

# **Advancing the Right to Belong: The Quest of a Civil Society**

**Exploring the Study of Ableism  
and Inclusion in Education**

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**Abstract:** The study of disability from anti-biased scholarship in pre-service teacher education allows teacher candidates opportunity to explore hegemony and oppression in current understandings of pedagogy for disabled students. The merging of critical disability theory, equality analysis and social justice understandings helps support students in developing an inclusive philosophy that can be applied to school ethos. An understanding of teachers as change agents in the quest of a civil society is critical in the transformation of system in crisis. A theoretical understanding of the *Right to Belong* gives hope for a vision of inclusion for all learners.

## **Introduction:**

**Recognition is the act of enlargement that enables both sides to envisage new possibilities of living together. We don't simply recognize each other for what we are; we recognize what we could become together.** Michael Ignatieff (p.136)

Teaching pre-service educators about the collective *right of belonging* through the exploration of anti-oppressive education and the celebration of cultural diversity is a daunting task. Today's neo-liberal trends permeated with the flavour of competitiveness and capitalism filter through educational pedagogy (Barnes and Mercer, 2000). Teachers struggle with conflicting messages that governments present on social and economic policy and the realities of their classroom situations created by a "generation dominated by individuality, self-gratification and narcissism" (Purpel, 1989, p.31). Additionally, they continue to be influenced by the history of their own schooling and their state histories of exclusion and hostility toward children of different cultures and abilities (Woodhouse, 2004; St. Denis, 2005). Disability oppression has been phrased as the last frontier<sup>1</sup> and although recognition of necessary critique exists among researchers and

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<sup>1</sup> Reiser sees disability oppression as the last "ism" to be addressed. Normalization of segregation and exclusion of disabled persons historically is permeated in the education and judicial systems of today's society.

academics in education, there is a hesitation to address the realities of ableism<sup>2</sup> in our society (Reiser, 2000, Linton, 1998). At the heart of that ableism exists the institution of education—a global system that needs significant critique if the educators of today are to become the change agents necessary to create an inclusive and civil society (Holt, 2003; Barton, 1997; Oliver, 1996; Linton, 1998; Skrtic, 1991; Purpel, 1989).

Common themes surrounding the philosophy of inclusive education encourage pre-service teachers to develop an understanding of children and youth with disabilities as being diverse learners that require varied supports within the classroom. Although many classroom and pre-service teachers accept the premise of inclusion as a necessary part of the school ethos, it seems they, along with academics, specialists and policy makers, continue to struggle not only with the mechanics of inclusive education, but most importantly with the philosophy of belonging and equality. The paradox of equity and excellence as applied to disabled learners<sup>3</sup> and regular learners has been explored in depth through the research efforts of Judy Lupart (2000) and although the call for both applications has been professed in anti-oppressive literature and critical pedagogy, as well as in the compilations of a few “best practice” examples, the vast majority of educators continue to display actions that reflect a “one or the other” phenomenon (Bunch, 2005). With this understanding, it seems crystal clear that the delivery of education for disabled students must be presented as a practice that supports equity while simultaneously advancing the provision of a quality service for all learners (Hehir, 2003;

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<sup>2</sup> Ableism has been defined as the discrimination and oppression of people with disabilities by the dominant or able-bodied members of a society.

<sup>3</sup> In this paper, the author uses the terms “*disabled learners*”, “*disabled students*” and “*disabled peoples*” interchangeably with the term “*persons with disabilities*”. Disability rights activists, Marta Russell and Ravi Malhotra advocate for this term to be used in the embracement of identity. The author uses the term with recognition and respect for the disabled people’s movement.

Mackay, 2004). Cascading models of integration that support the “medicalization” or rehabilitation of the disabled student are not helpful in understanding equity and excellence as two merging concepts; these antiquated models continue to present teachers with a view of the individual as one displaying an intrinsic deficit—this phenomena reinforces a continuum of value applied to students and generates the devalued learner. Additionally, it is known the complexities surrounding the effective delivery of an educational service for all learners are further complicated by an economic milieu that affords value to a hierarchal system over a system grounded in the understanding of adhocracy<sup>4</sup> (Skrtic, 1991). Adherence by administrators and “specialists” to the phenomena of hierarchy continues to systemically discriminate against students with disabilities by creating and maintaining attitudinal and environmental barriers that work to dismiss practices grounded in inclusive and democratic philosophy (Freire, 1998; Skrtic, 1991). Although there is a peripheral move to a support diverse learners with collaborative services, this is often abandoned for what is known; hegemony in education is reflected in the systems and structures closely tied to funding mechanisms. Essentially, these structures promote the illusion of a thriving school, one that builds student bodies and staffing cohorts through a process that encourages the identification of defective learners and the sorting of these students to specialized and segregated services (Tomlinson, 1982). Critique of the existing models of support for disabled learners show that these systems eat up significant portions of funding in diagnostic service—funds that could be more usefully applied to a model of community development, inclusive participation and classroom cohesion through cooperative learnings (Lupart, 2000, 2005). The present dualistic system of regular and special education has a historical foundation

