special needs but in narrower ranges of subject areas:

“They (teachers) reported evolving attitudes in the general student population towards students with special needs, specifically greater levels of acceptance,



understanding, and empathy. Improved social benefits for students with special needs were also identified, particularly in terms of peer interactions. Improved academic attainment was identified, but to a lesser extent, and often in subjects such as Art, Music, and Physical Education.”

#### **4. Pre-service and in-service training for teachers to support Inclusive approaches**

While the issue of teacher preparation for inclusive classrooms has been addressed by a number of authors who consistently describe the inadequacy of teacher preparation for inclusive classrooms, there appears to have been little if any response to their arguments by the Canadian institutions that prepare teachers. The Roeher Institute (2004) describes the haphazard nature of teacher training for teachers preparing to work in inclusive settings, with most teacher training institutions providing an elective option dealing with inclusionary issues and practices, a finding supported by Timmins (2004). In Lupart & Webber’s (2002) historical review on Canadian inclusionary trends they state:

“As general education began to shift towards these more inclusionary practices, it became increasingly apparent that regular classroom teachers and administrators were insufficiently prepared and ill-equipped to effect the multidimensional and complex changes that inclusive education reformers had envisioned.” (p. 18)

Stanovich & Jordan (2002) argue that “many teachers who are currently teaching in such (inclusive) classrooms have not been prepared to meet the challenges they face on a daily basis.” (p. 173) Similarly, Pudlas (2001) argues that “many teachers currently in the public system have not had formal education in working with students with special needs.” (p. 43) Martin et al (2003), somewhat more optimistically, describe teacher education programs where teachers-in-training successfully adapted both teaching and assessment to meet the needs of diverse learners, but only in one university. While such progress was possible, however, no evidence was provided that such approaches were common in teacher training institutions. Similarly, Winzer (2002) developed pre-service training that used student portfolios to examine disabilities through critical analysis of prevailing social perceptions. The work of Martin et al and Winzer offers two glimpses of initiatives that can be productive in pre-service teacher education, but they are limited examples of effective pre-service preparation for teaching in inclusive settings. Timmins (2004) offers five areas of focus for pre-service preparation for teaching in inclusive school systems, arguing that teacher education programs need to:

- deal with attitudinal barriers
- look at role models
- challenge assumptions and perceptions
- focus on problem-solving
- promote collaborative practice
- illustrate that inclusive practice is excellent teaching.

These reviews indicate that in Canada, pre-service teacher training for teaching in inclusive classrooms is inadequate. Little wonder, then, with a comprehensive exposure to inclusive teaching approaches being so limited in many Canadian teacher-training institutions, that the journey toward inclusion is ongoing rather than realized.

However, regardless of the argued inadequacy of teacher training, few would dispute that pre-service training alone cannot fully prepare all teachers for inclusive classrooms. While some awareness of diversity, and perhaps knowledge of adaptation and other approaches, may be of utility, teachers also require in-service to teach to diverse needs. Jordan & Stanovich (2001) argue that successful inclusion depends on teaching approaches, not just placement of students with special needs in a classroom. Their argument stresses the need to create space for individual interactions with students, with adapted instruction being critical. However, adaptations are rarely addressed either in teacher professional development or in teacher training programs.

Stanovich & Jordan (2004) outline four premises forming a rationale for ongoing teacher professional development linked to inclusion:

- inclusion is a world-wide phenomenon and is not a passing fad
- classroom teachers are key to the successful inclusion of students with disabilities
- successful learning in inclusive classrooms rests on foundational principles of effective teaching
- professional development can be a major benefit for the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms.

Pivotal to Stanovich & Jordan's argument is the claim that teachers can take greater responsibility for all students without workload increases, but that an attitudinal shift is required toward understanding that it is the responsibility of teachers to meet the needs of all students. They differentiate this from what they consider to be many teachers' current beliefs that knowledge of approaches to teaching to diversity requires additional knowledge to their existing knowledge about teaching. Thus they argue that all students are different in terms of learning needs, and a range of approaches is required to meet such differences. This reflects not additional but core knowledge about teaching. Appropriate approaches might include universal design for learning<sup>2</sup> and differentiated instruction.

Jordan (2001) also argues that resources provided by governments for teacher training and in-service are inadequate to effectively build system capacity to meet diverse learners' needs. Jordan's promotion of the allocation of money to support the placement and training of resource teachers<sup>3</sup> has been widely ignored by governments, and an opposite direction taken by the British Columbia government. This is reflected in reduced numbers of resource-teachers and a significant exodus of experienced resource teachers from their support role and into classroom teaching positions. One B.C. teacher described<sup>4</sup> what she saw occurring in her school district following the government funding and contract changes of 2002:

“The impacts on the role of the Specialist Support Teachers are considerable, and should be of great concern to district and provincial policy-makers if such policy-makers have any interest in maintaining the province's inclusionary policy. Inclusion needs Specialist Support Teachers who understand the philosophy and practices of inclusion, so that they can directly teach students and support the work of classroom teachers, while also carrying out roles in assessment, collaborative planning, and communication with parents. Provincial government

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.cast.org/teachingeverystudent/ideas/tes/>

<sup>3</sup> The term 'resource teachers' is used here to identify those teachers with specialized training and knowledge of inclusive approaches. They work in support of classroom teachers while also providing direct service to students. In B.C., this includes Special Education, Learning Assistance, and ESL teachers.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.bctf.ca/education/InclusiveEd/challenge/>

decisions that have a negative impact on the specialists' ability to perform these roles mean that less inclusion will occur. The only alternative to providing effective specialist support in Special Education, ESL, and Learning Assistance, is that every classroom teacher be fully prepared for and capable of teaching to a huge range of diversity. There is no evidence that this preparation and capacity currently exist.”

## **5. The centrality of the teacher in making Inclusion a success**

There is considerable evidence of general teacher support for the philosophy of inclusion (King & Edmonds, 2001; Naylor, 2002, 2004; Pudlas, 2003; Martinez, 2004). However, such support is matched with a view among teachers that current preparation and training are inadequate for teaching in inclusive schools – 43% of a sample of B.C. teachers reported that they felt unprepared to teach to the diverse range of students in their classrooms (Naylor, 2002). Teachers also believe that resources to support inclusion are inadequate, a belief supported by a considerable body of evidence, some from the B.C. government's own review, and referenced in this paper.

