What task might a principal undertake that would be more critical to teachers and students than to engage in leadership for inclusion? All education stakeholders have an inescapable vested interest in enabling principals in their mandate to be better informed about inclusion and to provide leadership based on such insights. In this manner, principals can directly support teachers who enact inclusion with students on a daily basis. Whilst our aspirations for such professional growth and practice in principals are laudable, exactly what this growth and practice might represent is mostly nebulous; therefore, good leadership for inclusion is more likely to occur by happenstance than by meticulous design. That is no longer the case.

This important and timely collection of international writings examines just what comprises the critical issues within inclusion and provides principals with a series of practical guides to direct their practice. This book takes leadership for inclusion out of the purely theoretical realm and firmly plants it in the professional lives and realities of principals and teachers in schools. The fundamental tenets and suggestions provided here have international application and should be essential readings for all principals and others in similar positions who are concerned about the welfare of teachers and students involved in inclusive education.

Leadership for Inclusion: A Practical Guide makes a significant contribution to an emerging literature in which all professional educators, and especially principals, are beginning to vigorously take on the new challenges presented by inclusion and inclusive schooling. Overall, this volume of candid propositions about principals’ practice invites the reader to engage in likeminded analyses and syntheses and to enfold their newfound knowledge and skills into their leadership. Given the influence that inclusion now has on education around the world, there is no task more worthy.
Leadership for Inclusion
CRITICAL ISSUES IN THE FUTURE OF LEARNING
AND TEACHING

Volume 3

Series Editors:

Michael Kompf - Brock University, Canada
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Scope:
This series represents a forum for important issues that do and will affect how learning and teaching are thought about and practised. All educational venues and situations are undergoing change because of information and communications technology, globalization and paradigmatic shifts in determining what knowledge is valued. Our scope includes matters in primary, secondary and tertiary education as well as community-based informal circumstances. Important and significant differences between information and knowledge represent a departure from traditional educational offerings heightening the need for further and deeper understanding of the implications such opportunities have for influencing what happens in schools, colleges and universities around the globe. An inclusive approach helps attend to important current and future issues related to learners, teachers and the variety of cultures and venues in which educational efforts occur. We invite forward-looking contributions that reflect an international comparative perspective illustrating similarities and differences in situations, problems, solutions and outcomes.
Leadership for Inclusion

A Practical Guide

Alan L. Edmunds
Robert B. Macmillan

The University of Western Ontario
DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to all educational leaders who are invariably involved in the education of students with exceptionalities; their patience and effort makes the difference in the lives of the children for whom they are responsible.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book would not have been possible without the cooperation and skillful efforts of each of the contributors. Their willingness to step outside the box and consider both leadership and inclusion from slightly different perspectives has resulted in an important collection of ideas. We hope this work will be a catalyst for many other future endeavors between the two disciplines.
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In the last three decades, no other aspect of educational practice has undergone as much change or has received as much critical attention as inclusion. Inclusion is a philosophical position that advocates for the regular classroom as the first-choice educational placement for students with exceptionalities. Thus, all practicing teachers, not just specialists, are now responsible for educating many more students with special educational needs. However, while the instructional responsibility for inclusion certainly lies with classroom teachers, its leadership responsibility ultimately rests with principals. “Leaders are called upon to support student learning in many ways … to address critical problems of practice … [and] to improve their knowledge about constructive educational leadership” (Firestone & Riehl, 2005, p. x–xi). In fact, in the vast majority of educational jurisdictions, principals are legally accountable for the educational progress outlined in the IEP of each student with an exceptionality. Nonetheless, despite such ultimate accountability and responsibility, the only truly meaningful influence that principals can exert on inclusion occurs indirectly. Aside from endorsing a school board’s or school district’s philosophy of inclusion and making sure extant policies are properly implemented, the predominant direct educational influence that principals exert on inclusion is to facilitate the actions of teachers. Considering the abundant evidence regarding the significant difficulties that teachers constantly face as they navigate inclusion, and considering the high positive impact that principals can have on teachers’ instructional effectiveness, it is time that educational leaders’ roles in the lives of the teachers who enact inclusion is clearly examined and delineated. It is only by such careful delineation that educational leaders, primarily principals, can proactively facilitate inclusion.

Leadership for inclusion means seeking out an understanding of the fundamental tenets of inclusion and constructing an administrative approach that complements the execution of those tenets by teachers. Without the aforementioned understandings and an active and carefully directed administrative approach, the facilitation of inclusion will occur more by happenstance than by professional design. Unfortunately, very little has been published to address the seemingly evident connections between educational leaders, teachers, and the enactment of inclusion. Moreover, equally little has been produced that specifically addresses the professional development needs of educational leaders regarding inclusion. Until now, educational leaders have been without the proper tools to carry out the vital role they play in the important educational enterprise called inclusion. This book is an attempt to remedy that problem.

Despite the fact that this collection of writings emanates from a predominantly North American perspective, the issues pertaining to inclusion that are examined, discussed and referenced herein have universal relevance for educators around the world. Readers will also find that the results and mindful suggestions that stem from the issues explored in each chapter hold important implications for all jurisdictions interested in leadership for inclusion within school systems.
There is near universal agreement that including children with exceptionalities in regular classrooms is laudable and should be the ideal that all schools and educators strive towards. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD; 2000; 1995), in a review of more than 23 jurisdictions worldwide, acknowledged that special education/inclusion is a complex and idiosyncratic organic system wherein almost every nation and school jurisdiction interested in supporting students with exceptionalities demonstrates common best practices as well as common concerns and dilemmas. For example, the research framing the various discourses about inclusion included in this volume presents a global, international perspective drawn from empirical studies undertaken throughout the world. In addition to adhering to a common overarching philosophy of inclusion, there is also universal agreement upon, and worldwide use of, the more applied aspects of inclusion such as preferences for early identification, expert assessment, individualized educational programs, and suitably differentiated curricula, instruction, and student assessment and evaluation. The shared ultimate objective of such educational practices and systems is to provide the very best opportunities for students with exceptionalities to maximize their educational potential.

