



SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS
FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

Inclusive Education in Montreal: Theory, Policy and Practice

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Educational accessibility and opportunities for people with different and/or special learning needs have progressed over the past 50 years. From having an educational system of segregation and exclusion to promoting inclusion in every school, the educational system in Montreal is changing for the better. The Quebec Ministry of Education adapted its outlook and policies in order to support inclusive education in schools.

Inclusive education is commonly used to describe a classroom and school where every child is accepted and supported throughout their education regardless of their diverse learning needs. The purpose of this research is to understand the barriers to inclusive education in Montreal and identify solutions for schools, teachers, and school boards in order to more effectively implement and consider inclusive education as a necessary educational model. Online research and interviews with educators, social workers, government employees, resource teachers, and experts in the field of inclusive education were conducted.

In theory, inclusive education is ideal; in practice, it is rarely achieved. Some of the barriers include placing children with disabilities or special learning needs in a class without proper support, a lack of financial resources, a lack of well trained teachers who can manage a large group of diverse learners, a lack of support for teachers, and a lack of accessibility to resources through the Montreal English School board (some resources are only offered in one language). To begin addressing these barriers, school boards and educators should: first, adapt their perspective on inclusive education; second, create more and better teacher training in diverse education, as well as provide teachers with incentives and rewards for their hard work and dedication to inclusion; third, provide more access to available resources, more support from the school boards, and access to the same resources in French and English; and fourth, everyone in the school system needs to understand that inclusion is a process that has been developing over centuries and that it is a move in the right direction. Ultimately, there is a collective responsibility to ensure that the current system is improved and adapted to suit the needs of all students.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2015 the United Nations (UN) established 17 new Sustainable Development Goals to be achieved by 2030.¹ Goal number four states, “Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning.”² Inclusive education is commonly described as students of all learning needs and disabilities learning in the same classroom and school environment. While progress has been made in this domain, Canada only recently closed some of its last institutions for people with disabilities and many of its provinces still struggle to support students with diverse learning needs. In Quebec, the Ministry of Education adapted its outlook and policies in order to support inclusive education in schools. But while there are conventions and policies to support children with disabilities and students with diverse learning needs, many still lack access to an inclusive education and must attend other schools. This can result in social isolation from their community, as they are not given the opportunity to be taught in their own neighborhood.

This report addresses the state of inclusive education in Canada, with a focus on Montreal, and seeks to envision what it should mean, what an inclusive classroom should look like, who is involved in the process, and who is responsible for implementing inclusive policies and practices. The report also touches on who benefits from inclusive education and when it can be detrimental. The purpose of this research is to understand the barriers to inclusive education in Montreal and to formulate recommendations for schools, teachers, and school boards to implement.

The system of inclusive education in Montreal continues to adapt over time. Since the closing of institutions for people with different abilities, Montreal school boards have been trying

¹ Sustainable Development Goals: 17 Goals to Transform our World, Un.org, Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

² Goal 4: Ensuring inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning. Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/education/>

to determine the best way to educate children with different learning needs. Historically, people with disabilities have been neglected, mistreated, and denied some of their basic human rights, including their right to education. In Canada, the push for inclusive education has been supported since the mid-1980s, in line with the establishment of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.³ The Charter states, “State Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels [of] lifelong learning,” a crucial aspect of the development of every individual’s full potential and in protecting their dignity, rights, and freedoms.⁴ The educational opportunities for young people with disabilities in Canada and all over the world have since improved, with special education schools opened to cater to these students’ needs. Originally, students were meant to learn in these schools for a short period of time in order to gain the necessary skills and cover basic material before moving into general education classrooms.⁵ However, private special needs schools continue to grow and cater to students with various abilities that the mainstream curriculum and school boards cannot provide.

