



DOMINICA

Caribbean Symposium on Inclusive Education

Kingston, Jamaica, 5 – 7 December 2007

UNESCO
International Bureau of Education



Commonwealth of Dominica Country Report

Dr. Jeffrey Blaize, Senior Education Officer, Secondary Schools

Inclusive Education in Dominica

Inclusive education describes the process through which a school attempts to respond to all pupils as individuals by reconsidering its curricular organization and provision. Through this process, the school builds its capacity to accept all pupils from the local community who wish to attend schooling (Sebba and Ainscow 1996). Inclusion is seen as the process of operating a classroom or school as a supportive community. An inclusive school operates from the principle that all students in the community should learn together. It means therefore that support for the process of inclusion should come from the whole school community and should benefit all students.

Inclusion is in many different respects, a value driven goal because of the different opinions people hold about its appropriateness in various circumstances. While inclusion may be a desirable goal for all children, the issue is complicated by differing viewpoints and as a result it is often misunderstood, mistrusted and confusing to parents and educators.

It means therefore that attempts to promote inclusion must clearly distinguish between the concepts of *inclusion* and *integration*. We promote inclusive education if we are able to restructure our education system to permit all students to be productively accommodated in our mainstream classes through reorganization of our classroom environment and facilitation of instructional shifts. Hence, inclusion is not seen as how to assimilate individual students with special educational needs into existing forms of schooling, but instead as how schools can be restructured in order to respond positively to all students as individuals.

This is separate and distinct from the concept of integration, since integration focuses on small groups of children for whom the curriculum is adapted and differentiated work is devised. Integration does not challenge or alter the organization and provision of the curriculum for students. Rather, it simply involves placing the child with special needs in the mainstream classroom hoping that he/she will cope.

Within the Dominican context, most of the institutions catering for the needs of students with disabilities are either privately owned or government assisted special schools. One of the main special schools on island caters for students who are mentally challenged, while the other caters for the hearing impaired. In addition to the two special schools listed above, there are only two other regular schools which cater for students with special needs, namely vision impairment and autism.

One of these institutions is a relatively small assisted school. This school has staff members who are versed in Braille education and can readily cater for the educational needs of the

students. The other is the largest public primary school on the island. This institution has most recently been piloting an inclusive education programme with physical assistance from the Ministry of Education. Within the Dominican school environment, there are a few teachers who are trained in special education within the mainstream settings. However, these individuals still hold the view that they are not competent enough to meet the needs of children with disabilities.

Inclusive education in Dominica has had many challenges. Among the most pressing limitations of inclusion are a lack of human resource, limited access to materials and equipment to facilitate inclusion, a silent culture of exclusion among schools and a lack of confidence by parents in the ability of educational institutions to adequately cater for the needs of their children.

Over the past years only limited progress has been made with respect to inclusive education. In most cases only special schools cater for the educational needs of students with special needs. These schools form part of the national education provision but function as a separate parallel school system for students perceived to be in need of special arrangements.

One of the main barriers to inclusion in Dominica is the attitude of persons about persons with disabilities. Such attitudes stem from a lack of education, inadequate public policies on the issue and insufficient trained personnel. Inclusive education in Dominica has not been guided by a written policy. Consequently, many mainstream schools maintain a degree of control over decisions on the acceptance of students with special needs.

Another major limitation of inclusive education in Dominica is teacher training. Many classroom teachers feel ill equipped to work with students with special needs. There has been some teacher training with respect to differentiated instruction. However, teachers lack specific training relating to specific learning difficulties in students.

Most recently, there has been a conscious effort by the Ministry of Education to encourage inclusive education within the public schools system. To this end, practical and tangible efforts have been made to support mainstream schools which practice inclusion. The step towards inclusive education in Dominica provides an excellent starting point for considering national legislation relating to inclusion.

According to the 1997 Education Act, Section 81 Sub-section (2), *'a student who is entitled to a special education programme shall have the programme delivered in the least restrictive and most enabling environment to the extent that resources permit and it is considered practicable by the Chief Education Officer in consultation with professional staff of the school and the Ministry and the parents, having due regard for the educational needs and the rights of all students.'*

In Sub-section (3) the Act goes on to say that *'a special education programme may take the form of an individual education plan in that the plan is tailored to the specific or individual needs of the student'*.