Teacher attitudes and capacity are crucial to the success of inclusive education in B.C. These have been negatively affected by what many teachers believe to be poor teacher preparation, even though inclusive education is mandated by government policy. And the resources to implement such policies have been reduced or removed by the very government that set the policies. Issues such as increasing class size affect teachers' capacity to include all students in learning (Henteleff, 2004), while an absence of parameters on class composition has led to over-representation of students with special needs in elective classes such as Art and Music. Such themes were reported by Nanaimo classroom teachers in a focus group session<sup>5</sup> in 2002:

“One teacher described a class of 34 students, significantly more than last year, and how such a number forced changes in pedagogical approaches: ‘You just can't do some things in a class of 34 that you could do with a smaller class.’ For teachers in Science labs, there were dramatic changes, with ‘much less hands-on,’ and more demonstrations by the teacher. For those subject areas named by one participant as the ‘soft’ sciences, such changes were major. ‘Soft’ sciences were defined as elective Science courses with a less-academic focus. With more students in the labs, safety was an increased risk factor. One participant said that when additional students with special needs were ‘packed in’ to such classes, as they had been this school year, both pedagogy and safety suffered, and the needs of students with special needs were less successfully met than in previous years. Students with special needs were included in such electives because of the electives' reduced academic content. But with smaller classes they were also engaged in the ‘hands-on’ nature of the courses (where students conducted experiments in labs, for example) that was appropriate to their needs. By increasing the numbers of students overall, and the numbers of students with special needs, the ‘hands-on’ attraction of the courses for such students has been reduced. In the view of these teachers, changing the class composition by increasing the numbers of students with special needs is therefore reducing the

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.bctf.ca/education/InclusiveEd/ResearchProject/fg/NanClassroomTeachers.html>

quality of education for the students and forcing the teacher to change teaching styles.”

There are copious amounts of literature informing teachers how to include all students, but minimal support to help them do the job. While the knowledge base about inclusive educational practice widens, and while inclusionary policies in B.C. have remained constant for almost twenty years, supports for teachers appear to be in decline in British Columbia, for the reasons stated above. In addition to funding and legislated contract changes that reduced staffing and resources for inclusion, the government also disbanded the Ministry of Education Special Programs Branch, with the result that provincial support declined for teachers in terms of web publication and other ways of disseminating information.

Jordan & Stanovich (2001), Crawford & Porter (2004), and the Roeher Institute (2004) all state that the classroom teacher is pivotal to the success or failure of inclusion. This notion, while never overtly challenged, is being undermined throughout the B.C. K-12 public education system. Pre-service training is inadequate and unfocused, so that many teachers commence their careers unprepared to teach to the diversity in their classrooms. Specialist teacher support for classroom teachers, and the capacity of specialists providing direct service to students, has been sharply reduced in B.C., while increased class size makes every teacher’s job more difficult and complex. Both of these factors make successful inclusion less likely, because larger class size reduces time spent on individual students, and because less specialist support reduces the capacity of classroom teachers to effectively include all students. Access to in-service for teachers is limited, and in-service focusing on inclusive approaches is only one possible choice in a bewildering range of options.

In B.C., school districts’ networking and collaborative documentation/dissemination is minimal, and has not replaced the publication or dissemination role once played by the now-defunct Special Programs Branch. While a policy of inclusion is still officially the B.C. provincial norm, the key supports for the classroom teachers who must make it work are being eroded or dismantled by decisions made largely at the provincial level.

The Roeher Institute (2004) report outlines key supports needed by classroom teachers:

- vision and clear mandate
- legislation, policy and guidelines
- linking policy to practice
- leadership
- advocacy
- resource allocation and use
- best practices for classroom inclusion
- professional development
- partnership, teamwork and collaboration
- public awareness and discourse
- knowledge base for practices.

The Roeher document outlines areas of support possible from provincial governments, ministries, school districts, teacher associations and other educational stakeholders. However, few in B.C. would argue that current structures match or even closely resemble the recommended key areas of support. This reflects one of the major issues of inclusion in B.C. today: while policies mandate inclusionary approaches, there is a shift of provincial government

resources and support away from the staffing, structures, and the knowledge-sharing that would encourage and develop inclusive approaches in schools.

## **6. Parents' and student advocacy groups' perspectives on Inclusion**

From the perspective of most parents of students with special needs, and the advocacy organizations that represent them, there would likely be consensus that the destination of a successful inclusionary educational system has not been reached (Malcolmson, 2003), although pockets of success are recognized.

In a study conducted by the B.C. Teachers' Federation in 2002<sup>6</sup>, the views of parents of students with special needs in the school system were collected in focus-group sessions. Their views reflect long-standing concerns about the capacity of the education system to educate their children, as stated in one focus group's summary statements:

- initially, parents had faith that the school system would provide appropriate education for their children, but they became disillusioned with the system over time
- parents recognized that a number of educators provided successful and appropriate learning experiences, as well as a welcoming environment, for their child
- all the parents stated that their children's positive educational experiences in schools were limited or isolated
- from the parents' point of view, relationships between parents and school staff were often strained and difficult
- diagnostic testing was often difficult to obtain from the educational system
- parents often considered reporting processes to be problematic and inappropriate
- parents increasingly used private services, because supports in the public education system were either unavailable or were seen as not meeting their children's needs
- parents expressed concerns about the IEP process, and aspects of programming after the IEP was written
- parents felt that they faced a form of systemic resistance to their efforts to address the issues of programming, staffing, and communication.