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<sup>4</sup> This refers to problem-solving organizations that resist bureaucratic and systemic hegemony.

that currently continues to reinforce exclusion and separation and it exists as an economic model that benefits large numbers of specialists that make disability their business (Lupart, 2000; Slee, 2000, Tomlinson, 1982). In addition, the society of the day, influenced by globalization and neo-liberalism, has retracted its previous enthusiasm for a culture of inclusion and many pockets of resistance can be found throughout the literature (Bunch and Valeo, 1997; Fey, 2001; Russell, 1998; Barton, 2001; Charlton, 1998; Linton, 1998; Slee, 2000). Collectively, these implications work to create and reinforce the confusion and stress that classroom teachers experience surrounding the “specialness” of diverse learners and the formation of their own educational philosophy and practice based on the principles of inclusion.

*What must we do to address this resistance and confusion?* The permanence of this confusion and resistance has to be addressed by exploring attitudes of teachers and their understandings of philosophy and ethos as applied to the teaching, assessment and care of disabled children and youth in their classrooms. How diverse learners are assigned value by the educators around them must be part of the query (Purpel, 1989). Additionally, the attitudes and behaviours that are adopted by pre-service teachers after school internships have to be explored in depth (Bunch, 2005; Bunch and Finnegan, 2000). Simultaneously, the need to view, profess and advance educational philosophy as the mortar of an inclusive pedagogy is absolutely critical in pre-service teacher education. Inclusion as a philosophical foundation must be seen as the framework that supports equality for disabled learners and, ultimately, presents an avenue for full membership with all the benefits and protections that other persons within our society take for granted. (Rioux, 2001) Supportingly, the role of educators must be seen as paramount in the creation of

an inclusive community and a civil society (Lupart, 2005). Teachers must recognize that they are a large piece of the puzzle in the creation of a civil society and collectively, their vision and actions will be significant in creating a culture of belonging that places the spotlight of value on the shoulders of each and every child in our society (Purpel, 1989).

Practicing teachers and educators of pre-service teachers must become the primary leaders in professing equality rights for disabled students (CACL, 2004; Porter, 2000). Equality rights or platform rights supported by secondary educational rights<sup>5</sup> and the acceptance and celebration of diversity to collectively counter the hegemony of normalcy prevalent in education systems must be professed from the leadership within if change is to occur (Mackay, 2005). Government sanctions to actively embrace inclusive philosophy and policy change are required for the re-conceptualization necessary to change the milieu of schools and the attitudes of teachers and administrators who relish in aged thinking and sanctioned exclusion and separation of learners (Booth, 2005; CACL, 2004). Martha Nussbaum believes that the route to a civil society includes: “affirmative measures designed to empower a previously oppressed group [and] a regime that makes people equal before the law and that empowers all citizens in certain basic ways will encourage compassion” (2000, p.421). The recognition that many faculties of education across our great country of Canada and extensively throughout the western world continue to retrofit inclusive education within a model of special education must be advanced (Linton, 1998; Slee, 2000). It must be clear that that inclusive education and the policies and practices surrounding it are not about “better” special education (OCIE, 2005). The future of inclusive education rests with the idea that “difference” can no

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<sup>5</sup> Mackay developed the understanding of platform rights as charter rights ensuring student access to accessible and inclusive classrooms. Secondary rights refer to a quality educational service or program of study that each student is afforded relative to individual learning styles.

longer be associated with or “synonymous with deficit” (Walter-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin, Williams, 2000, p.279). The question remains as to how it is that teacher candidates can accept and advocate for the value of each learner regardless of difference in intellectual capacity, physical prowess and emotional competence. The complexity surrounding this question is immense as these concepts are difficult for even the most significant change agents and academics<sup>6</sup> that fight for social justice and civil rights (Baylies, 2002).

A brief explanation of inclusion and a point of beginning can be found within the work of the Ontario Human Rights Commission. With direction from the leadership founded on principles of the Ontario Coalition for Inclusive Education, the Commission has adapted the guidelines first presented at the Salamanca Accord (UNESCO) in 1999. The philosophical understanding of inclusive education within this movement is best described in this way:

Inclusion is about the improving of schooling. Rather than being a marginalized theme concerned with how a relatively small group of pupils might be attached to the mainstream schools, it lays the foundations for an approach that could lead to the transformation of the system itself.  
(UNESCO, Salamanca, p.9, 1999).

