

CANADIAN TEACHERS' ASSOCIATIONS AND THE INCLUSIVE MOVEMENT FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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During the 1980s Canadian teachers' associations became deeply immersed in the reform movement that called for the inclusion of students with special needs into general classrooms. Associations raised issues surrounding inclusive schooling, particularly in regard to the conditions of teaching and learning. As inclusion evolved into a dominant paradigm for schooling, the associations assumed more positive and conciliatory stances. To illustrate the manner in which Canadian teachers' associations confronted the inclusive schooling policy, this paper discusses common overlapping elements found in their collective dialogue surrounding three major themes — implementation, funding and supports, and professional development. It considers initial association responses and gradual shifts in stances by many associations as they increasingly supported inclusive schooling and assimilated its concepts under the banners of teacher professionalism and social justice.

The 1980s heralded a remarkable commitment to inclusive schooling for students with special needs. The philosophical assumptions and discourses that underlay the inclusive movement focused on social justice, civil rights, and equity, and differed fundamentally from traditional conceptions of exceptionality and special education. Government intervention was intense and sustained: many jurisdictions acted to form statutory and operational frameworks to define and facilitate special services within an inclusive framework. The ensuing legislation and policies diminished the line between general and special education and broadened the responsibilities of general classroom teachers.

However, meaningful reform cannot be achieved without ownership by the teachers who are called upon to implement the changes and by the associations that represent their collective

voice.¹ How to address inclusion and the circumstances of their members took on substantial significance for teachers' associations across Canada. They undertook penetrating and comprehensive research that referenced inclusive education to the situations of students with special needs, the requirements of the general classroom, and the lives of general classroom teachers.

This paper is designed to examine the continuing progress of inclusive schooling from the standpoint of teachers' associations in Canada. It plots the manner in which the associations responded to policy changes relating to students with special needs in the opening years of the inclusive crusade and the ways in which their arguments both changed and reinterpreted government rhetoric as inclusion became a dominant perspective. With seventeen provincial and territorial teachers' organizations in Canada, together with multiple areas central to any discussion on the nature of the reform movement, it is clearly impossible to outline the policies, programs, and problems in each jurisdiction related to inclusive schooling. The data here are selective rather than comprehensive. The selection of examples pinpoints common themes that emerge from the documentation – the implementation of inclusive practices; resources and supports; and professional development.

The stimulus for this paper is three decades of research into the attitudes of general classroom teachers toward the principles of inclusive schooling and toward students with special needs (e.g., Chow & Winzer, 1992; Winzer, 1987, 2008; Winzer & Mazurek, in press). While teachers' attitudes form only a single strand in the web of contemporary discussions about education reform, their study represents “one of the largest bodies of research investigating the

¹ Distinctions exist among teachers' federations, associations, societies, and unions. We use the term *associations* as a generic descriptor.

critical area of inclusion” (Cook, Tankersley, Cook, & Lundrum, 2000, p. 116). It seemed a natural progression to investigate the collective voices of teachers. However, there is a dearth of literature that considers teachers’ associations. As Nina Bascia (2005a) points out, much of the literature is “silent on teacher unions” and research on education reform “reveals only scant glimpses of union sponsorship or participation” (p. 226).

Two caveats underlie the paper. First, investigations of teacher attitudes, usually initiated by researchers, are contained within a body of well-designed and well-conducted empirical research that employs surveys, questionnaires, and meta-analyses. Documentation from teacher associations tends to be more qualitatively descriptive. However, when data is commissioned on behalf of teacher organizations, distinctions between academic research and commissioned research becomes blurred as the same players are often involved in both. In moving from the quantitative methodologies of teacher attitude research to the sphere of teacher association documentation, we employ material that was largely gathered from the electronic media. Association documentation is not a large-scale data base and Web sites as a source of data are limited. Nevertheless, the generated material was rich and diverse, adequate for an initial study, and generalizable: nine provinces are considered (Quebec and the territories are not included here).

