

# Social Justice and Inclusion:

## An Epistemological View of Disability and Educational Opportunity

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Please note: The PowerPoint presentation that accompanies this module has extensive Instructor's Notes, which users will find valuable in preparing to use the presentation in class.

# I. Introduction

## **Social Justice and Inclusion: An Epistemological View of Disability and Educational Opportunity**

### **Overview**

The foundations of social justice are predicated on a set of values and beliefs that ensure that school environments, curriculum, and instruction are based on respect for all students and are grounded in their inclusion and full participation in their community and social settings. Educational leaders need an opportunity to explore this foundation of values and beliefs regarding students and families and their participation in schools and their communities. This module examines the historical, contextual, and philosophical meanings of disability and what it means to be placed at risk. Underlying assumptions and contemporary examples that promote positive values and beliefs toward inclusion, integration, and social justice are an important part of this module. One of the purposes of the module is to examine from a sociological and social psychological perspective current misconceptions, myths, and assumptions about disability and being placed at risk in our current culture.

### **Objectives**

Upon completion of this module, students will be able to —

- Describe historical, contextual, and philosophical meaning of disability.
- Identify what it means to be placed at risk.
- Recognize underlying assumptions and contemporary examples that promote positive values and beliefs toward inclusion, integration, and social justice.
- Examine from a sociological and social psychological perspective current misconceptions, myths, and assumptions about disability and being placed at risk in our current culture.
- Become familiar with federal laws and litigation that have served as the legal policy framework upon which educational opportunities for students with disabilities have been established.

### **Module Outline**

#### **A. Historical Perspectives on Disability**

- Disability: From Historical Misunderstanding to Inclusive Policies/Practices
- Disability in a (Post) Modern Context
- Reflective Questions
- References

#### **B. The Federal Role in Serving School-Age Children with Disabilities**

- Litigation
- Legislation
- Reflective Questions

- References

**C. Inclusion: Values, Perspectives, and Practices**

- Creating an Inclusive Learning Climate
- Reflective Questions
- References

**D. Leadership Role in Achieving Education Results for All Students**

- Leadership Role
- Reflective Questions
- References

**Instructor Resources**

- Assessment strategy
- Case study and case study questions
- Reading assignment
- PowerPoint files, including: presentation *Education as a Social Justice Issue for Children and Youth with Disabilities*, Instructor roles, reflective questions, and references

## II. Process for Assessment of Learning Outcomes

### Assessment of Learning Outcomes

1. Assessment of the learners' understanding of the materials and practical application to their situation can be determined, during the lecture, by use of the Reflection Questions. The Reflection Questions are listed at the end of each section of this module.
2. A case study with questions can be incorporated during the lecture or as a take home assignment. The case study and questions are available at the end of this module.
3. The Application Assignments have been developed to be used as a tool for learners to synthesize their learning and develop practical application to their individual situations. The Application Assignments include —
  - In this module you will be using the lecture, class discussion, personal experiences, readings, and reference list to formulate your responses to this assignment. Write a two page paper describing how all children are included in your school or school district. Describe the strategies used in your school or school district to successfully support all children. Identify the challenges to supporting all children and how those challenges have been addressed.
  - In this module you will be using the lecture, class discussion, personal experiences, readings, and reference list to formulate your responses to this assignment. Develop a two to five page paper that addresses social justice and inclusion in your school or school district. Reflect on the information presented in this module and identify five principles or strategies you would like to use in your school or school district. For each of the five principles or strategies you plan on applying, please do the following—
    - i. List the specific principles or strategies from the readings/lecture you are attempting to address.
    - ii. Explain why you selected these specific principle or strategies.
    - iii. Create a plan to actually implement these principles or strategies in your school or school district.
    - iv. Describe the challenges that would be faced when these principles or strategies are implemented. Identify approaches to overcome the challenges.
    - v. Explain how applying these principles or strategies will positively impact all students. Describe the method that will be used to identify the positive impact on all students.

### **III. Case Study:**

## ***Inclusion at Birch Grove Elementary***

by Lois Nordling

Birch Grove Elementary School is a culturally diverse school in Brooklyn Park, Minnesota, with a population of 720 students in kindergarten through sixth grade. One-third of the students participate in the free or reduced lunch program. Approximately 10 percent of the students qualify for special education services, primarily through the Full-Service Special Education program. Full-service special education is a cross-categorical service delivery model in which special education teachers serve students with a wide range of disabilities. At Birch Grove, the students' disabilities include learning disabilities, emotional behavioral disabilities, developmental disabilities, and other health disabilities.

Implementation of the inclusion model at Birch Grove has evolved over time. The school hosts one of its district's Cooperative Kindergarten classrooms where a general educator and a special educator licensed in early childhood education co-teach together all day. In addition, three full service special education teachers implement the current inclusion model to provide special education services for students in grades 1-6. As part of the model, they spend part of each day teaching in the general education classrooms. Their instructional roles and responsibilities vary and include teaching leveled reading, implementing an alternative reading curriculum with a group of 15 students, team-teaching whole group math lessons with the general education teacher, or teaching research skills to a small group. Having participated in the weekly planning meeting and being aware of the upcoming curriculum, the special educators can increase the skill and confidence level of students with disabilities by pre-teaching skills during small group sessions.