The key to transformation is in the education of our children and youth. The youth that exists in our colleges and universities can bring hope to this phenomenon. In advocating for a change of thinking or “right thinking” (Freire, 1998) and for the restructuring of our educational institutions, visionaries must look to university classrooms in which students and faculty are dialoguing about inclusive philosophy and critiquing the influence of historical and current realities of disabled peoples. If the role of universities is to provide an education for Canadian youth to become compassionate, creative and critical citizens,

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<sup>6</sup> Martha Nussbaum and her discourse on capacity.

both teachers and learners, it is essential that these discussions permeate all pre-service classes in the areas of curriculum, diversity and leadership. The thrust for this critique is about creating a society that embraces peace and justice. It is about freshness; it is about beginnings; it is about educators that come to their classrooms embracing a new vision in which all learners belong and are valued. A strong philosophical base of theory will provide courage and collectivism for beginner teachers to protect the right to belong through the valuing of each child as an important member of her classroom community. In the words of Jean Vanier (2006):

Let's rethink a new vision for our world, based on every human person as important. And that means we will have to change. We move from a world of competition where I have to appear the powerful one, which means crushing others, to becoming the cooperative one, the understanding one, the listening one, so that we can build something together.

*How will we do this?* Roger Slee, Dean of Education, University of McGill, advocates for a critical examination of the present system; to negate this would reinforce the retrofitting of special education practice presently espoused as inclusion. The upholding of ableistic views and practices will be reinforced and the valuing of diversity in all classrooms will continue to be pushed to the perimeter if current understandings of students with differences and disabilities continue to rely on the educational-psychological model of student assessment and therapeutic intervention (Hall and Kearns in Holt, 2003). Without challenge, the individual tragedy model of disability that accompanies those who are “special” will continue to be the “normalized view” that all educators protect. It is critical that the education of pre-service teachers include an exploration of ableism and inclusion. This notion must be advanced through the critiquing of educational hegemony and the study of civil and human rights discourse.

Teachers must begin to understand that legal rights and moral obligations give disabled students full access to inclusive classrooms and equal educational opportunities (Mackay, 2005; Degener, 2003; Greschner, 2002; Vanier, 1998; Kunc, 2000; and Purpel, 1989). Pre-service teachers must be given opportunity to explore discourses that show “educational policy is underpinned by an individual tragedy model of disability” and the subsets of this model, the educational-psychological model and the medical model of disability, are situated within most educational policy in the western world (Holt, 2003, p.122). Anti-oppressive education and critical disability theory can support students in the exploration of ableism and the understanding of how systemic discrimination in education exists (Kumashiro, 2000). Secondly, inclusive education must be seen as a fundamental human right and a theoretical framework of belonging must be utilized for dialogue and justification of an inclusive educational pedagogy. A critical point of maturity that both pre-service and classroom teachers must arrive at is in the understanding of student needs and challenges; it is precisely when teachers arrive at the understanding that acceptance of belonging is the foundational precursor for learning and that student mastery and achievement are smaller pieces of the puzzle in child growth and self-esteem, that a path to emancipation can be cleared (Kunc, 2000). Framing the philosophy of education with social justice principles is a useful process in which to strengthen students’ understandings of critical pedagogy in the advancement of inclusion.

## The Realities of “Special”: Addressing Oppression and Hegemony

**Most of the greatest evils that man has inflicted upon man have come through people feeling quite certain about something which, in fact, was false.** Bertrand Russell (p.12)

A critical point in learning about disability oppression comes from the understanding that oppression is tied to every day commonalities and how these normalizations have been accepted as policy in the social fabric of our society. Although the institutionalised systems that exist to support persons with disabilities have been influenced by historical foundations, generally education students or teacher candidates are not privy to this critique as it has not been prioritized as a significant area of study like other anti-biased teachings such as those situated around gender or race (Charlton, 1998; Reiser, 2000; Morris, 1996; Linton, 1998). Linton contends that in addressing oppression one must name it. In *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity* (1998), Linton points to Tulloch’s definition of ableism in “*Reader’s Digest Oxford Wordfinder* as ‘discrimination in favour of the able-bodied,’” (p.9). She further promotes the idea of persons with disabilities being discriminated against by those from the dominant society and likens ableism to sexism, racism and homophobia. Additionally, “members of the general public including members of it on the judiciary and on juries, is by and large ableist”; the “glancing gaze” of “well-meaning people who do not have progressive information and education, is in part because we do not teach disability in public schools and colleges as we teach race and gender,” (Davis, 2001, p.137). Both Razack (1998) and Sampson (2006) recognize the phenomenon of ableism in our disabling society and call for further exploration of gendered disability discrimination through the understanding of both critical disability theory and feminist theory.