As such, these perspectives inherently mesh with our pervasive and global views about children with exceptionalities and their education. De Jong’s (2005) systematic review of student behavior provided a perspective common in many countries; “positive relationships, particularly between student and teacher, are critical for maximizing appropriate behaviour and achieving learning outcomes” (p. 358). Studies from around the globe also reveal that the inclusion of children with special needs has been thoughtfully investigated and that children’s and adolescents’ acceptance of children with special needs and programs that facilitate inclusion are of international interest. It is also evident that the world-wide movement of assessment reform has increased pressure on educational leaders to incorporate the principles of assessment and accountability in inclusive education with a view towards enhancing assessment literacy in inclusive environments.

Despite the uniformity of opinion concerning the merits of inclusion, educators still appear to struggle to understand the philosophy of inclusion and the policies that govern its implementation, although it is widely viewed that these struggles primarily stem from the evident disconnect between the educational needs of students with exceptionalities and the abilities of educators to meet them. This particular problem, for example, caused the National Union of Teachers of Great Britain to recently call for an end to the policy of inclusion stating that inclusion had failed many children and had demonstrated very clearly the failures in policy and practice in their education system and schools (Halpin, 2006). By the same token, it is also widely agreed that improved teacher education and more university and school partnerships are seen as the strongest potential solutions to this dilemma. To this end, this book provides a discussion of school climate and classroom ethos and how educators’ professional development can empower them to make schools more inclusive.

Finally, the universality of the topics and issues presented by the wide array of contributors to this volume is an accurate reflection of the themes of numerous international conferences that foster inclusion. Each of the chapters would be
well-reviewed and well-attended sessions at any of these conferences regardless of
the country or city that hosted the gathering. This is a testament to the worldwide
applicability of the common ideas, efforts, and strategies that create and support
teachers and students in inclusive environments.

The concept for this book was prompted by two somewhat related bodies of
knowledge. The first to come to our attention was the reverberating demand in
recent educational administration literature for enhanced research in leadership that
served to strengthen the field’s ability to build knowledge that informed practice.

research will be more effective if it consistently focuses on how leadership
contributes to student learning. We recognize that leaders are called upon to
support student learning in many ways, some more direct than others, and we
think it is important to understand how all of them can be improved … to
address critical problems of practice (Firestone & Riehl, 2005, p. x–xi).

Based on this literature, there appeared to be several aspects of leadership that could
make unique and important contributions to how inclusion functions in schools.
These facets of leadership were: exemplary leadership practice; administrative trust
and team-building; and the particular problems faced by educational leaders
(Fullan, 2001; Leithwood & Riehl, 2005). The second came to our attention whilst
we were conducting a small but important study that investigated principals’
perspectives on the inclusiveness of their schools (detailed in Chapter 13). The study
was based on the foundational elements extensively reported as the underpinnings
of inclusion which had been previously documented in studies examining teachers’
perceptions of inclusion. Those foundational elements were: philosophy; policies;
instruction; assessment; behaviour and discipline; community connections;
attitudes and perceptions; student evaluation; professional development; and field-
based evidence (Edmunds, 2003a; 2003b; 1999; Edmunds & Edmunds, 2008;
Edmunds, Macmillan, Nowicki, Specht, & Edmunds, in press; IDEA, 1997; 2004;
King & Edmunds, 2001). The results of that study revealed a broader need for
the specific understandings and actions that educational leaders required to better
facilitate inclusion for teachers. Combined, the issues surrounding these two bodies
of knowledge coalesced into an excellent opportunity to improve our knowledge
about constructive leadership and to articulate how links can be made between
learning, leadership, inclusion, and educational equity. To this end, topical experts
with unique research perspectives and expertise were sought from both disciplines
(several of whom have experience in both domains) to provide comprehensive
portrayals of each respective underpinning of inclusion and to provide explicit
recommendations for those in educational leadership.

As well as providing careful analyses of the pertinent issues and thoughtful,
practicable recommendations, the book introduces educational leaders to global
and practical understandings of the subtle nuances of inclusion heretofore only
understood by teachers, and rarely appreciated or provided for by principals. In
doing so, the chapters richly contextualizes inclusion for principals highlighting
how their leadership is crucial to the overall process, yet also making them aware
of the day-to-day dilemmas that teachers face. These explicit elements of the book
PREFACE

will allow leaders to proactively support teachers in their schools as never before. As of this writing, there is nothing for educational leaders that compares to the work contained in this volume.

The overarching thrust of this collection of writings from a group of respected multi-national experts in special education and educational administration/leadership, is that leaders enhance school effectiveness by influencing the capacities and motivations of teachers. Each of the contributions, most of which are multi-authored, has gone to great lengths to make administrative and pedagogical suggestions for principals that will have practical and meaningful impacts on teachers lives. The intended results of this manuscript are to heighten the awareness of inclusion for educational leaders so that they can explicitly facilitate inclusion for teachers and, by extension, improve the educational and social outcomes of students with special needs. This book does not address inclusive pedagogy per se, however, some of the chapters address actions that leaders can take to further enhance teachers’ specialized methods and programs where appropriate.

There is no question that the advent of inclusion has dramatically changed the way schooling is currently practiced - it has changed the lives of the teachers who enact it and the lives of the students who receive it. Thus, educational leaders have to support teachers by demonstrating that the problems they encounter while changing inclusive practices will be taken seriously and that administrative help and support will be provided (Louis, Toole, & Hargreaves, 1999).