In Montreal, there are five schools boards across the city, which act as the intermediary between the Quebec Ministry of Education and individual schools. Each school board adheres to the province’s *Education Act*. Per Section 235, school boards should adopt measures to support integrated classrooms where students of all abilities can learn and develop in the same environment. In addition, the Ministry of Education has made other relevant suggestions, such as implementing a special education policy at the school board level,⁶ and creating an advisory

³ Jones, K. (2012, March 3). Inclusive Education: Including Special Needs Students in Regular Classrooms. *Montrealites*. Retrieved from <http://www.montrealites.ca/education/2012/03/inclusive-education-including-special-needs-students-in-regular-classrooms.html#.WYJ98IpJnrD>

⁴ United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. (December, 6 2006). 24.1.a. p.14. Retrieved from http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convention_accessible_pdf.pdf

⁵ Gordon L. Porter. Personal communication. July 9, 2017.

⁶ Education Act. (1990). Division VI: Functions and Power of the School Board. 235. Retrieved from <http://legisquebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/ShowDoc/cs/I-13.3>

board to determine the best way to support children with special needs.⁷ However, school boards leave the implementation of inclusionary practices to each school's discretion.

METHODOLOGY

Research for this report was exploratory in nature. Most of the data collected was from online sources such as journals, online news reports, organizations' websites, and government policies and reports. In addition, 10 interviews were conducted with educators, experts in the field of inclusive education, directors of organizations working in the field, resource educators, social workers, and employees working with or for the Ministry of Education. The interviewees were contacted by email or phone between May 7th and August 2nd, 2017, and information about the research was shared prior to interviews. Interview questions were tailored accordingly for each interview based on interviewees' positions and involvement in inclusive education. Some interviewees chose not to be identified by name and thus are identified in this report using a pseudonym or are simply described as an interviewee. The desired outcome of this report is that it is read and taken into consideration by educators, school administrators, resource teachers, school board and government employees, as well as used to advocate for inclusive education.

It is worth noting the constraints and limitations that affected this research. First, the study was conducted primarily during the summer months when elementary and high schools are closed, thus I did not have the chance to speak with any students or parents. Further research in this area should incorporate these vital perspectives to better understand inclusive education in Montreal. I was also unable to obtain the perspective of various special needs schools in Montreal. While all of the experts, educators, and resource teachers I spoke with were knowledgeable about inclusive education, only a handful were able to provide me with insight

⁷ Ibid.

into inclusive education for children with intellectual disabilities. That being said, some of the information in this report does reinforce the benefits and recommendations for inclusive education for children with mild intellectual disabilities in primary education. In addition, I was unable to connect with the French school boards in Montreal, thus this study focuses on the English school boards. Finally, while this report focuses on inclusive education and examples of how it affects students with disabilities, it is important to point out that inclusive education also relates to children with other differences in the classroom.

KEY FINDINGS: INCLUSIVE EDUCATION BENEFITS ALL STUDENTS

Assumptions Debunked

Everyone has a different perspective on inclusive education. In its most basic sense, it is understood as having children with disabilities in the same classroom as their neurotypical peers. Lusthaus et al. state that while some may think smaller, homogenized classes benefit students with disabilities more than general education classes, “students did not learn more because there may have been lowered expectations, water[ed]-down curriculum, and a lack of peer models in the special classes.”⁸ Conversely, inclusive education, whereby children with disabilities are active participants in the classroom environment, and where appropriate supports have been implemented in the classroom, has proven to have no negative impact on the academic achievement of their peers at the primary school level.⁹ Thus, providing children with and without disabilities an inclusive education is both equitable and empowering. In inclusive settings, children with disabilities are able to express their needs, collaborate with their peers,

⁸ Lusthaus, E., Gazith, K., & Lusthaus C. (1992). Each Belongs: A rationale for full inclusion. *McGill Journal of Education*. 27, (3). p. 301.

⁹ Dessemontet, R.S., & Bless, G. (2013). The impact of including children with intellectual disability in general education classrooms on the academic achievement of their low-, average-, and high-achieving peers. *Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability*. 38, (1). p. 23.

learn about and feel a sense of belonging with the people in their community.¹⁰ Essentially, these children are part of an education system that is building social connectedness. Moreover, Lusthaus et al. highlight numerous studies that resulted in positive outcomes such as performing “better academically and socially when [children with disabilities] were in regular classrooms with modified curriculum than when they were in special classrooms.”¹¹

Learning About Diversity

Beyond the moral argument that every child has a right to an inclusive education, studies have proven that neurotypical students in inclusive classrooms “become more positive” towards children with disabilities due to their overall educational experience and classroom interactions.¹² In an interview conducted for this study on July 31st, 2017, the interviewee expressed that truly inclusive settings, such as neurotypical students “working in class with students with disabilities,” provides them with “the ability to learn more about the diversity that exists around them.”¹³ Furthermore, Gordon Porter, an expert in the field of inclusive education, stated in an interview that inclusive education can help us achieve more accepting societies where children can grow and be citizens in a true democracy.