These views likely indicate that the journey towards inclusion has already been long and problematic, and for many parents the destination of acceptable inclusion will not be reached in time for their children. While different interpretations of the focus-group data are possible, parents generally indicated that there were systemic issues that negatively impacted the full inclusion of their children into schools:

“The comments provided by the participants in this focus group reflect the perspectives of a committed group of parent advocates. As such they may not be reflective of the ‘average’ parent, should such a person exist. But as activists, they have much to offer in their views and understanding of the education system. Most appeared to have started their connection with the school system when their child entered school, with hope and trust, both of which dissipated either rapidly or over time. Gradually they became more assertive, more networked, and more knowing of how the system worked. They engaged with teachers, Administrative

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.bctf.ca/education/InclusiveEd/ResearchProject/>

Officers, Special Education Assistants, offering support, ideas, and challenges. They accessed district staff and used appeal processes when they believed either to be necessary. Their perspective is that there have been systemic problems with the inclusion of their children in public schools for many years, but they are particularly worried now in terms of whether the goal of an inclusive education system is slipping further from reach.” (Naylor, 2002)

## 7. Funding, systemic support, and accountability issues affecting Inclusion

Crawford (2005) discusses the “inadequacy of resource allocation” (p. 20) in Canada for inclusive education, a perspective expressed in B.C. by the government’s own review of Special Education (Siegel & Ladyman, 2000), reported in Perry et al (2001):

“Siegel and Ladyman (2000), in their recent review of special education in B.C., indicate that B.C. has a history of under-serving exceptional students. In 1987, the ministry provided special education funding to 6.2% of the students enrolled in public schools, while other jurisdictions were supporting 12% of their population. In 1989, the Canadian Council for Exceptional Children reported prevalence estimates for Learning Disabilities in several provinces across Canada. B.C.’s estimates were the lowest, at 1.29%.” (p. 77)

Such funding was arguably reduced further with the 2002 B.C.-government decision to de-target \$230 million from Special Education, which had the immediate result of lowering identification rates, and likely services, for students with a range of high-incidence special needs. Evidence for the reduction in high incidence identification is provided by Ministry of Education data (from Standard Report 1585), which show that the identification of high incidence students in three of four categories declined by over 20% between 2001–02 and 2004–05:

Category	#s identified, 2001–02	#s identified, 2004–05	% change 2001–02 to 2004–05
K – Mild Intellectual Disability	3,862	2,971	-23.1%
P – Gifted	16,989	13,141	-22.6%
Q – Learning Disability	14,805	16,168	+9.2%
R – Moderate behaviour support/ mental illness	12,429	9,562	-23.1%

De-targeting did not remove this funding from the provincial education budget, but it did give districts full discretion on its spending. This discretion allowed some school districts, which previously spent up to 40% more on Special Education than the targeted amount they received from the provincial government<sup>7</sup>, to reduce spending in selected areas of Special Education. A few years earlier, the B.C. School Trustees’ Association (BCSTA, 2000) made a submission<sup>8</sup> on education funding to the NDP government that stated:

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/accountability/district/revenue/0001/>, Table 12.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.bcsta.org/pub/pubindex.htm>

“School boards already spend substantially more on special education than they receive from government for that purpose. No school board wishes to reduce its expenditures to the ministry’s current level, and, thereby, impair the education of students with special needs. It is equally true that school boards cannot maintain current funding levels, much less increase them to meet the projected growth of this student population in the future.” (p. 5)

While the Trustees did not wish to reduce spending on Special Education in 2000, they showed considerable alacrity to do just that when offered the chance by the incoming Liberal government in 2002. Such alacrity was doubtless further spurred by the provincial government’s decision to award, but not pay for, two years of 2.5% teacher-salary increases, thereby forcing school districts to reduce teacher staffing in order to avoid budgetary deficits.

The B.C. Liberal government’s legislated removal of all contract language relating to Special Education, Learning Assistance, and ESL prior to the start of the 2002–03 school year also contributed to staffing cuts in these areas. There were disproportionately high cuts to teaching positions in Special Education, Learning Assistance, and ESL compared to the general cuts in teacher numbers. The general cut in teacher numbers (7.8%) was, in percentage terms, over twice more than the percentage decline in student enrolment (3.5%), and the cuts to special education staffing, at 18%, were more than double the level of general cuts in teacher numbers, and over five times greater than the decline in student numbers.

Following these actions, the Ministry of Education changed their data reporting in such a way that the reports which showed the school district expenditures that included High Incidence Special Education were discontinued, thereby eliminating the capacity to track what school districts received and spent on Special Education services, including the non-targeted High Incidence categories.

Removing the funding and staffing required to create the conditions that are argued as necessary to support inclusion (Roehrer Institute, 2004), are actions that collectively amount to a systemic attack by government on inclusive educational approaches. Teachers’ work to include all students has been made more difficult by increased class size, and there is evidence of greater numbers of students with special needs being placed in greater numbers in some classes, particularly secondary elective courses. Since the cuts, there has been a significant exodus of experienced Specialist Support Teachers from their work in supporting inclusive education, reducing support to classroom teachers and for the collaborative approaches crucial to the success of inclusion.<sup>9</sup> The actions, consequences, and data sources for these claims can be seen in the table below:

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.bctf.ca/education/InclusiveEd/challenge/>

ACTION	CONSEQUENCE	DATA SOURCES
<p>Teacher salary increase of 2.5% per year in 2001–02, 2002–03, and 2003–04, but provincial govt. funds 2001–02 school year only</p> <p>Other increased costs incurred to school districts:</p>	<p>7.8% of teachers laid off (compare to 3.5% decline in student enrolment)</p> <p>Extra costs to school districts, totaling \$106,726,102 for the 2004–05 school year, that are not funded by province: teacher salary increases, pensions, MSP premiums, hydro</p>	<p>Ministry of Education Form 1530 – Staffing data</p> <p>Ministry of Education Table 2, FTE Funded Enrolment 2000–01 to 2004–05</p> <p>Ministry of Education Revenue and Expenditure information, 2001–2005</p>
<p>De-targeting – \$230 million removed from targeted Special Ed funding and districts given discretion on whether to spend on High Incidence Special Education</p>	<p>Provincially, fewer high incidence students are designated</p>	<p>Ministry of Education Funding Allocation (final), 2002</p> <p>Provincial Composite 2001–02 Operating Grant 2002–03</p> <p>Student Enrolment Reports 2001–02 to 2004–05</p>
<p>Removal of staffing ratios for ESL, Special Education, Learning Assistance</p>	<p>ESL staffing reduced by 18.5%</p> <p>Special Ed staffing reduced by 18.3%</p> <p>Overall teacher staffing reduced by 7.8%</p>	<p>Ministry of Education Form 1530 data</p>
<p>Legislation removes class size from contract in Grades 4–12; increased class size legislated for K–3</p>	<p>General increase in class size</p>	<p>BCTF ‘key findings’ from 2002–03 research<sup>10</sup></p> <p>Data obtained from BCTF FOI requests for class size data from school districts</p>
<p>Removal of class composition language from contract</p>	<p>Some increased concentration of students with special needs in some classes, particularly secondary electives</p>	<p>BCTF Research focus groups, 2002–03 research project<sup>11</sup></p>
<p>Ministry changes in data-reporting, so no data collected or reported on districts’ spending for High Incidence Special Education</p>	<p>Reduction in support is not traceable</p>	<p>Ministry of Education Table 12: Preliminary Targeted and Budgeted Amounts for Special Education and Aboriginal programs, 2000–01</p>