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INTRODUCTION

Over the previous century, we have seen significant changes in the education of students with exceptionalities. Initially, the common practice was to place these students in institutions designed to address their specific educational needs based on fairly incomplete beliefs about the nature of each exceptionality. In most cases, these students were not equipped to later integrate easily into their communities and to meaningfully participate in wider society. As we gained better techniques for identification and diagnoses, our understanding of the spectrum and characteristics of each exceptionality improved as did our conceptualizations of meeting their educational needs. With this increasing understanding, we began to shift away from institutional care towards developing programs delivered in separate classrooms within schools that provided specialized instruction and which allowed students to experience a somewhat “normal” school environment outside of their classroom. While good intentioned, these initial steps still forced students with special needs to be segregated and excluded. Eventually, programming in separate classrooms was replaced by “pull-out” programs, some of which remain today, and later by attempts to include fully students with exceptionalities in all aspects of school life and, by extension, in all aspects of life out of school.

In the last three decades, the right of children with exceptionalities to be included in the “regular” classroom has become accepted, at least philosophically if not practically (Bunch, Lupart & Brown, 1997), but we are still struggling with how to include these children while delivering appropriate programs designed to meet the individual needs of each child. There is scant but significant evidence that the success of such inclusive programs is largely attributable to the leadership of the principal and the ability of that administrator to create an inclusive school environment (Baker, 2007; Reyes & Wagstaff, 2006; Ryan, 2006). This book has been designed to help school leaders to first think about, and then address, the issues involved in leading for inclusion.

Educational Change

Two predominant factors led to changes in the types of education provided for students with special needs. The first has been an increasingly better understanding of the range and nuances of exceptionalities. Advances in this area have helped...
to inform educators who design specialized educational programs that incorporate our current understanding of the roots and characteristics of each exceptionality. When these programs enable students to accomplish what had been previously believed not possible or not feasible, we have seen changes in community and societal beliefs about what these students can and cannot do. This has often followed by commensurate shifts in attitudes about what comprises an appropriate education for such students. The second factor has been changes to the laws concerning students with special needs. Some laws have set the framework for the educational rights of all children, and especially for children with special needs. The courts, through decisions on specific cases, have been instrumental in clarifying and defining the implementation of the laws, particularly those governing the issues of equity and equality, and the responsibilities of schools to students with exceptionalities (Williams & Macmillan, 2001; 2003; 2005). Unfortunately, some decisions have left schools and school systems struggling to understand all implications emerging from such decisions and attempting to translate the essence of those decisions into practice. This has resulted in teachers attempting to do what is best for children within the spirit of the law, but having to do so without a definitive framework. Without a clear framework, teachers have experienced a great deal of professional discomfort due their uncertainty about the appropriateness of their decisions (Macmillan & Meyer, 2006). For principals, this task is especially troublesome because they are responsible for supporting teachers and for creating an inclusive environment (Ryan, 2006), but without a clear, legal direction about how this is to be done. Moreover, because principals mostly play an indirect role in the enactment of inclusion, they also have not had a clear set of practical directions about how to help their teachers working on the front lines of inclusion day-to-day.

The overriding problem for educators is: how can schools who must adapt to a broad spectrum of abilities and needs in their students address all their inherent specific and personal abilities and needs, especially given current resources? This book is an attempt to help administrators examine these complex issues, to analyze and reframe them in a way that may provide insights, and to provide possible indications about how to proceed. The purpose of this first chapter is to lay the groundwork for the subsequent chapters. The authors of each chapter identify areas that we, as educators and particularly administrators, need to consider in order to properly engage in the work of creating inclusive schools. We acknowledge that some of the suggested approaches are reasonably straightforward and may indicate rudimentary and easy paths to follow. However, we also recognize that not all of these complex issues are easily resolved and will remain dilemmas to varying degrees because no clear path to a solution exists. For this reason, the insights, suggestions and recommendations provided here are meant for the reader to consider, to analyze, and to use in ways that are appropriate to his or her administrative context. We hope that in the process, we have provided assistance to those charged with the difficult, but essential, task of envisioning, creating, leading, and sustaining inclusive schools.
A Leadership Framework

One of the key foci of recent research on school leadership has been: what practices do successful leaders use? Over the past twenty years, we have gained better insights into these skills and practices. Leithwood’s chapter examines this body of research and groups leaders’ practices into four broad categories: setting directions; developing people; redesigning the organization; and managing the instructional program. These broad categories are evident in the chapters by the other contributors to this volume.

Setting Direction

To be inclusive, schools must establish inclusion as an overarching goal that permeates throughout everything they do, with principals leading the effort to specifically define and redefine the direction to be taken. This direction must be clear, contextualized, and framed within the philosophy and policies behind inclusion. In an attempt to provide leaders with the appropriate background, D. Young’s chapter outlines the philosophy and policies of inclusive practice. However, the gap between knowing what must be done and putting it into practice is often quite large. For this reason, principals need to take an active role in helping teachers create an inclusive environment, but they may not be able to achieve this goal unless they have the trust of the staff; trust between a principal and teachers is an essential component of inclusive leadership. Some insights into how a principal can develop trust with teachers and build collaborative teams are provided by Macmillan’s chapter, which focuses on the development of a positive relationship between principals and teachers if the school is to work together.

Developing People

Once the school’s direction has been set, the next task is to help the staff understand the implications that inclusion may have for their instructional practice and for potential changes that may affect their beliefs about the way children with exceptionalities learn and don’t learn. Toward this end, Nowicki and Samuels examine how principals can help teachers build better understandings about ways to encourage and develop among all children positive perceptions of their peers’ abilities. Through an increase in teachers’ knowledge, shifts in attitudes and beliefs can lead to better understandings of the experiences of all children by all children.

A key factor in charting the progressing academic abilities and needs of students is appropriate and accurate school subject assessment methods. Clear and precise assessment methods are also a key element in reporting students’ school performances and progress to all stakeholders, especially parents. Renihan and Noonan provide an overview of what principals need to know about current assessment practices designed to support student learning, given recent changes in
assessment for inclusion. Using these practices, principals can properly support teachers as they modify, where necessary, their specific instructional and grading approaches to suit the specific abilities and needs of each child.