The second caveat stresses that this is an exploratory paper, not a comparison with the teacher attitude literature. As the contributions of teacher associations have been inadequately explored, an initial study serves two aims. First, a survey of relevant documentation illustrates the pan-Canadian attention paid by teachers’ associations to inclusion as a facet of the national conversation on education policy and reform. Second, it responds to a need to examine the balance of interests and voices influencing the inclusive reform.

Teachers' Associations

In Canada, as a result of the Education provisions in Section 93 of The Constitution Act, 1867, provinces have almost exclusive jurisdictional control over education. Indeed, at the federal level, a ministry of education does not even exist. Where the federal government does have some authority in the realm of education, it is in focused and clearly delineated realms: “the federal government retains responsibilities for funding support for education programs of national priority such as bilingualism, multiculturalism, occupational and apprenticeship training, international development and post-secondary education; sectoral jurisdiction over education related to the armed forces and penitentiaries; funding for services in the [northern territories], and the education of status Indian and Inuit children” (Kachur, 2000, p. 54).

Since constitutional responsibility resides almost exclusively at the provincial level, educational organizations developed first on a provincial basis, followed by teachers in the territories forming equivalent associations. There are nineteen provincial and territorial teachers' associations (Northwest Territories Teachers' Association, 2010), all but three of which are affiliated either directly or indirectly with the Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF) (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2010).

Teachers' associations have a variety of structures and priorities, and are shaped by distinct educational, cultural, political, economic, and social contexts. All, however, echo certain points in regard to students with special needs. In general, they define special needs; limit or recommend the number of children with special needs in a classroom; and specify levels of staffing, qualifications for personnel, and staff responsibilities for planning. Despite the differences between associations, some issues related to inclusive practices resonate in all jurisdictions.

Early Movement Toward Inclusion

In the first flush of enthusiasm in the mid-1980s, policy making focused on the ideological themes of inclusive education. The discourses, founded on social-ethical considerations and intimately connected to common conceptions of social justice, foregrounded children's human and educational rights but had limited regard for the beliefs of educators. Teachers' voices were muted or unheard, their skills and willingness virtually unquestioned. Advocates and policy makers seemed to assume that teachers would endorse the philosophy, welcome children with special needs into general classrooms, and willingly make the pilgrimage to individualized and specialized instruction (Winzer, 2008). It follows that teachers' associations could not claim even partial parentage for the movement.

Nevertheless, rapidly mounting interest and enabling legislation propelled the inclusive movement into a consistent focus of attention by teachers' associations. Policy makers faced a skeptical audience – one that showed substantial wariness, if not downright resistance and reluctance. Teachers' associations were not unique in their stances. For many educators, advocacy groups, and parents, inclusion was a clarion call to reshape the field and discard much of traditional special education. For others, inclusion defied educational orthodoxy and was a radical reform to be approached cautiously (Winzer, 2008, 2009).

When the teachers' associations found themselves on “the sharp edge of change” (Bascia & Hargreaves, 2000), there occurred a significant increase in political activity in reaction to government initiatives (Bascia, 2005a, b; Naylor, 2002b). Animosity between teachers' associations and conservative but reforming governments became more the norm than the exception (Naylor, 2002b).

Associations responded to new legislation and policies with their own penetrating and comprehensive research. For example, the Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF) first gave consideration to students with special needs in 1982; in 1992 the CTF addressed inclusion and the integration of special needs children in its policies (Philpott, 2002). The Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) (2002a, b, c) expressed deep concerns about inclusion. By the end of the 1980s, "teachers' representatives from around the province were hearing stories of mounting frustration from teachers at all levels" (Flower & Booi, 1998, p. 124). The Elementary Teachers' Association of Ontario (ETFO) (2002, p. 5) reported integration as "a significant issue for teachers." School restructuring and the increased inclusion of students with special needs prompted messages of concern from the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association (NLTA) (Younghusband, Garlie, & Church, 2003). When Nova Scotia enacted the *Special Education Policy Manual* in 1996, it thrust the notion of inclusion to the forefront of the education agenda. There was considerable reaction to the first official policy on special education and the implementation methods for full inclusion suggested by the province. New Brunswick teachers complained that the province "went whole hog without planning" (Education Consulting, 2002, p. 22).