Crawford’s (2005) brief foray into the issues of accountability focused on the ‘excellence/equity’ debate addressed elsewhere in this paper, but failed to state why accountability issues have considerable significance for the goal of greater inclusion in Canadian schools. Earl (1999) discusses Darling-Hammond’s (1994) analysis of what could be considered dichotomous views of educational accountability:

“One view seeks to induce change through extrinsic rewards and sanctions for both schools and students, on the assumption that the fundamental problem is a

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.bctf.ca/education/InclusiveEd/ResearchProject/PreliminaryData.html>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.bctf.ca/education/InclusiveEd/ResearchProject/>



lack of will to change on the part of educators. The other view seeks to induce change by building knowledge among school practitioners and parents about alternative methods and by stimulating organizational rethinking through opportunities to work together on the design of teaching and schooling and to experiment with new approaches. This view assumes that the fundamental problem is a lack of knowledge about the possibilities for teaching and learning, combined with lack of organizational capacity for change.” (p. 3)

The first view reflects what has arguably become a more common perspective under periods of market-based reforms in some Canadian provinces (Jordan, 2001), and as a result of U.S. initiatives launched to promote ‘higher standards’. These appear most popular with conservative governments in both countries, but have also been adapted, to varying degrees, by social democratic governments, ostensibly to the left of the political spectrum, such as governments in the UK and New Zealand. The UK Labour government perhaps best epitomizes a social-democratic government which provides public services such as education and health, and which regards citizens as consumers of government services and the central government’s role to be primarily focused on accountability. The accountability framework for the English and Welsh public school systems is enforced by government inspectors, with schools compared and ranked by achievement in annual tables, with ‘failing’ schools named, shamed, and re-organized. New Zealand’s model of market-based reform was found by Lauder & Hughes (1999) to limit access to preferred schools to a greater extent for children and families in lower socio-economic levels, in which populations are concentrated higher numbers of students with exceptionalities:

“The problem is that education markets, subject to limited financing, will never be able to provide the variety of schools demanded. Consequently, schools are rationed according to social class.” (p. 81)

The authors’ findings were supported by Fiske & Ladd (2000). They discussed the issue of schools removing students who limited schools’ ratings, as measured by exams, and found anecdotal evidence to support the case, while offering empirical evidence from the UK that such exclusion was also occurring there. They argue that the benefits of market-driven and consumer-oriented reforms accrue primarily to those white, middle-class parents of children who did not have special needs and who were knowledgeable consumers of educational services. They expressed concern at the strategies schools used to remove students who limited the school’s performance in tests:

“Underlying these strategies is a profound question about whether schools in a state-created market for education can operate as a public service in which the needs of all children are addressed, irrespective of their exam potential. The logical consequence of a market is that these ‘at-risk’ students will be herded into special schools which cater for low performing and disruptive students. The implications of this deliberate rejection by some schools have, to our knowledge, simply not been considered by policy makers.” (p. 133)

It is therefore arguable that a market approach (with accountability systems which measure school success by standardized test scores) is incompatible with inclusion, which means that all children, regardless of academic ability, are included in academic and social aspects of neighbourhood schools. Market-driven schools, on the other hand, compete for narrowly defined measures of success and exclude those students standing in the way of such success, some of whom have special needs.

Issues of accountability are therefore pivotal to the concept of inclusion because large-scale system accountability often conflicts with the focus on individual student needs, and especially the needs of students with exceptionalities. When system accountability is measured by tests, and schools are designated on a continuum from 'good' to 'bad,' then the capacity of the school to maximize test results is crucial to the school rating and placement on the continuum. Too many students with exceptionalities may skew the results and create the impression that the school is not performing well. This, as noted above, has led to the exclusion of some students with exceptionalities from schools in England, a situation now occurring in a number of U.S. states, including Texas and New York, as noted by Hursh (2005), who states:

“Under accountability systems where schools are evaluated based on the percentage of students passing the standardized examinations, it becomes rational to leave the lowest-performing students behind.” (p. 614)

Issues of accountability should be addressed, and market reforms countered, if inclusion is not only to survive but to evolve into the norm of schooling. The excellence/equity debate has been addressed earlier in this paper, but one important consideration in B.C. at this time is whether policies of inclusion can logically co-exist with directives or 'reforms' that counter inclusionary policies by stressing accountability measures that make inclusion less likely to occur. At a time of limited resources, will schools focus on improving achievement for those students whose improvements might be reflected on standardized tests, or will they allocate resources to helping all students reach their potential, whether or not such potential is reflected in standardized test results?

Whether educational systems can manage a balance between system accountability and inclusion also requires a focus on the issue of privatization of public services, including education. Kohn (2004) argues that market reforms are intended as the rhetorical prelude to shifting public education systems into the private sector by a stress on the supposed superiority of the market model.

One approach to a balanced form of accountability has been proposed by Jones (2004) who links it to five measures, including equity and access for students:

- the physical and emotional well-being of students
- student learning for a modern democratic society
- teacher learning compatible with adult learning principles
- equity and access, adding fairness to excellence
- school improvement, using self-assessment and adjustment.