A model for implementing and sustaining a shift in instruction is the development of a community of practice. Before people can develop a community of practice built on the concepts foundational to inclusion, they have to understand what it is and what it is not. Pudlas’ chapter adroitly suggests that professional development is the primary means by which this can be achieved. His notions about the types of professional development required to accomplish this are those that not only focus on inclusive practice, but also focus on models that involve teachers in examining the fundamentals concepts behind inclusive practice. By fostering such deep appreciations about and for inclusion, principals will enhance teachers’ everyday practices.

In addition to professional development initiatives designed to foster community, Specht and Young make specific suggestions which principals may consider in order to foster inclusive communities of practice. They also suggest that shifting the focus from individual teacher effort to community effort is more effective in the creation of inclusive schools.

**Redesigning the Organization**

Setting directions and developing people are insufficient, however, if the broader objective is to sustain an inclusive environment; in this instance, the fundamentals of the organization, including the beliefs, values, actions, and expectations have to change as well. In some cases, the redesign of a school will require a serious questioning of deeply held beliefs about students with exceptionalities, upon which many school practices are based. Without a disruption of our basic beliefs and a refocusing on what inclusion is intended to and can achieve, as Fraser and Shields suggest, new ideas for the improvement of instruction will be nearly impossible to design, implement, and sustain over the long term. Without a consideration for sustainability, inclusion is at risk of becoming a fad, both in spirit and in practice.

We must remember, however, that schools function within the administrative framework established by the school district, and to some extent, are limited by the district in what they can do. Instead of this being a negative characteristic, some school districts have used their influential role to reshape how schools deal with inclusion. DiPetta, Woloshyn, Gallagher, DiBiase Hyatt, Dworet, and Bennett provide an example of such an initiative. They describe how one school district developed a strategy for implementing inclusive education in its schools and they describe the impact the initiative had on administrators and teachers. They also provide recommendations for others who may wish to undertake a similar approach. The Edmunds et al. final chapter further describes how principals used the underpinnings of inclusion to both critically examine their school’s organizational approaches to inclusion for strengths and needs, and to make systemic changes as necessary based on sound principles rather than unsubstantiated claims.
Managing the Instructional Program

The principal needs to support teachers in their efforts to develop and deliver effective inclusive classroom practices. One of the best ways to demonstrate this support is to ensure that the school is safe, both psychologically and physically. Edmunds’s chapter on managing student behavior provides insights into the underpinnings of behavior and suggests how principals can use school-wide approaches to help teachers to manage their classrooms as an instructional support for inclusion. There are two underlying themes. First, is that persistent/consistent disruptive student behavior significantly undermines the learning of all students, but particularly for students with exceptionalities. Second, is that all students, and especially students with exceptionalities, learn, thrive, and prosper within psychologically secure learning environments.

Principals are charged with the instructional leadership of their schools and can take on this crucial role in a number of ways, such as advocating for appropriate and timely psycho-educational assessment practices. In Edmunds’s second chapter, he describes how principals can take an active role in supporting teachers’ instruction by ensuring that an accurate assessment of a child’s strengths and needs is conducted, and by helping teachers through various means to develop appropriate instructional programs based on that assessment. This information, combined with evidence from Renihan and Noonan’s chapter on classroom assessment, gives principals a comprehensive overview of all aspects of assessment and describes how their school can benefit from these understandings.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

No doubt, principals have difficult decisions to make when trying to ensure that their school is genuinely inclusive, both in practice and in fact. These decisions range from the allocation of scarce resources for program support to ensuring that teachers understand the implications of becoming truly inclusive and developing ways to encourage teachers to work to that end. The chapters in this book indicate that there are no formulaic solutions, no short term fixes, and no easy shortcuts to the development of an inclusive school. Leaders also need to realize and accept that the sustainability of such a culture requires that inclusion must be one of the cornerstones of the school’s ethos and not dependent on one person’s leadership (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). To this end, we hope that all readers, especially those in formal and informal leadership roles, will gain insights into how they can develop and sustain their inclusive leadership practices.

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INTRODUCTION

Many current practices in education persist because of long held and unquestioned assumptions about the nature of schooling and the respective roles of educators and students. Many of these assumptions made about people, their behavior, and their capabilities, emerge from taken-for-granted beliefs held by dominant groups in society. Foucault, the eminent French intellectual reminded us that these dominant groups are the major power brokers and decision makers. His theory of discourse analysis highlighted the ways in which “systems of ideas emerge as systems of power” (Sawicki, 1991, p. 12). Power resides with those whose social status places them in a privileged and superior position that is rarely questioned in any explicit fashion, but rather accepted as the normal state of affairs. These discourses, or taken-for-granted assumptions, attitudes, and beliefs shape and guide dominant social and educational practices in ways that often exclude members of minoritized groups, including those who may require some form of adaptive educational support. Because typical concepts of normality are pervasive, they are often disempowering for groups who fall outside what is deemed normal; as a consequence, these groups are regularly marginalized and silenced in education. For that reason, discourse theory is particularly pertinent to the inclusion of students whose success requires various forms of adaptive educational services.

Concepts of normality or normalcy go to the heart of the issue in the field of inclusion. While those with special educational needs fall outside certain “measures” of what might be considered normal or average, too often the underlying assumption is that those outside the norm are somehow abnormal. The cult of normalcy which underpins dominant discourses assumes there are certain acceptable ways to be a citizen, a learner, a friend, a student and that there are some who patently do not “fit” these normative patterns. Inclusion, however, is not about everyone fitting a certain mould in order to be accepted.