To address this one must concur that it is the responsibility of faculty to present pre-service teachers with a balanced view of disability by exploring history as well as current “exceptionality” phenomena that exists within the pedagogy of special education. To sugar coat the realities of today’s services without giving students access to historical injustices is to create a society of learners that accepts hegemony and further supports the inability to critique or to develop the capacity to accept and support diversity (Fey, 2001; Razack, 1998; St. Denis, 2005). Examples of exclusion, ableism and human rights infractions have to be clearly presented to students. The permanence of hegemony surrounding the education of disabled learners is contentious and conflicting, particularly among educators in the fields of special education, educational psychology, anti-oppressive education and critical theory. Although the subject has the potential to present conflict, frustration and even dismissal, faculty must be courageous with this idea of balance. The inability to present issues for dialogue and critique is a phenomenon tied to oppressive regimes and will further oppress students with diverse needs (Vanier, 1998; Freire, 1998).

An example of historical critique is presented by Canadian disability activist, Norm Kunc. He experienced first hand the acts of exclusion and ableism when as a child he was relegated to a regime of exercise to change his physical form. Additionally, he endured further scrutiny by the nature of control a segregated model of education offered. He speaks of the phenomenon of disability from the perspective of difference and like Martha Minnow, defines it as the ‘dilemma of difference’ (Kunc, 2000; Minnow, 1990). Kunc’s analysis of social and cultural understandings of disability, created by the dominant actors in a society, rests with the construction of value formation. He believes

that the views of disability and the corresponding responses or actions of these views are influenced by political, social and economic forces that in any given era affect the public's attitudes and beliefs. The significance of Kunc's work has to be considered by legislators, judiciary and educators when providing equality interpretations and outcome services for persons with disabilities.

In his development of value formation, he has identified four responses to disability. The first response he presents is marginalization. [It] "is expressed by avoiding, segregating and in some cases putting an end to people who are different," (Kunc, 2000, p.160). In this example, persons with disabilities are viewed as a burden. Those who respond to this view support the initiatives of segregated education, institutionalization of adults, and euthanasia for the elderly, ill or disabled. An astounding regression of justice is exemplified in a new piece of legislation that the Netherlands has recently passed to protect physicians giving them the legal right to euthanize disabled children under the age of twelve<sup>7</sup>. The second response Kunc explains is reform—persons with disabilities can join the mainstream if they change to become like those that are deemed normal. This message clearly shows that value lies in being typical and uniform and that children and adults must be rehabilitated or assimilated to meet these standards. Thirdly, the response of tolerance has been identified as a mainstream phenomenon and, although it signifies attention as it is an outcome from the American civil rights movement, it is detrimental in that it promotes the ideas of benevolence and resignation, and can not completely deliver the understandings of acceptance and belonging. Lastly, Kunc sees valuing as the only acceptable response or view. Here diversity is embraced and disability is seen as typical. This view does not mean that the implications of disability to an individual and family

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<sup>7</sup> Ragged Edge reports the concerns of those from the disability community in response to the Netherlands.

should be minimized. It means that a person with a disability is seen as different and having different needs, and however challenging those needs might be, that the life circumstance around this person should not be viewed as tragedy. This view confirms and welcomes variance within humanity and sees persons with disabilities as part of the norm within our society. The unfortunate part of this scenario is that the last view is rarely spoken about by educational scholars and certainly, the culture of the modern day society openly disputes this phenomenon by the discourse it studies and the actions it takes (Wolbring, 2005).

In understanding the realities that exist for disabled children and adults, teacher candidates must be encouraged to search for explicit human rights infractions and taught to identify more subtle examples of disability discrimination. Ableism is everywhere; one merely has to open one's eyes to see it. Students must become aware of the overwhelming evidence that shows that both Canadian judiciary and educational analysts utilize the medical model<sup>8</sup> to interpret equality rights of persons with disabilities. This model continues to disenfranchise and further marginalize students with disabilities and excludes their access to full citizenship. (Barnes & Mercer, 2003; Oliver, 1996; Reiser, 1996; Bach, 2002) Reiser (1996) provides his personal reflection:

The 'medical model' sees the disabled person as the problem. We are to be adapted to fit into the world as it is. If this is not possible, then we are shut away in some specialized institution...the emphasis is on dependence, backed up by the stereotypes of disability that call forth pity, fear and patronizing attitudes. Rather than on the needs of the person, the focus is usually on the impairment. With the medical and associated professions' discourse of cures, normalization and science, the power to change us lies within them. ...the assessments of us are used to determine where we go to school; what support we get; what type of

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<sup>8</sup> The government of Canada defines disability from three distinct perspectives: impairment, functional limitations and ecological understandings, however, it is noted that all provincial and territorial jurisdictions present most legislative definitions in accordance with the dominant medical model. <http://www.sdc.gc.ca/asp/gateway.asp?hr=en/hip/odi/documents/Definitions/Definitions001.shtml>

education; where we live; whether or not we can work and what type of work we can do; and indeed whether we are even born at all, or are allowed to procreate. Powerful and pervasive views of us are reinforced in language and in the media, books, films, comics and art. The ‘medical model’ view of us creates a cycle of dependency and exclusion which is difficult to break. ‘Medical model’ thinking about us predominates in schools where special educational needs are thought of as emanating from the individual who is seen as different, faulty and needing to be assessed and made as normal as possible. (p.119)