Such an approach widens the scope and nature of accountability in ways that would encourage schools to address all learners' needs and avoid simplistic and standardized measurement. Sadly, there appears to be little current appetite among governments for this more comprehensive notion of accountability.

Three documents published by the B.C. government provide some indication of its view on its planning and accountability functions, and where the issue of inclusion fits in their planning and focus. These are:

1. District Accountability Contract Guidelines, 2005–06
2. Ministry of Education Service Plan, 2005–06 to 2007–08
3. B.C. Ministry of Finance Budget and Fiscal Plan, 2005–06 to 2007–08.

The B.C. government's 'District Accountability Contract Guidelines' for the school year 2005-06<sup>12</sup> mentions 'achievement' 20 times. 'Performance' is mentioned 34 times. 'ESL' and 'Special Education' are mentioned once each, and only in the suggestions for what to include in the section for demographics. The terms 'inclusion' or 'inclusive' are not mentioned at all. Similarly, in the Ministry of Education's 2005-07 Service Plan, 'achievement' is mentioned 29 times, 'performance' 47 times, but neither 'Inclusion' nor 'Special Education' are mentioned at all. The implicit message from government to school districts is that measurable student achievement is paramount, but there is no message that the learning and progress of all students is equally paramount. Districts are also informed that in terms of accountability, they are "responsible and will be held accountable":

"The ministry provides operating funding to school boards and others to support the K-12 public school system. School boards are responsible for and will be held accountable for improving student achievement and publicly reporting the results." (B.C. Ministry of Education Service Plan 2005-06 to 2007-08, p. 5)

One notable exception is the focus on Aboriginal Education, mentioned 49 times in the Accountability Guidelines, but only three times in the Service Plan, possibly an indication that the focus on Aboriginal Education is fading as a government priority. Inclusion, if the guidelines reflect government thinking, appears not to be an area where districts are to be held accountable.

In contrast, the B.C. Ministry of Finance 'Budget and Fiscal Plan' 2005-06 to 2007-08 states:

"...increased funding for K-12 students will be linked to locally developed plans that will ensure every student has access to:

- school libraries and quality learning resources
- music and arts programs; and
- improved services to support every special needs student." (p. 19)

While the budget plan identifies \$134 million in 'increased funding' for services to students with special needs over three years, some of this spending is outside of educational services, and is \$96 million less than the amount removed at a stroke from 'high incidence' allocations in 2002. Any support for teachers for implementing inclusionary policies is not likely to stem from the B.C. provincial government in the next three years, if current accountability contracts and budget planning documents reflect government thinking. However, the recent teachers' strike in B.C. focused considerable media attention on the issue of inclusion, and generated broad public empathy for teachers' claims that supports for inclusion were inadequate. At the time of writing, it is too early to say whether this may result in improved funding and systemic supports for inclusion in B.C.'s public schools.

Improving services to support every student with special needs will take little, using the current service levels as the benchmark. The same could be said for the other areas as well, since cuts to library and music programmes have been the norm in B.C. in recent years. As one example, there were 31.5% fewer teacher-librarians in B.C. public schools in 2004-05 than there were in 2001-02, a loss nine times greater than the rate of decline in student enrolment.<sup>13</sup> Because of the significant levels of cuts and service reductions the system has recently sustained, the minimal

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<sup>12</sup> [http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/schools/sdinfo/acc\\_contracts/05-06\\_guidelines.pdf](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/schools/sdinfo/acc_contracts/05-06_guidelines.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/accountability/district/revenue/0405/>

planned increases will have little impact on inclusion and will not increase specialist support staffing to anywhere near the numbers of those employed in such roles before the cuts of 2002.

Another key issue links to the term ‘locally developed plans.’ Promoting local plans with no central dissemination role from government reflects the continued absence of a provincial role to support and extend inclusive education, a role identified as crucial by Crawford (2005) if inclusion is to be the norm in practice rather than merely expressed in policy documents. Promotion of locally developed approaches ‘reinvents the wheel’ and reduces the efficacy of inclusion, unless there are ways to mobilize the knowledge generated at the local level. Such knowledge mobilization should arguably form part of the role played by a provincial government, but there is no evidence of such a role in the actions or the policies of the B.C. government.

The abdication of the government and ministry of their responsibilities is nowhere more evident than in the B.C. Ministry of Education (2004) publication “Diversity in B.C. Schools: A Framework.” This 37-page document includes less than half a page on Special Education, and lists no inclusion-related resources produced, or supports offered, by the ministry since a revision of its policy document in 2002. Even more alarming is the focus on ‘Implications for School Boards and Schools,’ which states:

“Boards of school trustees, school district officials and other school leaders have a unique responsibility and challenging duty to address increasing diversity in both the educational and operational aspects of schooling.” (p. 23)

The statement per se is a truism: school district trustees, officials, and other school leaders do have such responsibilities and duties. What appears alarming is that the ministry, as one administrative arm of provincial government, fails to mention any responsibilities and duties ministry and government may have to address in terms of supporting diversity. While the literature stresses that one pivotal role of provincial governments should be to support school districts and teachers in developing inclusive resources and approaches, the B.C. government and its ministry has walked away from the notion that they have any responsibility for supporting an inclusive education system, and placed accountability squarely on the shoulders of every organization and structure other than their own. The responsibility is not ‘unique,’ as the ‘Framework’ asserts; it is shared among government, school districts, and teachers, all of whom have responsibility to address diverse student needs. The abdication of the B.C. government and the Ministry of Education from accepting shared responsibility therefore counters the goal of effectively building inclusion in B.C.’s public schools.

In contrast, New Brunswick’s Deputy Minister of Education, John Kershaw (2004), stated:

“A government or Department of Education cannot simply dictate that inclusive education will occur – because it needs its partners to assist in the design and implementation of this policy approach.”