From a dominant discourse perspective, connotations of the opposite of normal tend to be derogative and include terms such as impaired, defective, faulty, damaged, deficient, incapacitated, or broken. Alternative, more positive discourses would recognize, instead, difference, uniqueness, and distinctiveness. They would emphasize that all children, those with disabilities and those who are non-disabled, must be treated with honor and respect and take their rightful place as valued members of classrooms, schools, and communities. To position children with special educational needs as distinct and unique is far more appropriate, more
respectful and humane, than to view them as abnormal and somehow ‘faulty.’ The ramifications of negative or deficit assumptions are far reaching; hence, it is the school leader’s job to ensure that inclusion is more than lip service. School leaders can easily perpetuate (sometimes unknowingly) those discourses that continue to disempower, dehumanize and denigrate those with special needs. Unless detrimental attitudes, beliefs, and systems are recognized and questioned wherever they occur, then students with special needs will continue to be marginalized and disenfranchised despite formal policies of inclusion.

This chapter briefly outlines a number of dominant discourses that may under-gird a philosophy of inclusion. It illustrates these discourses and provides some brief examples of alternative discourses that emphasize the rights of children with exceptionalities, rights that their “normalized” peers already enjoy and which should not be withheld on any basis, let alone on moral, ethical, or legal grounds.

EXAMINING DOMINANT DISCOURSES

Despite a raft of legislation that affirms the rights of those with disabilities to a fair, just, and equitable education, a number of deficit discourses still dominate thinking about those with special needs. Although these discourses co-exist alongside a rights discourse, they continue to negatively influence the quality of life of those with exceptionalities. To illustrate the need for the school leader to be vigilant about the beliefs as well as the practices of all educators, three such discourses are outlined here: the lay, the medical, and the charity. We could just as easily have used terms such as deficit, pathologizing, or hegemonic discourses; the point is that when some students are singled out in unnecessary and essentializing ways, school leaders must be prepared both to speak and to act.

The Lay Discourse

The lay discourse assumes that life must be awful for those with disabilities and that having a child with a disability is a dreadful tragedy. The prevalent attitude from this perspective is that those with disabilities should be institutionalized (or at least hidden), kept away from the mainstream of society for everyone’s benefit. In citing Taylor & Harrington’s (2001) extensive research on interventions and services for students with exceptionalities, Edmunds & Edmunds (2008) provided a somber yet pointed reminder of this attitude;

As unpalatable as it may be, we have to remember that the early forms and types of special education were not designed with the best interests of children with exceptionalities in mind. Rather, they were designed as convenient measures to thwart perceived threats to the education of normal students (p. 15).

For educators, the belief underpinning this attitude is that disability is shameful, embarrassing, and too difficult to address in regular schooling. From the lay perspective, people are victims of their disabilities, their lives are confined and
restricted and their existence is assumed to be atypical, less meaningful, and less enjoyable than for those perceived to be normal. Although this attitude is now rarely explicit in public schooling, vestiges of it remain in the ways in which we offer services to those in need of assistance. For example, teacher aides who work with students with special needs sometimes block students’ opportunities to integrate with their non-disabled peers and reinforce their differences in stigmatizing ways (Meyer & Bevan-Brown, 2005). The assumption, too often, is that the teacher aide “solves the problem” of having a student with special needs in the classroom. This discourse generally sees the teacher aide assigned to work one-on-one with the student on his or her particular remedial needs. If teacher aides become the “velcro aides,” who are virtually attached to the side of their students, they may also symbolize over-protectiveness as they operate as a select adult tutor within the classroom. In such cases exclusion is manifest in what ostensibly appears to be an inclusive setting. This further isolates the student with special needs who has plenty of attention from one adult, but little interaction with the rest of his or her classmates. Nevertheless, the assumption is that his or her needs are being met.

In often subtle ways, underlying lay discourses continue to reinforce the view that the student is not really part of the class community and that the convenient option is to allocate a teacher aide to the student. Moreover, under the guise of teaching independent skills through adult tutelage, it can actually increase a student’s dependence on the teacher aide to assist, translate, support, intervene, and guide (Meyer & Bevan-Brown, 2005). Opportunities for friendships and regular social interaction with the class community can be blocked if the teacher aide operates exclusively as personal tutor. Research has also found that non-disabled students often assume that their peers with special needs do not need friends as they have their teacher aide’s abiding attention (MacArthur, Kelly & Higgins, 2005). In most circumstances, therefore, the school leader may be well advised to consider assigning teaching aides to specific classrooms or teachers rather than having them permanently associated with a specific student. A useful alternative is to have the teacher aide work with groups that include students with special needs so that they are facilitating social interaction as well as learning in ways that are less isolating and more focused on building the class community.

The Medical Discourse

The medical discourse positions disability as an illness that requires treatment. The emphasis from this perspective is on levels of impairment, degrees of severity, clinical descriptions, physiological symptoms, diagnosis, and treatment/therapeutic regimes. The assumption is that disability can and should be treatable, often with drugs and therapies, in an attempt to normalize people as much as possible. Education from this perspective focuses on treatment and remediation. Indeed, the medical discourse has contributed much to the deficit thinking surrounding people with disabilities as the pathological emphasis underscores the abnormal and undesirable (Skrtic, 1991). The assumption is that special needs are problematic, aberrant, unhealthy, and in need of specialized interventions in the “hope of curing”
or of normalizing as much as possible. Shields, Bishop, and Mazawi (2005) use the term pathologizing for its utility in explaining social and cultural relationships that exist in schooling and classroom interactions. They define pathologizing as “a process where perceived structural-functional, cultural, or epistemological deviation from an assumed normal state is ascribed to another group as a product of power relationships, whereby the less powerful group is deemed to be abnormal in some way (p. x).” They then go on to say that pathologizing discourses and practices are ways of regulating, managing, and marginalizing others.

Obviously, schools need to know something about serious medical conditions that a student may have in order to keep a student from preventable harm. For example, children with cancer are particularly vulnerable to general childhood illnesses such as chicken pox when their immune system resistance is lowered during chemotherapy treatments. Children with severe allergies may also unexpectedly fall into anaphylactic shock. Thus, ongoing communication between school and home is required to keep students safe. However, it is rare that the medical discourse is actually used to describe a remediable condition; instead, it is often used to imply that students who need specific pedagogical interventions or adaptations are somehow ill and must be cured. Even when there are identifiable medical factors, the medical discourse often becomes so dominant that students’ deficits, problems, and treatments are all encompassing and, conversely, their strengths, abilities and humanity are ignored.