The windstorm of surveys, reports, and recommendations eschewed the emotional moralizing and sentimental egalitarianism that underlay so much of the early inclusive movement. Governments and teachers' associations stood on opposite sides of an ideological fault line. Some associations saw the ideology of the crafters of inclusion as not tempered by the lived experiences of teachers, but by the prevailing social winds. They characterized the actions of governments as "ideologically inspired, and hostile or challenging to their members' interest" (Naylor, 2002b, p. 1). They tended to judge inclusion as more of a procedural classroom concern

than a social prejudice issue, another element in a constant parade of imposed top-down government initiatives that increased teachers' work and failed to recognize the complexity of contemporary school life. Teachers' associations centered the reform and its accompanying responsibilities within the broader field of workload issues. Because the blueprint for inclusion was seen as conflicting with the hard realities of the classroom, survival and the well being of members generally trumped ideology in the associations' collective messages.

For their part, some governments countered that the teachers' associations were no less ideological in their positions and were merely traditionally "formidable foes of meaningful educational reform" (Haar, 1998), interested solely in staking out territory to defend or expand and pursuing better pay and benefits. Associations were chastised for doing what they were established to do – protect members and advance their interests.

When the movement was presented as a social and educational ideology or principle, associations' responses tended to be equivocal. The Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association (NLTA), as an example, observed that "philosophically inclusion is desirable" (NLTA, 1999, p. 6). However, marked differences existed between inclusion as a philosophy and the inclusive classroom in which the principle was to be realized. Even if the concepts of inclusive schooling were supported, teachers' associations found "the devil" to be "in implementation and other details" (Froese-Germain, 2004, p. 7).

Teacher Workload

Work exerts a decisive influence on teachers' well being and levels of stress. As job design shifted to more inclusive classrooms, it enjoined increased responsibilities for teachers and added to the complexity and stress of teaching. Along with the rapid organizational changes

in support of new curricula, the quest for higher standards, and large-scale assessments, inclusive practices demanded innovative pedagogical approaches and evolving roles for educators. Many teachers felt under siege and unprepared to comply with the broad array of requirements. They interpreted inclusion as requiring change to accustomed practice, felt that it increased their workload and stress levels, and demanded time they did not have. In Newfoundland, for example, teachers found inclusion to be extra work; they did not have time for the required extra activities or for altering routines (Edmunds, 2000). Teachers in British Columbia expressed “disappointment and frustration at the difficulty of daily implementation” (Naylor, 2002a). New Brunswick teachers variously said that “we have taken the notion of inclusion to an absurd level” and “inclusion has been pursued to the point of the ridiculous” (Education Consulting, 2002, p. 22).

Time constraints and workload issues were closely linked to common concerns about the negative social and/or academic consequences for typically developing students. The NLTA observed that the “policies and procedures being implemented” were “having a serious and detrimental effect on the level of instruction being provided to all students” (NLTA, 1999, p. 3). In Alberta, teachers told their association that inclusion was a valuable policy that had been carried to an extreme and failed to serve either normally developing or special students well (ATA, 2002a). In Nova Scotia, the president of the province’s public teachers union said that teaching disabled students in regular classrooms had become a “nightmare” (NSTU, 2002).

Daily, teachers faced the dilemma of attending to the special needs of the unique child versus serving the group of students. One teacher in BC noted that “the time classroom teachers must devote to a special needs student during academic learning is enormous” (“I’m a teacher,” 2002, p. 52). Alberta teachers were “too often forced to engage in a form of triage, deciding who

will receive their attention and who must do without” (ATA, 2002c, p. 8). A New Brunswick teacher spoke to “devotion to heterogeneous grouping at the expense of children’s learning and reasonable teaching conditions” (Education Consulting, 2002, p. 49). New Brunswick, it was said, created a system that “nurtures to the detriment of kids,” where teachers were “torn between being kind and having expectations” (Education Consulting, 2002, p. 30).