Collaborative approaches and complementary initiatives need to be developed and promoted within and across organizations, as Kershaw has suggested. Some such approaches are being promoted by the Roeher Institute (2004) and through the discussions at conferences such as the National Inclusive Summit held in Ottawa in November, 2004.<sup>14</sup> There are also many school districts attempting, within limited and reduced resources, to support teachers’ inclusive

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.cacl.ca/english/natconf/2004/index.html>

approaches. Yet there remains a dearth of initiatives that generate practical supports for teachers, and none developed in recent years by the government of B.C.

The issue of accountability approaches in B.C. can also be understood through consideration of 'loose-tight coupling.' This concept was initially used by Glassman (1973), who linked elements in living systems, but its educational focus was developed and applied by Weick (1976), who argued that loose coupling was common in educational systems and organizations:

“By loose coupling the author intends to convey the image that coupled events are responsive, but that each event also preserves its own identity and some evidence of its physical or logical separateness. Thus, in the case of an educational organization, it may be the case that the counselor’s office is loosely coupled to the principal’s office. The image is that the principal and the counselor are somehow attached, but that each retains some identity and separateness and that their attachment may be circumscribed, infrequent, weak in its mutual affects, unimportant, and/or slow to respond. Each of those connotations would be conveyed if the qualifier ‘loosely’ was attached to the word ‘coupled’. Loose coupling also carries connotations of impermanence, dissolvability, and tacitness, all of which are potentially crucial properties of the ‘glue’ that holds organizations together.” (p. 3)

‘Loose-tight’ coupling is therefore an approach where the central government (provincial, in the case of B.C.) maintains tight control over the fundamental rules that fund and hold school districts accountable, while supposedly giving them the ‘flexibility’ to provide programs and staff as they see fit. An illustration of this might be the B.C. government’s refusal to pay for two years’ teacher salary increases, thereby forcing school districts to choose to lay off significant numbers of teachers and to increase class size.

A second way of understanding forms of accountability can be found in the work of Peters (2005), who argues that Britain and the USA have each been defined by respective governments as a ‘risk society.’ By defining ‘risk,’ whether in terms of international trading competitiveness, education outcomes, or even the environment, arguments can be made that the state must set the conditions and directions to counter the perceived risk. The most obvious example of this is the (1983) USA report, ‘A Nation at Risk.’<sup>15</sup> This and later reports set the stage for arguments that public schools were failing to address the perceived risks. Governments therefore needed to exercise power to direct educational institutions under their control. At the same time, Peters argues that governments were using the ‘risk’ scenario to force their populations to take greater responsibility in choosing education, health, and employment services. This responsibility made them consumers in selecting educational, health, or employment-related options and services. So the risk became, at least in the eyes of the proponents of those who articulate ‘risk’, unquestioned, a norm that all members of a society should work to counter. The government then set agendas to counter the risk, but each citizen as a consumer also assumed some risk. Schools and other public institutions then were aligned with the government-set goals (perhaps increasing literacy), but populations were required to access services as consumers. This was epitomized in the UK Labour government’s ‘Third Way’ program that, Peters argues, is intended “to subordinate the security of the producer to the freedom of the consumer” (p. 135). Peters quotes a speech made by the UK Prime Minister Tony Blair in 2001, where Blair defined the four principles of the ‘Third Way’ program:

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/index.html>

“First, high standards and full accountability. Second, devolution to the front-line to encourage diversity and local creativity. Third, flexibility of employment so that staff are better able to deliver modern public services. Fourth, the promotion of alternative providers and greater choice. All four principles have one goal – to put the consumer first. We are making the public services user-led, not producer- or bureaucracy-led, allowing for greater freedom and incentives for services to develop as users want.” (p. 135)

Blair’s ‘Third Way’ reflects an ideology replacing the welfare state (first way) and neo-liberalism (second way) with a view that the state’s role is defined, powerful, yet responsive to citizens-as-consumers, who also take on added responsibility for choice and decision-making. The language is decisive, and appears much closer to neo-Liberal thinking than anything found in welfare states, with an optimistic rhetoric promoting its market-oriented approach by stressing improved benefits to citizens as the new and selective consumers of government services. Such services, as noted earlier with reference to the New Zealand research, tend to best meet the needs of those middle-class citizens able to adapt to market conditions, and often produce schools that exclude and discriminate based on social class and disability.

## **Discussion**

The considerable body of literature that informs this paper identified seven key areas central to any discussion or reflection on the nature, evolution, and success of inclusion in Canadian K-12 public school systems. Reflecting on these seven areas and the extensive explorations in the literature, there is little doubt that enough is known in terms of how to make inclusive education a pervasive reality in Canadian public education systems. Yet it is not a pervasive reality, as reflected in the substantial numbers of students being educated in separate institutions, or because they are physically placed within regular schools yet inadequately included in most or all educational and social aspects of schooling.

In the province of British Columbia, both NDP and Liberal governments have espoused and mandated inclusion, yet both have failed to fund it adequately. In addition to the long-standing financial neglect, the current Liberal government has compounded the damage by changing funding systems and legislating in ways that forced or facilitated districts’ removal of services from high incidence special education. At the same time, government has failed to fund the cost to districts of teacher-salary improvements, resulting in the loss of thousands of teachers from B.C. schools, and the teacher contracts they have imposed have resulted in increased class sizes and the removal of many specialists from roles supportive of inclusion. By closing the Special Programs Branch they also gutted the Ministry of Education’s capacity to offer systemic support to teachers and school districts through web publishing and other knowledge-dissemination means. All of these actions are documented by the government’s own data produced since 2002, which show significantly reduced high incidence student designations, disproportionately large reductions in Special Education, Learning Assistance, and ESL staffing, and which articulate statements that the focus of the Ministry of Education is on system accountability, not system support.

Pre-service training in Canada offers a limited focus on inclusive approaches. There appears to be little evidence that universities are addressing the issue of teaching to the diversity in every classroom, preferring to consider diverse learning needs as an elective or as a minimal part of mandatory course requirements.

After 20 years of inclusive schooling, almost half of a sample group of 380 B.C. teachers report that they do not feel confident in teaching to the diversity in their classrooms, and many currently struggle with larger class sizes and reduced specialist support. Many parents of students with special needs report dissatisfaction and concern with the educational services offered to their children.