For example, in the following description, Full Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) is identified by a number of highly specific criteria which are simultaneously present in the candidate. These include: 1) significant growth retardation before and after birth; 2) measurable mental retardation; 3) abnormal facial characteristics; 4) a range of other physical deformities and defects (Dorris, 1989). Here the emphasis is obviously on the negative physiological effects. When this is the only information teachers are given about a student diagnosed with foetal alcohol syndrome, it is not surprising that their view is one of deficit and that they are unlikely to expect much from such a student. The emphasis in this discourse on “deformity” and “defects” clearly signals this is repugnant and extremely unfortunate. Remediation in such cases is seen as the only hope, and given the permanent nature of the condition, thought to be a weak hope at best.

An alternative discourse would acknowledge the condition but consider what the student can do, not just what he or she cannot. For example, Tony, a seven-year-old student with FAS well-known to one of the authors, loves to be outdoors, enjoys dance and is learning to count on the abacus. His inclusion with his peers was enhanced on his birthday when his mother brought his favorite activity to school. At lunch time the playground was filled by Tony and his classmates blowing colored bubbles which drifted in multi-colored hues around the yard. Shrieks and giggles of delight were heard as Tony and his peers capered with glee after their incandescent and ephemeral creations. Moreover, this simple activity showed Tony interacting with his peers without experiencing negative judgments, sharing an activity in which they could all participate and succeed.
School leaders will need to attend to providing accurate and complete information for teachers and to facilitating excellent and necessary communication between home and school. In so doing, it becomes essential to find an appropriate balance between care and caution and nurturing the student’s abilities, agency, and independence.

The Charity Discourse

The charity discourse positions people with disabilities as weak and powerless and in need of care and attention. This perspective assumes that those with disabilities should be nursed, cared for, protected and buffeted from a world in which they cannot cope. It fails to acknowledge or identify their agency, capabilities, and capacity; hence, their voices are rarely heard and less often sought either in the classroom or in policy debates. As with the other discourses, those with special needs are considered victims and their conditions thought to comprise terrible suffering, incapacity, and helplessness. This discourse appeals to those with benevolent intentions who believe they can alleviate suffering through helping actions and decision making of those so labeled.

The assumption underpinning this discourse is that students with exceptionalities, apart from the gifted, are not competent, do not have opinions worth considering, and should be grateful for the attention and assistance of those who are non-disabled. Assumption in fact goes to the heart of this discourse. For example, people who have low vision and use Braille canes are sometimes pulled across roads by well-meaning sighted people intent on helping, whether that assistance is welcomed or not. Students who use wheelchairs are pushed around the playground and school corridors by their peers and while this can sometimes be welcomed, sometimes it is not. Students who use wheelchairs for mobility obviously have their own wishes as to where they would like to go. From a charity discourse, students are treated as toys or as someone to look after, tend to, and protect. One author frequently recalls the words of a friend who typically described his son as the classroom “pet rock.”

Actions emerging from this discourse reinforce feelings of inadequacy and helplessness. Students with disabilities are cosseted to the extent that they are not considered responsible for their behavior or decisions. Classrooms that operate from such a stance position students with exceptionalities as weak, needy, and beholden to those who deign to help, either as paid paraprofessionals such as teacher aides or as benevolent peers. Such classrooms often have rosters of ‘buddies’ wherein non-disabled students are paired up on a daily basis to help a student with a disability. The intention may be well meaning but too often the notion is that students with special needs require help all the time (which they do not) and that without a roster no one would bother with them. Moreover, the illusion of friendship is parodied when a roster proclaims on a public, daily basis who will be the ‘buddy’ today for student X. Real friendships are based upon a special alchemy that cannot be coerced (Van der Klift & Kunc, 1994) and are more likely to emerge through genuine, shared interests. Buddy systems that reinforce a one-way helper-helpee relationship effectively disempower and disenfranchise students with exceptionalities.
A charity discourse is complex as it obviously reflects the human trait of compassion, a desire to reach out and to help others who appear to be in need. However, the power dynamics always require consideration. Hence, a school leader should always ask, and encourage others to ask questions such as whose interests are being served? Who benefits from such help and who is left feeling undermined? Who, in fact, wanted the help in the first place? Who is really included and who has once again been marginalized—despite good intentions? A charity discourse can lead both educators and students to objectify, and dominate students with disabilities in ways that are unhealthy and dehumanizing. Consider, for example, the following report by a mother of a child with cancer:

This girl became almost possessive of the fact that there was Natalie and she had no hair and she was “hers”…in fact the year that Natalie was off school [for various treatments] she’d say to the other kids “She’s my friend” and she’d write Natalie cards saying you’re my best friend, but she wasn’t actually…and when Natalie did return to school she didn’t want Natalie around her…the teacher came to me and said this girl doesn’t want Natalie hanging around but she feels sorry for her…(Fraser, 2001, p. 21).

In this case the charity discourse was evident through the convenience of sending cards and proclaiming affection but not when it actually came to the demands of meaningful interaction and real friendship.

Summary

Discourses can thus be complex and multi-faceted, they can overlap and coalesce, with charity turning to lay discourse in the above situation. School leaders need to understand these discourses and the insidious ways in which they both dehumanize and disempower students with disabilities. Leaders must educate their staff about these discourses and how schools can, unconsciously, perpetuate these unethical attitudes. It is also the school leader’s role to promote an alternative discourse, such as a rights discourse, that positions those with disabilities as people first and foremost; as capable of contributing to school and society and as worthy—as anyone—of dignity and respect. Here, they may find it helpful to promote among their school community, Starratt’s (1991) notion of treating the other with “absolute regard,” as they work to lead a community in which the complementary ethics of justice, caring, and critique are always present.