Primarily concerned with the working conditions of their members, teachers’ associations would not valorize full inclusion as the sole route to addressing disability and marginalization. The Canadian Teachers’ Federation, for example, held that inclusion was not always the best or only response to the needs of challenged children: the impact on the learning of other students in the classroom must always be considered and addressed (CTF, 2004; Council of Ministers, 2004). The Council of Atlantic Provinces Teacher Organizations (CAPTO) adopted a policy in 2003 which supported the inclusion of pupils with exceptionalities, but always with due regard for the educational needs of all pupils. Settings other than the general classroom were seen as appropriate for specific purposes (MacIntyre, 2003). In Newfoundland, Patricia Canning spoke against an undue emphasis placed upon the concept of inclusion and suggested that “inclusion is but one of a number of avenues available to students’ needs and the regular classroom must be considered as but one of a number of placement options” (NLTA, 1999, p. 3). In BC, more than four times as many teachers supported non-school placements in some cases as did those supporting full-school placement (Naylor, 2004). In Nova Scotia, over 90 percent of respondents to a survey believed that full-time inclusion for all students was not appropriate (MacMillan, Meyer, Edmunds, Edmunds, & Feltmate, 2002).

Funding and Supports

Managing inclusive classrooms requires new kinds of supports or that traditional supports be provided in new ways. Student supports are anything that helps a child to pursue educational goals such as materials, adaptations, or the assistance of a paraeducator. Teacher supports include extra personnel, planning time, and class size reduction.

There is nothing novel about teachers' representatives decrying government parsimony. The 1990s were a period of "economic scarcity and work intensification" (Bascia, 2001, p. 10) in which conservative economic policies resulted in the resources devoted to education declining while the number of students with special needs included in general classrooms increased. Teachers' associations expressed concern about implementing the policies "in a climate of reduced support" (ETFO, 2002, p. 6). A poll of 1,000 teachers undertaken by the Canadian Teachers' Federation found that 30 percent of respondents cited lack of resources and access to experts as key stumbling blocks to the success of inclusive education (O'Connor, 2004). In New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, Edmunds and colleagues (2000) found that 77 percent of the teachers surveyed did not think that they had adequate resources to properly carry out their teaching duties. The Nova Scotia Teachers' Union (NSTU) warned that, "if the government does not commit the necessary resources, then no student is being served by the current policy" (in ETFO, 2002, p. 6). At the 2002 annual meeting, NSTU delegates voted unanimously to withdraw support for inclusive policies because they were so poorly funded by the provincial government (NSTU, 2002). A BCTF survey (Schaefer, 2003) found that inadequate levels of learning resources were a source of stress to 85 percent of teachers, with little difference in the perceptions of elementary and secondary personnel.

A consistent complaint from teachers' associations was that some education ministries misconstrued the concept of inclusion to save education dollars. Inclusive classrooms became the norm for fiscal rather than moral reasons (Jordan, 2001). In Nova Scotia and Newfoundland, Edmunds (2000) found that teachers felt that the philosophy and practice of inclusion was implemented by both provinces as a cost-saving measure, not because inclusion was a sound and proven educational mandate.

Reduced funding trickles down to affect diverse areas of acute interest to teachers' associations. Issues include teacher satisfaction; teacher workload; retention and attrition; stress and burnout; role conflict, role ambiguity, and role overload such as excessive paperwork. Stringent funding can also translate into a reduction in the number of teachers needed in schools through the elimination of special classes, the elimination or combination of special education teaching positions, or trained teachers abandoning the special education area for general classroom placements.