The journey towards pervasive inclusion in B.C.'s public schools is clearly still ongoing, and the destination arguably further away now than it was three years ago.

The traditional analysis of this situation repeatedly calls for events which do not occur: new forms of pre-service that incorporate teaching to diversity into each unit and approach – rather than treating diversity as a separate concept; improved professional development focusing on inclusion – while teachers are bombarded with choices from a bewildering array of subject and pedagogical approaches, as well as expectations from some school districts that certain areas of PD will have priority. Few authors offer a close scrutiny of the actions of provincial governments, often recognizing their policies but failing to evaluate their actions in terms of funding, systemic support, or knowledge mobilization. Until the B.C. provincial government adequately funds and supports inclusion, while also encouraging and supporting the dissemination of information about good practices and resources in support of inclusion, the journey towards pervasive inclusion will likely be longer and more troubled, as each district reinvents approaches and resources but for the most part fails to share them. This report does not challenge the analyses in the literature which address teacher pre- and in-service, and all the other areas discussed above, but argues that in British Columbia at least, all are irrelevant unless the provincial government fundamentally changes its role and the funding, administrative, and accountability structures that the government has set in place.

For the B.C. government, and likely for most Canadian provincial governments, inclusion is not an issue of importance, if importance is measured by levels of funding, support, and staffing. A look at participation in forums such as the National Summit on Inclusive Education, held in Ottawa in 2004, is telling of the apathy of provincial governments and ministries toward collaborative debate about inclusion in Canadian education systems. The exception in Canada appears to be the province of New Brunswick. Only that province sent deputy ministers of education, senior ministry officials, and other senior figures in government and ministries to the Summit. While every province's teacher unions sent representatives, the Province of British Columbia, like most other provinces, sent neither government nor ministry representatives, nor did any school district superintendent from an urban B.C. school district attend. Such limited participation also reflects the limited ability of community-based organizations to interest governments, ministries, or school districts in discussions about the future of inclusion.

The B.C. provincial government is increasingly aligning itself with the role of government in public education that is epitomized in the UK's 'Third Way.' Such an approach, Peters (2005) argued, is problematic for the promotion of inclusion, but does not elaborate. The following section explores several areas where the 'Third Way' may be problematic to inclusion within a B.C. context.

The first concerns the nature of an education system's focus and accountability, both set by the provincial government. In B.C., the budget and accountability documents discussed above prioritize 'performance' and 'achievement' in language that appears exclusive of many students with special needs. Districts are being told to focus on improving performance or achievement,

with no mention (apart from the arguably fading focus on Aboriginal achievement) of those students who may not perform well on standardized tests such as provincial exams.

The second area of concern is devolution of control to school districts within the context of the provincial government's focus and priorities. This closely mirrors the principles stated by Tony Blair that stress creativity and flexibility, and how central government 'enables' local providers to adapt and offer appropriate services. Such 'empowerment' is accompanied by stringent accountability measures that ensure the local creativity closely provides what the central government requires. Thus, school districts received the message from the provincial government that inclusion was not a priority in terms of accountability, and have cut resources for services to high incidence students. The message from the provincial government is clear, and most school districts in B.C. appear compliant, apparently regarding the allocation of resources as a managerial issue rather than a question that involves consideration of equity and social justice. Put another way, school districts appear to be agreeing that there is only so much money in the box and their job is to manage a school district and spend it as best they can, fitting in with the directions of government. If those directions reduce inclusion as a priority, so be it.

A third concern is that the current role of government in B.C. contradicts what is known in the literature (Roehrer, 2004), both in terms of cohesive government support for inclusion, and for the mobilization of knowledge within and across systems (SSHRC, 2004). The B.C. government's dismantling of the Special Programs Branch of the Ministry of Education, and its increased and dominant focus on accountability, mean less systemic support for educators from the provincial government and from its administrative arm, the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education's web page for information and resources was developed at a time when government believed it had a role to both direct and support inclusive approaches by providing information on strategies and resources. But that role, and the ministry's dissemination of information, is clearly over. No new resources or strategies have been added to the ministry's site for several years. School districts generally have shown minimal capacity for resource-sharing, documentation of good practice, or collaboration. Resources are occasionally sold by school districts, but rarely shared for the common good. So the absence of a central co-ordinating arm of government in resource-development and sharing has been particularly problematic. However, it must be stressed that problems relating to underfunding, accountability, and limited or non-existent systemic support are not unique to the tenure of the current government; they reflect international trends in those countries enamoured of market approaches, which often espouse limited support and funding for public sector services.

Even though major reductions in services are occurring in schools and classrooms, the B.C. government can say its policy of inclusion remains consistent, explicit, and mandating of inclusive approaches provincially. There is mounting evidence that this policy is reflected more in documents than in reality, in that government's legislation, accountability structures, and funding processes have the effect of reducing the likelihood of effective and pervasive inclusion. The supposed 'autonomy' and 'flexibility' allowed to school districts, in an environment of stringent accountability requirements, facilitate and arguably encourage school districts to shift funding and staffing away from inclusive supports. At one and the same time the government can point to its policy of inclusion, while allocating funding in ways that give school districts little choice but to reduce staffing and services in Special Education and Learning Assistance.

Messages on issues of inclusion from the provincial government to school districts are usually implicit rather than explicit. So when the government fails to fund two out of three years of teacher salary increases, the implicit message is that districts should lay off teachers and increase



class size. When high incidence special education funding is de-targeted (so that the districts receive the same amount of money but do not have to spend it on services or staffing linked to students with high incidence special needs) the implicit message from the provincial government is for school districts to spend wherever they wish outside of high incidence special education. When ratios are removed for Learning Assistance and ESL teachers, the implicit message from government is that districts are encouraged to have fewer teachers in those areas. The explicit terms of ‘flexibility’ and ‘autonomy’ mask the more potent, but implicit, messages that force increased class size, reduced staffing, and fewer high incidence designations, all of which have occurred since 2002. Similarly, explicit messages of increased funding seem ridiculous, when they follow cuts in staffing and service that were even greater – somewhat like cutting off an arm and then offering back the hand. B.C. school districts have clearly understood and acted on a range of implicit messages from the provincial government, while the government conveniently places all responsibility for decisions made onto school districts, as though the districts had any real choices to make.