INCLUSION AS A RIGHT

An alternative to the three pervasive discourses described above is the rights discourse which emerged in the 1960s alongside various civil rights campaigns of the era including women’s rights, the rights of war veterans, the rights of gays and the passage in 1964 in the United States of the Civil Rights Act. Many government and non-government organizations work to achieve political recognition and rights for those with disabilities and to promote positive images and attitudes
The aim is that people with disabilities have a legitimate right to the same privileges that the non-disabled take for granted such as access to jobs, social interaction, interdependence, independent living, respect, recognition, education, and the opportunities to which all who live in a thriving democracy are entitled. Increasingly, too, people with disabilities are defining just what rights mean for them rather than being told by well meaning organizations what their needs and rights are. In a recent interview about the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities adopted by the United Nations in 2006, Lex Grandia, head of the World Federation of the DeafBlind, stated that deaf/blind people are often not considered able to have a meaningful quality of life or to make a significant contribution to decisions made about them. He spoke about his experiences growing up in an institution, following the divorce of his parents when he was two years old, saying:

When I grew up in institutions I had a number—number 49. I was not considered a person. Now I begin to get the feeling that I am a person with the possibility to make my own decisions. I have to learn that and I have to do it... Access to information is very important for me also. It’s the equality. It’s the feeling of being a person like anybody else. And trying to change the attitude of people, of society is also very important... (Outlook BBC, 2007).

School leaders must take seriously Grandia’s message about the importance of teaching people they are people with the right not only to make their own decisions but to make a contribution to the society in which they live. The following examples provide a few suggestions of ways in which schools can promote inclusive practices and honor the rights discourse in their practice.

Inclusive Geographies

The school and classroom are microcosms of society and will reflect dominant norms of power, privilege, and status unless school leaders devise and enact specific policies to ensure social justice. Some obvious ways in which those with physical disabilities are marginalized are the decisions made about access, space, and physical seating. Ramps for wheelchair access, or adaptations to bathrooms and drinking fountains are just a starting point. Some schools do virtually nothing beyond these basics which in themselves, do not provide inclusion. Inclusion is fostered when students with disabilities can participate alongside their non-disabled peers. This means that they are not isolated in the corner of the classroom with the teacher aide, separate from the rest of the class. It means instead that they are seated alongside their peers in academic and social groups that foster interaction, dialogue, and collaboration. It means that equipment in experiential classes such as physical education, art, and music is adapted to permit full participation. The playground is another site where inclusive geographies need to be evident. For health and safety reasons playground equipment is generally located in flat places where the ground surface is covered in soft materials to buffer and protect students from possible falls. Ensuring that the soft material does not inhibit the use of
calipers or wheelchairs promotes inclusion as does situating play areas so students with disabilities do not have to spend an inordinate amount of time and energy getting to them.

Structuring the classroom for inclusion also means ensuring that there is easy access to resources, seating, and movement around the room. It means that students with disabilities hold similar responsibilities in the classroom to those of their classmates whether they are being in charge of cleaning the board, taking attendance, distributing books and papers, or participating in a presentation. Having a responsible task disrupts the typical notion that students with disabilities always require help and assistance. It provides them a degree of power that positions students as authoritative and able to assist their non-disabled peers. It also facilitates social interaction as the supply of resources provides an authentic context for interaction. It is particularly important that students with special needs are not always on the receiving end of help (Meyer, Park, Grenot-Scheyer, Schwartz & Harry, 1998).

Although it is human to feel protective towards a student with obvious and severe special needs, sometimes we do students a disservice by protecting, buffeting, and “saving” them from opportunities to take risks and build resilience. For example, during a class excursion to an indoor, simulated rock climbing facility, Zaan, who had a brain tumor, was expected to watch and not participate. The tumor had affected his eyesight, coordination, and dexterity and so both parent and teacher assumed that it was better and safer if he did not take his turn in climbing the wall. However, Zaan pleaded to have a go and, with some trepidation, his teacher and parent relented. With the safety harness in place and the guidance of the climbing instructor, Zaan gingerly made his way up the wall watched by his peers, his mother and teacher. To everyone’s surprise and delight he climbed to the top of the wall and stood there beaming with pride. His peers cheered and his mother smiled back with tears streaming down her face. It was one of those moments where assumptions were challenged and over-turned in a dramatic and unforgettable way.

Inclusive geographies require educators who do not block peer interaction, mixed instructional groups that include students with special needs, and physical inclusion of children with disabilities within the class milieu, not on the periphery. Thus, in inclusive schools, leaders constantly encourage teachers to provide opportunities for students to participate in all school activities alongside their peers.

Social Interaction and Friendships

Social interaction is particularly important for students with special needs. These students are more likely to be lonely, isolated, and lack authentic friendships. Lack of real friendships further isolates students with special needs and makes them more vulnerable to rejection or over-involvement (Fraser, 2001). As Cullingford (1991) argued “a school’s virtues derive from the pleasures of friendship; its terrors from loneliness and isolation” (p. 48). There is often a tendency for students with
special needs to be treated as ghosts (virtually ignored), guests (respected but not integrated), or pets (cosseted and pampered) in the classroom (Meyer & Bevan-Brown, 2005). Peer relationships can be enhanced through physical proximity, through cooperative group activities, through shared interests, and joint projects. Lack of friends can also increase the likelihood of teasing and bullying which in turn, creates a vicious cycle (MacArthur et al., 2005). Inclusive practices foster authentic relationships, and while friendship cannot be coerced the classroom should provide opportunities for positive peer relationships.