The system for assigning the special educators to grade levels is a significant element in the school's inclusion model. In kindergarten, for example, a general educator and special educator co-teach together all day. In grades 1-6, each of the three special educators is assigned to two different grade levels – one primary and one intermediate grade. There are several benefits to this strategy. First, each special educator needs to learn only two grade-level curricula rather than several. Second, the schedules for the two assigned grade levels become the basis of the special education teacher's daily schedule. Third, the classroom teachers in each grade work together to develop a schedule that is consistent and that allows special educators to be present in general education classrooms at high instructional need times. Most significantly, the special educators become part of the grade-level teams and establish the personal and professional relationships that are the core to a successful inclusion environment.

Teaching can be a "lonely" position. At Birch Grove, classroom teachers view the opportunities to plan with another professional and to watch another adult teach as ways to strengthen their own teaching. The special educator becomes a source of intervention ideas for other struggling learners. The special educator also becomes an advocate for the students and the classroom teacher when additional resources are needed, such as alternative curricular materials or additional assistance from a paraprofessional. What is the role of the principal in an inclusive special education program, such as Birch Grove's? Here are some ways principals can provide support —

- Articulating and affirming the value and role of the special educators in the school.
- Being actively involved by participating regularly in due process meetings as well as special education team meetings. Such meetings are a means for staying informed of

student issues and concerns.

- Ensuring ongoing staff development so that all staff remain current. Topics the Birch Grove staff have found beneficial for all students include brain research, multiple intelligences, differentiated instruction, and research-based teaching strategies. The information gained from these sessions benefited all students.
- Providing training for non-licensed staff since they play a significant role in meeting student needs.
- Creative problem solving on issues related to learning, behavior, or family involvement.
- Assisting in securing resources to meet the needs of all learners, such as technology or additional personnel.

Most importantly, the principal needs to support the efforts made by classroom teachers and special educators in creating different learning options for students. Meeting the learning needs of all students is a challenging responsibility for teachers. Educating students with a wide range of abilities and backgrounds in general education classrooms adds to this challenge. While an increasingly diverse student body creates new challenges for schools, it also creates new opportunities and enriched learning environments for both students and staff.

*Lois Nordling is former Principal of Birch Grove Elementary School, Brooklyn Park, Minnesota. She may be reached at 763/504- 7601 or [lois\\_nordling@rdale.k12.mn.us](mailto:lois_nordling@rdale.k12.mn.us).*

Gaylord, V., Vandercook, T., & York-Barr, J. (Eds.). (2003). *Impact: Feature Issue on Revisiting Inclusive K-12 Education*, 16(1). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, Institute on Community Integration.

## IV. Case Study Questions

1. Identify strategies used to support the inclusion of all children at Birch Grove Elementary School.
2. Describe the possible roles of an education leader to support the inclusion of all children at Birch Grove Elementary School.
3. Identify the roles that you as an education leader could assume to support the inclusion of all children in your school setting?
4. Describe strategies that you as an education leader could use to support the inclusion of all children in your school setting?



## V. Reading Assignments

### ***Impact: Feature Issue on Revisiting Inclusive K-12 Education (2003)***

Available online at —

[ici.umn.edu/products/newsletters.html](http://ici.umn.edu/products/newsletters.html)

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### **Christmas in Purgatory: a Photographic Essay on Mental Retardation (1966)**

Available online at —[www.disabilitymuseum.org/lib/docs/1782.htm](http://www.disabilitymuseum.org/lib/docs/1782.htm)

## References

- Beck, L. G., Murphy, J., & Associates. (1997). *Ethics in Educational Leadership Programs: Emerging Models*. Columbia, MO: The University Council for Educational Administration.
- Salisbury, C. L., McGregor, G. (2002). The Administrative Climate and Context of Inclusive Elementary Schools. *Journal of Exceptional Children* 68(2), 259-273.
- Gaylord, V., Vandercook, T., & York-Barr, J. (Eds.). (2003). *Impact: Feature Issue on Revisiting Inclusive K-12 Education*, 16(1). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, Institute on Community Integration.
- Web site of the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory located at: <http://www.sedl.org/>

## Additional Resources

- Bruininks, R.H., & Lakin, K.C. (1985). *Living and learning in the least restrictive environment*. Baltimore: Brookes Publishing.
- Paul, P.V., & Ward, M.E., (1996). Inclusion paradigms in conflict. *Theory into Practice*, 35(1), 4-11.
- Turner, C.S.V., & Seashore Louis, K. (1996). Society's response to differences: A sociological perspective. *Remedial and Special Education*, 17(3), 134-141.
- McLaughlin, M.J., & Nolet, V. (2004). *What every principle needs to know about special education*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- National Association of Elementary School Principles & Council for Exceptional Children (2001). *Implementing IDEA: A guide for principals*. Alexandria, VA: NAESP.
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