British Columbia, for example, found itself with a reduced number of resource teachers as a result of a significant exodus of experienced resource teachers from their support role and into classroom teaching positions (Naylor, 2005). In Ontario, stress among special education personnel leads to "teachers with the least experience" being "placed in the most difficult positions because others have simply had enough" (ETFO, 2002, p. 15). BC specialist support teachers similarly report high levels of stress and, when they can no longer perform, relatively inexperienced staff take over the positions (Naylor, 2003). Systems are then at risk for losing promising teachers who lack the experience or knowledge for particularly challenging placements and are not provided with a range of necessary supports. A poll undertaken by the Canadian Teachers' Federation (2004) found that lack of classroom support for special needs

students was one of the top factors contributing to teacher burnout and prompting young teachers to leave the profession.

Additionally, less specialist staff – psychologists, social workers, speech therapists, and others – are available for consultation and collaboration, so teachers receive less support in their efforts to assist students with special needs. In Ontario, the Catholic Teachers' Association (2002) complained that “the overall reduction of other professional staff available to assist teachers is another factor stretching the system to the breaking point” (p. 19). In Nova Scotia, specific support staff once available at the elementary level were reduced or removed entirely (MacMillan et al., 2000).

A further burden lies within the intensification of bureaucratic and administrative requirements. Associations variously chide that the introduction of complex and elaborate documentation procedures to determine student eligibility for funding raises considerable barriers. The steps required to access much of special education funding have become a bureaucratic nightmare: too much time and energy is expended in order to access inadequate funding. Further, excessive paperwork not only takes away much time for direct work with students, but needy students are languishing on waiting lists while school professionals are tied up filling out the forms to qualify for funds (EFTO, 2002; NLTA, 1999). In BC, audits became counter productive: the focus on audit and accountability requirements together with increasing paperwork diverted resources away from delivering services to students (Naylor, 2003).

Professional Development

A central concern for teachers is the sense that their work is jeopardized by a lack of professional development realistically geared toward supporting inclusive schooling. Although

advocacy for enhanced preservice and inservice teacher training has been consistent and persistent since at least the early-1970s, a substantial body of literature indicates that teachers are inadequately prepared to teach children with special needs (e.g., Edmunds, 2000, 2003).

Naylor (2003) found that a large number of teachers in British Columbia felt that they were professionally unprepared to teach diverse children in the classroom. Researchers (Edmunds, 2000; Maich, 2002; Younghusband, 1999) pinpointed the concerns of teachers in Newfoundland – poor preparation for inclusive classrooms, lack of confidence in their teaching skills or their program and curriculum adaptation skills, lack of the skills to teach children with learning difficulties, and little preparation to deal with other disabilities. Professional development has been identified as a major obstacle by educators in Nova Scotia (MacIntyre, 2003). In two separate surveys of more than 1,000 teachers (Edmunds, 2003; Edmunds, Halsall, MacMillan, & Edmunds, 2000), 80 percent of respondents felt that they did not have adequate professional training for inclusion.

Advancing the Inclusive Agenda

The inclusive agenda rapidly moved from an idea to a conviction and the clamor and tensions that characterized the early movement muted. This is not to suggest that hard debates about the consequences of the inclusive reform for schools and teachers disappeared, the myriad problems evaporated, or that teachers' associations became apolitical or neutral. Rather, in step with the paradigm shift, associations subtly reshaped their views. They recognized that the idea of inclusion had become entrenched and that polarizing debates about its merits were unproductive and outdated. Inclusion itself was “no longer an issue” (ATA, 2008, p. 11).

As the fundamental propositions and dimensions of inclusion were ceded the status of accepted reality, many previously unconvinced groups assumed more favourable stances (Winzer, 2009). Following this thread, a shift can be discerned in the documentation from teachers' associations. The change was not a sudden conversion but rather was defined by changes in political and educational activity. Teachers' associations confronted the issue of inclusion with more nuanced and strategic responses. They used their considerable resources to research and articulate alternatives, to play an advocacy role, to collaborate with allies also involved in the inclusive movement, and to reframe and reconceptualize their opposition to government mandates by adjusting the focus to add issues concerning teacher professionalism and social justice considerations.