In addition to the emotional well-being that friends provide there is increasing evidence to suggest that social inclusion and friendships can enhance school achievement (Ladd, 1990; Newcomb & Bagwell, 1996; Peters, 2000). While having friends does not ensure academic progress, “friendships are associated with enhanced opportunities to exercise behaviors related to social, emotional, and cognitive growth” (Newcomb & Bagwell, 1996, p. 317). As previously stated, attention should be given to power dynamics so that students with special needs are not always on the receiving end of help from their peers.

When students have severe disabilities such as profound autism, social inclusion can be challenging. However, it is important to reframe perceptions of deficit as creative opportunities. For example, Imelda’s vocalization consists of a loud guttural utterance which she repeats at much the same volume and intensity. When her class performed a play, she had the role of signaling the change of scene through the expression of her utterance. Instead of framing her in deficit terms as non-verbal and thus unable to take a speaking role, she was framed as pivotal to the sequence of the play. Her role was not merely one of ‘being a tree’ or some similarly passive position amounting to background scenery. She was given power and prominence within the play. In another example, a student who was also non-verbal and had the habit of repeatedly putting marbles in a jar, became the centre of a process drama. Each time she placed a marble in the jar, it was the signal for her peers to change the focus of their drama and adopt a new genre. Such examples show how even repetitive behaviors that seem obsessive can be reframed in aesthetic terms and employed as central, not peripheral, to classroom programs.

**High Academic Expectations**

Achieving access and socialization do not ensure the presence of either an inclusive school or an inclusive classroom, but simply a kind of educational social club. School leaders are charged with a mandate to ensure that every child learns (consistent with his or her abilities) to high standards of academic excellence. Full inclusion for students whose academic programs may require some level of adaptation must nevertheless attend carefully to ensuring that students achieve appropriate and excellent academic learning—standards that understand and reject the limitations implicit in the discourses we examined earlier.

Fortunately, there has been considerable research to indicate that, here, it is the climate of expectations set by the school that makes the greatest difference. The long-standing studies of teachers who were told (falsely) that their classes
comprised students of outstanding talent and aptitude, in which the students rose to the level of expectations such a belief implied, are well-known (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). An important study (Wagstaff & Fusarelli, 1995) found that the single most important factor in the academic achievement of minoritized students was the *explicit* rejection of deficit thinking on the part of the school leader. In like fashion, a series of New Zealand studies of specific pedagogical interventions with Maori students also found that expectations were key (Bishop & Berryman, 2006). When Maori students were taught using relational and constructivist pedagogies that took account of their specific learning preferences and that assumed they were capable of initiative, agency, and academic excellence, they performed as well as their non-Maori peers. Although the previous two studies focused on students minoritized because of their ethnic group affiliation, there is good reason to believe that the same holds true for students minoritized for reasons related to some intellectual or physical limitations. Levy (1975) reviewed studies that demonstrated the ability of “severely retarded adults” to “perform complex industrial tasks” including the accurate insertion of electronic components into a printed or etched circuit board. Jones, Vaughn, and Roberts (2002) studied a similar phenomenon and found that because memory for spatial location appears to be not directly affected by the individual’s level of intelligence, it is possible for those mentally impaired to learn complex tasks requiring spatial knowledge.

The key, not only to considering future employment for students with some kind of disability, but to considering appropriate academic expectations as well, is to focus not on the limitation, but on the capabilities and abilities of each student. Stereotyping what an individual may or may not be able to achieve is akin to earlier societal assumptions that some jobs were only suitable for male employees. Carla, a blind woman in one of the author’s graduate classes in educational leadership, not only taught the instructor, but all of her peers this important lesson. When she had received the appropriate support, in terms of having her textbook material converted to an audio format, she was engaged, articulate, and perceptive in her classroom participation. However, when the university readers had failed to provide the audio material in a timely fashion, she was forced to sit quietly, unable to participate fully. Moreover, when I learned to accurately describe what appeared on an on-screen diagram or to adapt the rules of an assignment requiring visual manipulation, she again participated fully. The institution’s recognition of its responsibility for making adequate and appropriate modifications was an essential prior condition to Carla’s inclusion; taking responsibility for listening to and understanding the readings was, of course, Carla’s part in assuring her ultimate success in graduate school. Had the lay, medical, or charity discourses dominated, Carla could never have achieved her potential. Providing her with the appropriate adaptations to which she was entitled was key. This is the critical responsibility of every school leader and administrator: ensuring that all students are provided with the instruction—academic, social, and physical—to which they have a legitimate and inherent right as citizens of a given community.
DISRUPTING DOMINANT DISCOURSES

CONCLUSION

School leaders have a moral, legal and ethical obligation to provide for the education of those with special needs alongside their non-disabled peers in schools. Sometimes this requires that additional resources be allocated to physically adapt the environment so that all students may participate in meaningful ways. Sometimes, this requires an intentional focus on grouping and regrouping students in order to promote mutually beneficial and responsible social interaction. On occasion, it also requires modifications of learning goals and objectives. Here it may be useful for educational leaders to be aware of the findings of the President’s Committee Job Accommodation Network, that on average 15% of accommodations cost nothing and 51% cost less than $500 (Walker, n.d.). If modification of the workplace is so cost effective, it is incumbent on educational leaders to take steps to allocate appropriate budgets to the task of creating an inclusive learning environment for all students.

At times, educators may be so paralyzed by the negative implications of dominant discourses that the task seems overwhelming. To ensure that inclusion fosters and enhances the learning and well-being of students requires that educational leaders constantly promote an understanding of alternative discourses and to challenge discourses that, although dominant, may be inappropriate. On the other hand, the rights discourse provided here presents a progressive framework for developing a respectful, engaging, humane, and thus, more inclusive education. The beliefs and values that accompany exclusionary discourses such as the lay, medical, and charity discourses, need to be recognized, “challenged, and replaced by more inclusionary paradigms” (Kearney & Kane, 2006, p. 216) as suggested here. Most importantly however, is the obligation to ensure that the human rights of every student are upheld in the educational processes and environments to which they are fully entitled.

REFERENCES