Students must be presented with the profound, cyclic and interfacing effects that judicial decisions have had on the life circumstances of disabled persons, their families and society as a whole.<sup>9</sup> Presently the government of Canada adheres to the medical model of disability as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO). The International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps (1980) and the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health<sup>10</sup> (2001) were adopted to define disability in Canada. Although the later classification has promoted an understanding of the interactions between impairment and external limitations or restrictions, the two models clearly view disability as an individual construct, one that predominantly requires medical assessment and intervention.

An important example of rights analysis can be presented to students by exploring the various critiques of the *Emily Eaton* equality claim<sup>11</sup>. The watershed case of *Eaton v. Brant County Board of Education* [1997] S.C.R. 241 has been critiqued by both Margot Young and Dianne Pothier, not only for its adherence to formal equality and its dismissal of substantive equality principles, but for the judiciary’s underpinning of the medical

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<sup>9</sup> The watershed cases of *Eaton*, *Eldridge* and *Auton* have had profound effects on the daily lives of disabled persons.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.who.int/classifications/icf/en/>

<sup>11</sup> The *Eaton* case received the green light for access to an inclusive education service by the *Ontario Court of Appeal* under the decision of Louise Arbour, however, opposing analysis was presented at the SCC in 1997 and the decision was overturned. The SCC analysis of this case came before the *Eldridge* case, which may have had significant influence as jurisprudence in the justification of inclusive education as an equality right.

model to reinforce the phenomenon of enforced segregated education as a just and useful avenue to education equity. Pothier alludes that it is Justice Sopinka's inability to see the problem from the view of the "other" when he provides the characteristic of blindness as a "source of inability" (p. 271) or the root of the problem:

the real barrier in Justice Sopinka's example is not blindness but the design of the test according to able-bodied norms. Justice Sopinka's framework makes accommodation of persons with disabilities an end in itself rather than as a possible means to the end of equality. The difference is significant. Justice Sopinka's analysis is premised on able-bodied design with after the fact tinkering through accommodation, rather than inclusive design from the start that may either obviate the need for accommodation at all or make it easier to accomplish because it was anticipated in advance. The basic point is this: while equality in the context of disability does require taking account of difference, it does not require a construction of a hierarchy between 'normal' and 'abnormal' (p.272).

It is the professional's analysis of the medical model with the insidious focus on personal characteristics of difference or deficit that continues to plague the equality rights of disabled Canadians. Pre-service teachers must be supported to critically examine decision making processes that infringe on equality rights afforded to students with differences. In exploring educational hegemony, they must be shown how dominant discourses and the decisions surrounding them allow children with disabilities to fail once given permission to join (Bell, 2004; Slee, 2004). Catherine Frazee refers to the idea of exclusionary inclusion that exists for children that are allowed access to the mainstream classroom.

[The] placing [of] disabled children unsupported and without creative intervention in classrooms that are already too large and under-resourced—leaves them vulnerable to an equality analysis that sees their differences as "residing in themselves."<sup>12</sup> Such an analysis perpetuates their disadvantage by imposing conditions upon inclusion, once again holding out the offer of equal participation as contingent upon their capacity to emulate valued social norms (p. 13, 2003).

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<sup>12</sup> Difference dilemma defined by Martha Minnow.

Although civil rights legislation, particularly in the UK, Canada and the United States, has made inroads on reducing stereotypical language and prejudiced acts, while consecutively addressing issues of access, women, indigenous people, gays and lesbians, and disabled persons collectively continue to fight for equality. To some extent, a greater struggle may ensue for disabled persons as there are few global protections or legislative models that enforce affirmative action or inclusive sanctions. In Canada, the education act in the province of New Brunswick is one of the few legislative pieces of inclusion that is enforced and sanctioned. Sadly, even this piece of legislation is scrutinized by both organizations and individuals resisting inclusive education policy (Porter, 2000; Bunch, 2005). Additionally, some legislation including the *American Disabilities Act* (ADA), the dominant anti-discrimination law in the United States, is likened to a two-edged sword. Although this act is suppose to promote affirmative action, burden of proof rests with the plaintiff and because the act itself is grounded in the medical model<sup>13</sup>, persons with disabilities have little success in advancing their positions (Davis, 2002). This grounding and the adherence to cascading clauses founded in rehabilitation legislation and *IDEA*<sup>14</sup> such as “reasonable accommodation and least restrictive environment”<sup>15</sup> support the position of the dominant and ableistic society as found in the *Garrett* case<sup>16</sup>. This case law and the defence of like jurisprudence continue to contribute to the marginalized status that disabled persons encounter in schools and in the larger society (Sampson, 2006; Pothier and Devlin, 2006; Pothier, 1998; Mossof and Grant, 2003; Silvers and Stein, 2003; Minnow, 1990; Young, I, 1990)

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<sup>13</sup> This Act is criticized in Backlash against the ADA: Reinterpreting Disability Rights.