It is reasonable to assume therefore that with respect to the above provisions as reflected in Dominica's Education Act, in most cases '*the least restrictive environment*' alluded to, would be the regular or main stream classroom.

As stated in the Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy and Practice in Special needs Education in June 1994, regular schools with an inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all. The statement indicates that these schools provide an effective education to the majority of children and improved efficiency and ultimately the cost effectiveness of the entire education system (UNESCO 1994).

The main sources of exclusion in Dominica are students with special educational needs based on physical or mental disabilities. The reasons given for such exclusion are inadequate physical resources and teacher training at the school level. On rare occasions, students are excluded based on their behaviour. In such cases, exclusion is determined by the Chief Education Officer upon the submission of a dossier of evidence by the school as well as a recommendation for expulsion. It must be noted that there is always careful consideration by the office of the Chief Education Officer with respect to excluding students based on their behaviour since it is quite clear that behaviour accepted by one school may not necessarily be accepted by another.

Inclusive education has not featured prominently in Dominica's National Curriculum. The National Curriculum addresses differentiated tasks for students with varying abilities but there has not been a shift in focus to facilitate inclusion. The Ministry of Education has recognized that inclusion is an issue of growing concern. However, there is the fear that the resources required to facilitate the process are not always available. Hence, addressing the issue at the policy formulation and implementation level, requires an initial commitment of resources for implementation.

Although inclusion is not addressed by the curriculum on a national level, mainstream schools which cater for students with special needs modify their curriculum to facilitate all students. With the introduction of Universal Secondary Education in Dominica, the issue of inclusion has been given greater prominence. The selection process for secondary schools that existed prior to Universal Secondary Education naturally excluded many students from accessing secondary education. Hence, Universal Secondary Education has provided students with special needs within the mainstream school new hope and increased opportunities for lifelong learning.

If inclusive education is afforded the degree of prominence that it deserves within the Dominican context, then more resources need to be invested both in terms of the development of human resource and the provision of material resources. Coupled with an investment in human and material resources, reorientation of the trend of thought and culture in our existing education system is paramount. Hence, the reconsideration and adjustment of teaching approaches and the use of necessary support for learning should be the key features of the process of inclusion in Dominica.

References

Sebba, J. and Ainscow, M. (1996) International developments in inclusive schooling. Mapping the issues. Cambridge Journal of Education. Vol. 26, No. 1. 1996

Education Act (1997) Commonwealth of Dominica

UNESCO (1994) The Salamanca Statement and Framework on Special Needs Education (Paris, UNESCO)

Assessing perspectives on the issue of inclusive education

Place a tick under the number of the most appropriate answer based on the scale provided. Please answer each question honestly. Your responses will be kept in strict confidence.

Strongly agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4	5

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
Many of the things that teachers do in the regular classroom are acceptable for students with special needs					
The needs of children with special needs are best served in regular classes					
Classroom behaviour of students with special needs require more patience from the teacher					
The challenge of being in a regular classroom promotes children’s academic growth					
Inclusion offers mixed group interaction which fosters acceptance of differences					
Regular teachers have knowledge and expertise to work with students with special needs					
Placement in a special class have negative effects on the social and emotional development of students with special needs					
Inclusion of children with special needs will require extensive retraining of teachers					
Children with special needs develop academic skills faster when placed in special schools					
Inclusion of students with special needs require changes in regular classroom procedures					
Most children with special needs are well behaved					
Children within regular schools often bully and pick on children with special needs					
Children with special needs will be socially isolated by other students in the classroom					
Inclusion has a negative effect on the emotional development of children with special needs					
Including children with special need in regular classes promotes their independence					
Children with special needs display behaviour problems in regular classes					
Inclusion of children with special needs could benefit other students in the class					

CARIBBEAN SYMPOSIUM ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Kingston Jamaica 5-7 December, 2007

Children with special needs need to be told exactly what to do an how to do it					
Children with special needs are likely to create confusion in the regular classroom					
The presence of children with special needs in regular classrooms will promote acceptance of differences on the part of other students					