The teachers' associations' strategies for reframing government rhetoric becomes visible in issues surrounding teacher workload. Assuming the mantle of both protectors and reformers, associations presented themselves as vital to the quality of teachers' work and also to the health and welfare of the larger education infrastructure. Instead of merely challenging the merits and feasibility of government initiatives and focusing opposition within the contexts of reduced services to vulnerable students and the increased workload and stress on teachers, associations shifted and recast the argument. Associations spoke to overlapping issues such as class size, a reduction of the pupil-teacher ratio in classes where there are students with special needs, caps on the number of special needs students admitted to a single classroom, class composition, and accountability (large-scale testing) agendas.

Many associations saw solutions that involved building capacity in terms of partnerships with other education stakeholders, territory not traditionally occupied by teacher organizations (Naylor, 2007). Acts of association collaboration were seen in efforts by the Canadian Teachers'

Federation to form task forces or committees to study the issue of inclusion, to hold conferences to help frame policy, and to pass or implement policy. The CTF, for example, participated as a research partner in a national study on the attitudes of teachers toward inclusion (see Bunch, Lupart, & Brown, 1997). The BCTF and other associations are building fruitful relationships with groups such as the Canadian Association for Community Living (CACL & BCTF, 2004).

Associations have long fulfilled two roles – negotiators of contracts and benefits, and professional associations (Rodrigue, 2000). Associations merge industrial and professional objectives in their mission statements and professional development appears as a significant aspect of association advocacy as well as a relatively stable and robust activity within the context of teachers' organizations (Rottman, 2008; Smaller, 1998). However, in a climate of dramatically decreased educational funding, the resources provided by governments for professional development were inadequate (Jordan, 2001). Teachers' associations moved to expand their efforts markedly (Bascia, 2005b).

Associations consistently advocate extended professional development on inclusive schooling for administrators, teachers, and paraeducators. For example, the Manitoba Teachers' Society "support[s] increased access for teachers and principals to professional development opportunities relating to programming and services for exceptional students" (MTS, 2001, p. 10). The NLTA (1999) stresses the need for effective and ongoing personnel development. Bascia (2005c) speaks approvingly of the ATA's role in assuming aspects of professional development and at the same time asserting its own preferences for reform.

Some associations have stepped outside their traditional roles to engage in activities typically associated with a more vigorous school reform agenda. They have embraced "social action unionism" which may be seen as "part of the broader movement for social progress." As

such, “it calls for participatory union membership, education reform to serve all children, collaboration with community organizations, and a concern for broader issues of equity” (Peterson, 1999, in Naylor, 2002b).

Although most Canadian teachers’ groups do not characterize themselves as social justice associations (Rottmann, 2008), Canadian teachers’ associations have “an abiding interest in social justice as reflected in their policies, programs, and decision-making structures” (Froese-Germain & O’Haire, 2007, p. 2). The Canadian Teachers’ Federation, for example, has a history of including equity issues among its priorities. The BCTF is proud of its history as a social justice federation (BCTF, 2006).

Social justice activities within Canadian teachers’ associations tend to be less sustained and vigorous than other functions. However, the perspectives have solidly advanced the notions of inclusion. Assumptions embedded in the various uses of the term social justice use the liberal dialogue of equal opportunity, civil rights, and individualization, all deeply explicit within the philosophy of inclusive schooling. It is not surprising that a recent study of 20 Canadian organizations (Rottmann, 2008) found that 80 percent of them supported at least one initiative related to disability.

The Current Scene

Currently, Canadian teachers’ associations speak favourably to the processes of inclusion. In fact, the documentation now characterizes teachers’ associations as major advocates of inclusive ideals, and governments as the laggards (e.g., Naylor, 2005; ATA, 2008).