<sup>14</sup> Predominant act defining access to education for disabled children in the United States.

<sup>15</sup> The language found in the ADA is cascading, medically referenced and non-inclusive.

<sup>16</sup> This is case was a slap in the face for the American disability movement.

## **New Ways of Seeing Disability: Inclusion as Freedom**

**I am not truly free if I am taking away someone else's freedom, just as surely as I am not free when my freedom is taken from me...to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.** Nelson Mandela (p.119)

UNESCO's Guidelines for Inclusion: Ensuring Access for All states that in order for teachers and students to lead in societal change, teachers must be shown how to respond to student diversity by "seeing individual differences not as problems to be fixed but as opportunities for enriched learning," (2005). An exploration of three entities—the social model of disability, principles of inclusive practice and teaching processes grounded in community development can assist pre-service teachers in accepting a new view of learners and an inclusive philosophical base to work from. Through this re-conceptualization, the valuing of each learner becomes the focal point of pedagogy and the acceptance and celebration of human diversity becomes centre stage.

Teachers must be aware of the history of disabled persons and the rights movement that spearheaded a new way of exploring disability. As a resistive process, disabled peoples have advanced the social model of disability to address societal discrimination and ableistic views (Oliver, 1996; Thomas, 2001; Morris, 1998; Wendell, 1996).

Although some legal analysts believe the model is useful only in the advancement of anti-discrimination legislation and cannot be as a mechanism for the advancement of an inclusive society, it is clear that many more agencies, NGO's and governments are using the ideas and language of the social model to provide a foothold for disability rights. An understanding of the inherent value of the social model is required for legislators, educators and students to move equality interpretations forward with a lens on human

rights and the corresponding freedoms found in equality rights. The World Bank explores the social model as a human rights model:

The social model, or human rights model focuses on the role of society in gaining equality for all its citizens including people with disabilities without them being seen as people with 'special needs'. Within this model, society has a responsibility to address barriers that prevent the participation of persons with disabilities. The focus shifts from fixing individuals to eliminating socially constructed barriers (meaning everything from prejudice to physical access barriers). The social model moves disability into the field of community development. Disabled people are perceived as active and equal participants of society, contributing to the development process.<sup>17</sup> (2006)

The advancement of inclusive education as a human rights approach that supports a society concerned with the peaceful existence and sustainability of the global community must be presented to students and teachers. The seriousness of this kind of teaching is presented by Len Barton (1997):

Inclusive education is part of a human rights approach to social relations and conditions. The intentions and values involved are an integral part of a vision of a whole society of which education is a part. Therefore the role of inclusive education plays in the development of an inclusive society is a very serious issue.... [It] involved a serious commitment to the task of identifying, challenging and contributing to the removal of injustices. Part of this task involves a self-critical analysis of the role schools play in the production and reproduction of injustices such as disabling barriers of various forms. Schools therefore need to be welcoming places. It is more than mere questions of access that are at stake here. It is a quest for the removal of policies and practices of exclusion and the realization of effective participatory democracy. It also involves a wider concern, that of clarifying the role of schools in combating institutional discrimination in relation to, for example, the position of disabled people in society. (p.234)

Inclusive education as a human right has a long and challenging history. More than 50 years ago, Chief Justice Earl Warren presented a warning to the American people; he asked them to move beyond their own biases and remove their blinders to accept a moral understanding of inclusion, without which would be the continued demise of African

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<sup>17</sup> <http://web.worldbank.org>

Americans. In his written decision of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* he talks about the lifelong harm that segregated schooling implicates:

To separate [children] from others of similar age and qualifications ... generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone ... Segregation ... has a detrimental effect upon the children ... [as it's] usually interpreted as denoting the inferiority of the group. A sense of inferiority affects the motivation of a child to learn. Segregation ... has a tendency to retard the education and mental development of children and to deprive them of ... benefits they would receive in an ... integrated school system. We conclude that ... the doctrine of "separate but equal" has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. (Warren, 1954 in Snow, p.1)

An examination of the history of education at the time of *Brown v. the Board of Education* gives pre-service teachers the capacity to see the parallels of discrimination between African Americans and disabled children. At the time of *Brown*, there was no evidence that children of all races could not be educated together and yet powerful white supremacist movements worked to destroy and disempower the black community and to separate and divide people. Today, the same can be said about children and adults with varying learning differences. There are powerful factions whose 'best interests' are served by keeping the disabled separate (Russell, 1998). "Racially-segregated schools were the result of prejudicial perceptions and attitudes, [and there is mounting evidence that] the segregation of children and adults with disabilities in special settings, at schools, in workplaces and living arrangements, is an outcome of [similar] prejudicial perceptions and attitudes" (Snow, p. 1).