Better Use of Resources

Mr. Porter, along with another interviewee from the Ministry of Education, also stated that inclusive education is ultimately more cost effective in terms of government resources. By

¹⁰ Professor F. Personal Communication. July 31, 2017.

¹¹ Lusthaus, E., Gazith, K., & Lusthaus C. (1992). Each Belongs: A rationale for full inclusion. *McGill Journal of Education*. 27, (3). p. 301-302.

¹² Dessemontet, R.S., & Bless, G. (2013). The impact of including children with intellectual disability in general education classrooms on the academic achievement of their low-, average-, and high-achieving peers. *Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability*. 38, (1). p. 24.

¹³ Professor F. Personal communication. July 31, 2017.

this, they mean that if you send a child with disabilities out of the general education system, you send away the funding that comes with them. This stunts the growth of general education, as both the diversity and the resources to create more adaptable and inclusive environments are withdrawn.

With the proper support, resources, and curriculum that meet the diverse needs of students, inclusive education can succeed. Beyond educational benefits, there are benefits to having children with disabilities more integrated into their local communities. Not only do they get the support they need to grow as individuals, but “when they are excluded, the community suffers the loss of their unique gifts.”¹⁴ While most of the findings from this study were overwhelmingly positive in terms of the theoretical concept of inclusive education, in practice there remain many barriers that prevent it from being implemented in schools across Montreal.

Unintended Consequence of Inclusive Education

Throughout interviews conducted during this study, the main concern for inclusive education, aside from the systemic barriers that prevent it from being successful, is bullying. Bullying can happen in any school especially if students lack the proper knowledge and understanding of differences and accommodations. Mrs. Handelman, a resource teacher in Montreal, expressed that bullying can happen due to jealousy. She recounted a case at a school she worked at previously where a student with a disability was provided with an iPad for reading texts, as outlined in the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP).¹⁵ An IEP is a legal document for every child that has a disability. Teachers, administrators, resource teachers, and the student are supposed to fill it out together and create realistic goals to help the student

¹⁴ Lusthaus, E., Gazith, K., & Lusthaus C. (1992). Each Belongs: A rationale for full inclusion. *McGill Journal of Education*. 27, (3). p. 301-302.

¹⁵ Bari Handelman. Personal communication. June 28, 2017.

advance socially and academically regardless of their disability. In this case, the accommodation was a visible one and thus labeled the child as different from his or her peers. This caused the students in the class to bully the child for being able to use an iPad. While a solution was found in this particular case, bullying is a common occurrence when classrooms are not adapted to an inclusive mindset. Additionally, calling a classroom, program, or environment inclusive without it having the necessary characteristics of a truly socially connected and inclusive environment can also lead to bullying.¹⁶ While there may be other cons to inclusive education, they were addressed more as barriers throughout the interview process for this research.

Barriers to Inclusive Education

There are several barriers that prevent inclusive education from being implemented in the classroom. Firstly, while policy implementation in this area has progressed, the resources needed for inclusive education to flourish remain elusive.¹⁷ In terms of the literary resources that do exist through the Ministry of Education, they are only available in French. For example, on the *Éducation et Enseignement Supérieur* website, there is a tab called ‘Réseau scolaire’ (translation: Educational Resources) under which there is a section for teachers.¹⁸ Under ‘Aide et Soutien’ (Translation: Help and Support), there is a link for educational adaptation.¹⁹ This website and its supplementary documents are not available in English.

Teachers, administrators, and resource teachers are also constrained in their ability to create inclusive classroom environments due to a lack of physical and financial support.²⁰ For example, asking teachers not only to follow the Quebec Education Plan, but also to take all of

¹⁶ Matthew Shapiro. Personal Communication. June 16, 2017.