A set of overlapping variables seems to play into the switched roles. From governments emerge new priorities and changing political discourses. The script for education reform is

constantly being revised: accountability, quality, competence, and efficiency have become key words in contemporary political and educational agendas. Governments maintain tight control over the fundamental rules that fund and hold schools accountable while simultaneously promoting the importance of local autonomy, flexibility in decision making, and the responsibility to decide how best to organize to meet the diverse needs of all students. At the same time, an espousal of market approaches can mean limited support and funding for public sector services. As Bourdieu (1998) points out, if the right hand is government, and the left hand is the caring professions, including teaching, then “the right hand does not know what the left hand is doing, and certainly does not want to pay for its activities” (p. 2).

Government shifts are moving to define education in terms of economic accountability and market-driven demand and away from concerns for social justice; teachers' associations are seeking to advance the reform agenda arguing from the perspective of social justice. They appreciate that diversity, equality, and inclusion are critical principles in Canadian legislation and society: not to be inclusive would compromise a social good that chimes with current values.

Still, social justice is not a foundational pillar of Canadian teachers' associations. Their responses to education reform are typically born more of immediate practical concerns than a broader sense of philosophy and ideology. Teachers' associations remain deeply concerned about “the lack of support for inclusive education for students with special needs” (ATA, 2008, p. 9). They are wont to criticize official apathy and inaction regarding inclusive practices. They castigate governments about their commitment to inclusion, contending that governments have forsaken and endangered inclusion in terms of levels of funding, support, and staffing.

In British Columbia, for example, a formal government commitment to inclusion has been in place since the School Act of 1989 and the adoption of the *Special education guidelines*

in 1995. However, the BCTF holds that removing the funding and staffing that are necessary preconditions for successful inclusive practice were actions that really amounted to a systematic attack by governments on inclusive educational approaches (see Naylor, 2005). In Alberta, the two largest sources of teacher dissatisfaction are large class sizes and the inadequacy of support for students with special needs (ATA, 2008). The ATA notes that “Alberta Education has not developed a systematic, province wide action plan to support regular classroom teachers in assuming the challenge of inclusive practice” (ATA, 2008, p. 14).

Summary

After three decades of research on teacher attitudes toward the inclusive movement it seemed logical to move to an assessment of the collective voices of teachers as manifest in documentation from teacher associations. Despite the powerful role that teacher associations play in influencing the direction and success of education reform, associations’ voices are often absent from studies researching change and policy development in education.

This introductory study tracked changes in the stances of teachers’ associations as the inclusive reform was introduced and confirmed. It was not designed to rehearse the huge pool of teacher attitude research. As a capsule summary, however, we can say with confidence that the trajectories are the same: the data on teacher attitudes clearly delineates the stages of concern of teachers from the initial adoption of inclusive practices to a nuanced and positive acceptance.

This study shows that when inclusive schooling for students with special needs appeared on the education reform horizon in the mid-1980s, Canadian teachers’ associations were wary and unconvinced. In general, they viewed the concepts and implementation as replete with unsustainable assumptions and prescriptions – an imposed government initiative that severely

compromised the working conditions of their members. They undertook penetrating, comprehensive, and extensive data collection that examined the impact of inclusive schooling and provided feedback on the conditions of learning and teaching. Common views criticized governments for not offering systematic support for schools as they attempted to implement inclusive policies and chided that the process was often effected without systematic modification to a school's organization, due regard to teachers' instructional expertise, or any guarantee of continuing resource provision.

As the inclusive reform accelerated and policy and practice confirmed the enduring nature of the agenda, opposition to the practicalities was reframed and reconceptualized. The circumstances of general classroom teachers remained significant but in at least some ways associations traded adversarial practices for co-operation: they assumed gatekeeper roles and attempted to take some stewardship for reform. They spoke to other complex issues such as equity, class composition, class size, teacher preparation, and professional development. Social justice issues which encompassed inclusive schooling also factored into teacher associations' thinking in an important way.

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