The philosophy of inclusive education as a human right can be presented and advanced through a model of equality that uses critical theory to create a foundation of belonging supported by the principles of respect, dignity and opportunity. Legal theorists, Donna Greschner, Rebecca Zietlow, Denise Reaume, William Pentney, Derrick

Bell, Diane Pothier and Richard Devlin, religious philosopher, Jean Vanier, disability rights activists, Norman Kunc, Simi Linton, Len Barton, Jenni Morris and Mike Oliver and educational theorists Paulo Freire, Roger Slee and David Purpel generate much discussion about the foundation of belonging as the beginning place for societal reform and the hope for an inclusive society. The starting point of this reform and re-conceptualization must begin with the teachers of children in elementary schools. It is here that the potential for human leadership in the quest of a civil society begins. If children are taught to live by the principles of inclusion, the possibility of a bright and inclusive society becomes a reality.

The philosophies of Greschner, Vanier and Kunc can be merged to support a pedagogical foundation for inclusive education as a human right. Critical disability theory, rights analysis and social justice understandings support a philosophy of inclusive education grounded by the principles of legal theory and moral obligation. A study of these theorists can be used by faculty, scholars and researchers as a beginning point for dialogue and an avenue to praxis and right thinking (Freire, 1998).

Donna Greschner argues that the promise of Section 15 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* has as much to do with belonging to the significant communities that define Canada as it has to do with understanding of freedom. She advocates that *Section 15* protects each citizen's interest in belonging to several distinct communities and defines this model of equality as the 'full membership' model. The first right to belong is to the human family. Here she advocates for the "protection of innate human dignity [and signifies] the importance of the human rights movement and democratic

participation” of all members of a society (1998, p. 421). Her understanding of this distinctly profound concept is further advanced in the letters of Jean Vanier (2006):

Humanity in its entirety is a body, and in the body each member is important. Groups, nations or races which cut themselves off from others, or seek to dominate by imposing their own culture, ideology and customs, by suppressing the identity of another's culture, wound and hurt not only that particular people but the whole of humanity and themselves. To-day, more than ever before, we are called to become more conscious of the fundamental unity of the human family and to help each group of people to find their identity and place in it, and to grow in openness toward others.

The second right to belong gives Canadians access to all political communities and recognizes universal suffrage. This right clearly presents the acceptance of voice for all Canadians regardless of how it is presented. Thirdly, in the understanding of belonging to identity groups, Greschner advocates for the respect and value of this identity to be protected by the provisions within the *Charter*. Duty to accommodate persons that belong to identity groups is a fundamental principle found within Section 15 (Brodsky and Day, 1996). Equality protections under the *Charter* are further explored in the jurisprudence of *Vriend*, *Eldridge* and *Law*. Her analysis of Section 15 of the *Charter* indicates that the primary purpose of this law is to overcome and prevent exclusion

not only...by explicit membership criteria—the formal rules of exclusion—but also by more indirect and less formal ways in which people are marked as second class, as less than full members, and not permitted to participate fully in the opportunities and riches of a society. (2002, p.306).

In advocating for an equality model of “full membership”, Greschner refers to the history of our province and the enactment of the *Saskatchewan Bill of Rights* in 1947 as a historical point in understanding the “Canadian” concept of belonging. Greschner believes that schools are important community institutions and the exclusion of belonging to such is an infringement:

Education has such importance to individual dignity and community interests that participation in the educational system indubitably constitutes an aspect of full membership [and she believes the] direct exclusion from such an important institution would violate section 15. (1998, p.435)

Throughout Greschner's advocacy for the foundation of belonging, she presents the principles of respect, dignity and opportunity as avenues to citizenship and calls for the *right to belong* as a protected equality right of all Canadians. The layering of these principles presents inclusive education as a solidarity agenda through the vision of "full membership" equality rights (Bach, 2002; Frazee, 2003). Greschner's voice adds to the work of the United Nations and is particularly useful when framing the discourse of inclusion in the draft *Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (2006). This acceptance sends a clear message to all educators, policy makers and academics—the subject of disability has been placed squarely in the field of human rights and discrimination law and there is no turning back from this analysis (Pothier and Devlin, 2006; Degener, 2003; Mosoff and Grant, 2003; Rioux, 2003; Greschner, 2002; Ruebain, 2000).