The cumulative evidence of provincial funding and legislative actions is at odds with the case made by the B.C. government that B.C. school districts have any real flexibility, and places school districts in a quandary. School districts have had few options in terms of what they have done in relation to staffing and Special Education services in the last three years. But having accepted the government’s directions, and acted on the implicit messages to lay off teachers, increase class size, and reduce support for inclusion, are school districts entering into some form of a Faustian deal, where they are being set up to take the blame for any future systemic failure, or setting themselves up as targets if they at some future date counter provincial government actions? By accepting the proffered ‘flexibility,’ are school districts accepting responsibility for decisions they have little choice but to take? Will any perceived failure by school districts, or sustained opposition from them, make school districts a future focus for provincial government legislation? This, in the short term, may be unlikely because of the districts’ current compliance with provincial directions, but could change should district and government consensus falter. At that stage, and to follow the argument of Peters, school districts may be seen by a provincial government as putting the education system at risk, and might be removed, with control then exercised from the province to individual school administrators and school councils, a scenario not unfamiliar in some ‘Third Way’ environments.

There is a need to address all the areas identified in the literature as necessary for supporting inclusion, but there also exists a strong argument for B.C. and other Canadian provincial governments to change their approach towards the issue of inclusion. Policies alone are insufficient. For inclusion to become a more pervasive reality, systemic problems need systemic solutions. These solutions involve building capacity in terms of individual teachers, schools, and school districts. Such capacity can only be built by provincial governments taking on more supportive roles, ideally in partnership with other educational stakeholders, and shifting accountability agendas.

Government and ministry support could be linked to knowledge mobilization, so that more successful approaches can be documented and shared across the province. Adequate funding might be provided to reduce class sizes, and to increase specialist support. Accountability structures should stress access and equity, and achievement for all students.

In the (probable) absence of provincial governments from this discussion and subsequent action, other system organizations such as teacher unions, school districts, and community organizations might find ways to collaborate and to share information and resources. While the likelihood of

significant collaboration among B.C.'s (somewhat optimistically titled) 'education partners' in the short term is unlikely, in part because of the fractious nature of B.C. politics and its education system, two teacher-union initiatives are described here as examples of pragmatic supports for teachers.

The first is the 'Teaching to Diversity' web page<sup>16</sup> on the union web site, which facilitates teacher access to a wide range of information about inclusive approaches 'as needed.' Now in its second year, use of this site as a publication forum and source of Professional Development materials is being piloted. Teacher inquiry groups in three school districts, jointly sponsored and supported by both the union and their respective school districts, are publishing reports here on issues such as designing and using Individual Education Plans (IEPs), studying 'Universal Design for Learning,'<sup>17</sup> and the use of picture communication symbols. Presentations on the site's use are being made at teacher Professional Development days, to school district Student Support Services staff, and at universities providing pre-service training for teachers.

The second BCTF initiative, in partnership with three school districts and local teacher associations, provides mentoring/professional conversation groups for specialist ESL, Special Education, and Learning Assistance teachers in those districts. This project emerged from union research that explored major changes in the roles of Specialist Support Teachers,<sup>18</sup> many now finding themselves with combined responsibilities across areas (e.g., ESL and Special Ed). The research also identified reduced staffing levels and a significant exodus of experienced teachers from these specialist roles, with the result that many inexperienced teachers were taking over Special Education, Learning Assistance, and ESL positions.

These projects are intended to support inclusion by:

- providing information to all educators 'as needed' through the web site
- demonstrating how such information might be used by educators in a variety of roles (classroom teacher, Specialist Support Teacher, district staff, student teachers, etc.)
- promoting collegial, inquiry-based approaches to current inclusive education issues and practices
- encouraging networking between inquiry groups through videoconferencing
- documenting and publishing the approaches, outcomes, or resources on the 'Teaching to Diversity' web page so that others might consider their utility
- identifying areas of focus that are seen as priorities by both management and union, and initiating collaboration with school districts to address them.

The BCTF's collaborative partnership with the University of British Columbia and the Vancouver School Board in the federally-funded Multiliteracies project offers another example of a teacher union's constructive effort to supporting teacher inquiry which can be linked to inclusionary goals and approaches. While this project is still in progress, some steps are being taken to link teachers in the project with others who are not a part it, so that they might develop better networks, publish their work on the union's web site, and link teachers' reports to other web-based information. This collaboration also provides opportunities to learn more about knowledge dissemination and mobilization that could feature as a role for the union in the future.

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.bctf.ca/TeachingToDiversity/>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.cast.org/teachingeverystudent/ideas/tes/>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.bctf.ca/education/InclusiveEd/challenge/>

I would argue that these projects reflect and model forms of collaboration and knowledge-mobilization that are required to authentically implement more pervasive inclusion. However, such projects are small in scale and cannot fully compensate for the absence of support from government and ministry for teachers' and school districts' inclusive approaches, especially when few school districts appear willing to partner with a union when the union-government relationship remains fractious.

The logical and somewhat depressing conclusion of this analysis is that the destination of full and pervasive inclusion will not soon be reached, in B.C. at least, unless there are fundamentally different approaches which must start within government and ministry offices and which should focus on systemic support and effective knowledge-mobilization. Current accountability structures and processes should be changed to encourage inclusion, maximum participation in schooling, and individual progress (as opposed to passing standardized tests), using criteria wider than those focusing on achievement, narrowly defined.

While these shifts appear very unlikely in the short term, there is a case for discussion and planning now about improved systemic support in readiness for a future time when more cohesive and collaborative change may be possible. Even a casual perusal of Ontario's recent history suggests that people tire of constant government attacks on education and other public services, and those governments promoting such attacks, like all in democratic societies, eventually fall. When opportunities arise in the future, there needs to be some notion of where the destination for inclusion may be, how it may be reached, and what future roles a teacher union might play to make inclusion a pervasive reality in the public schools of B.C. In the meantime, the government actions that lead to reduced inclusion should be identified, and those in government should be held accountable.

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November, 2005



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