Jean Vanier leads one to believe that the possibility of an inclusive society, a culture of belonging, a new order, can be created by the leaders of tomorrow. In this evolution, he defines a sense of belonging as the process by which all people realize full humanity and a peaceful world. Vanier's vision for seeking truth and accepting and recognizing our histories and the histories of oppressed persons, particularly those with disabilities, can lead to a greater openness and understanding of humanity, the key element in creating an inclusive society. He advocates that the "greater good" can only be achieved through belonging to community and like Greschner, places value in the understanding of membership and collectivism. Vanier believes that the possibility of acceptance and

friendship among diverse peoples occurs only when belonging is foundational. It is here, in the community, where persons of difference come together, that compassion, love and peace have a chance for evolution:

A culture of peace implies an acceptance of each person with their gifts and their weakness, helping each one to rediscover his/her dignity and place in the human community. In a culture of peace, people who are stronger are encouraged to recognize and accept their own weaknesses, and to serve and give support to those who are more vulnerable and to help them discover their own capacities. In a culture of peace each person is seen as unique, important and sacred. (2006)

Norm Kunc advocates that teachers need to learn that “belonging is a right, not a privileged status that is earned” (2000, p.91). He believes the fundamental principle of inclusive education is the valuing of diversity within human society. He speaks of the membership of the classroom as a panacea for human rights and has a vision that all children have capacity to understand interdependence and grow in compassion and acceptance of those with differences. Supportingly, Martha Nussbaum believes that students’ having a broad compassion for fellow students is essential in creating a civilized society. Mitchell Levitz, a young man with Down syndrome who wrote his own story, put it this way: “It is really about how much love and compassion that you have. That’s what really counts about values” (Nussbaum, p. 422).

There are many scholars who remain vigilant in their critique of educational pedagogy that supports special education orthodoxy (Ware, 2005; Gabel, 2005; Slee, 2004). Linda Ware cites the work of Lous Heshusius as paramount in this critique. She is hopeful that special education’s long-standing model of “prevention/treatment/remediation/measurement” will finally be abandoned in pursuit of a “social/cultural/political” understanding of disability (2005, p. 107). In supporting the

work of Heshusis, she advocates for an interdisciplinary approach in the study of education and in particular pre-service teacher education, through a collaborative inquiry of disability. This collective model of study has the potential to support the *right of belonging* through the understanding of inclusive education as a human right. The necessary critique of disability education utilizing critical disability theory, equality analysis and social justice principles can empower students and teachers to become articulate and courageous in this endeavour. It is with this hope that the words of Susan Wendell resonate. She asks what it might take to create a society with a vision of valuing and respect afforded to all people. Her response is this:

It would certainly mean not assuming that every disability is a tragic loss or that everyone with a disability wants to be 'cured.' It would mean seeking out and respecting knowledge and perspectives of people with disabilities. It would mean being willing to learn about and respect ways of being and forms of consciousness that are unfamiliar. (1996, p.84)

Additionally, Vanier's reflective thought should provide scholars, teachers and students with the courage that is required to engage in critical thought and compassionate action:

One of the big questions for each one of us today is how to turn our backs on the culture of rivalry, individualism, conflict or depression that surrounds us, and move instead into a culture of solidarity and cooperation, peace and hope. How can this transformation come about in us? ... "Is it possible that one day there will be paradise on earth?" It seems to me that paradise on earth is not possible unless each one of us discovers the paradise within us, that little sanctuary hidden in the most intimate part of our being. Perceiving and finding this inner paradise of peace and unity implies a struggle against the culture of rivalry which is within us too. If I can catch a glimpse of this inner paradise, I will begin to see it in others. And then as several people come together who live it, we create community ... but all that implies a real struggle. Letter, June 2006

The protection of inclusion and the creation of a civil society cannot be open for debate. William Pentney has eloquently described the concept of belonging and the importance of equality provisions in protecting that right:

Belonging. Such an achingly simple word. It conjures up some of our deepest yearnings, and for some of us, perhaps our most painful memories. Equality claims begin and end with a desire for belonging, for community. Ideas of equality lie at the heart of the Canadian promise of community. Yet we know that communities are built in two ways: by welcoming in, and by keeping out. The desire to belong is intense and profound. Each of us has a deeply personal experience of that, which has been built since childhood.... Equality law seeks to protect and promote belonging; to allow others into the fold, and to encourage and cement our bonds of community. (Frazee, 2003, p.8)

In closing, it is hoped that teachers and those who will come to teach will take up the challenge to question and critique. The creation of a civil society, one built on the principles of inclusion and belonging, is required to address the fragmentation of the world all humanity shares. The words of Berndt Rosengren provide the courage to imagine the possibility of a new vision, a vision of an inclusive society that presents freedom as paramount:

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(Presented by Begnt Lindquest, 2002 UN Special Rapporteur on Disability)

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