¹⁷ Bari Handelman. Personal Communication. June 12, 2017.

¹⁸ Adaptation Scolaire. *Éducation et Enseignement Supérieur*. Retrieved from <http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/enseignants/aide-et-soutien/adaptation-scolaire/>

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Mrs. M. Personal communication. August 21, 2017.

their student's individual needs into account while creating an open and accepting classroom environment, is daunting; teachers cannot do it all on their own. Since the introduction of inclusionary policies, there has been little training provided to help teachers adapt their mindset and transition to a new pedagogy.²¹ While new teachers in training can take courses on diverse learners, how to address their needs, and how to work together to help these students attain their goals, veteran teachers who have been teaching for 20 years may lack the understanding, knowledge, and willingness to adjust their teaching methods.²² Others attempting to become inclusive educators may have a difficult time if their administration, school, and school board lack the resources and the know-how to support them.²³

In addition to resources and educator support, there needs to be a change in mindset and community consciousness in order for inclusive education to thrive. Often the definition of inclusive education has been misunderstood as merely having children with disabilities in the same class as their neurotypical peers.²⁴ At first glance this can seem inclusive, but simply being put in a class without the proper tools can be academically and socially isolating. As stated by a professor interviewed, "Being in the same room does not mean you're being included."²⁵

Research has proven that inclusive education at the primary level has no negative impact on neurotypical students' academic achievement. However, as discussed with an interviewee, parents still fear that having a class with students who have diverse needs will negatively affect their child's education.²⁶ Additionally, the Ministry of Education states that inclusive education is important and recommended, but in practice is not compulsory.²⁷ Thus, there is no governing

²¹ Gordon L. Porter. Personal communication. July 9, 2017.

²² Bari Handelman. Personal communication. June 28, 2017.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Gordon L. Porter. Personal communication. July 9, 2017.

²⁵ Professor F. Personal communication. July 31, 2017.

²⁶ Ministry of Education. Personal communication. August 1, 2017.

²⁷ Ibid.

body requiring teachers and school administrations to implement inclusive practices. With no accountability, educators will implement inclusive practices in their own way or not at all. Both approaches can be extremely detrimental to students' wellbeing and developmental growth.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations in this section offer strategies for overcoming the aforementioned barriers to inclusive education in Montreal and for improving its implementation. They are underpinned by the belief that “integration by definition includes adaptation of the curriculum and adequate support for students and teachers, not just physical placement.”²⁸ The recommendations are summarized as follows:

1. Redefine inclusive education by ending integration and begin to require the practice of inclusion in all schools.
2. Increase funding for teacher training programs and courses on inclusive education.
3. Ensure availability of best practices, resources, and documents in both English and French.
4. Ensure the support and participation of a child's complete micro and mesosystem.

Recommendation 1: Redefining Inclusive Education

In order for inclusive education to be implemented more broadly, it needs to be redefined beyond just having diversity in the classroom and providing the necessary support to children who require equitable accommodations. Instead, the aim should be to help every student.²⁹ Redefining inclusive education in this way can underscore the importance of ensuring that every

²⁸ Lusthaus, E., Gazith, K., & Lusthaus C. (1992). Each Belongs: A rationale for full inclusion. *McGill Journal of Education*. 27, (3). p. 303.

²⁹ Ministry of Education. Personal communication. August 1, 2017.

student is empowered and feels valued and a sense of belonging.³⁰ Regardless of the heterogeneity or homogeneity of a class, be it in a public, private, religious, special needs or other type of school, every school and every class should incorporate inclusive values. Additionally, inclusive education should also mean celebrating differences in a positive way and not simply just tolerating them.³¹

By redefining inclusive education, teachers, resources educators, and administrators can begin to create more inclusive school environments, even if they lack resources. It is important to acknowledge that some children with mild to severe learning disabilities need more specialized educational attention; however, this doesn't mean that their education needs to be exclusive. Even if they are educated in a separate school, they should still be included in every aspect of their scholastic experience and encouraged to participate in their local community.³² Recognizing that some children need specialized support is an important step in involving them in determining their educational future.³³

Recommendation 2: Increase Funding for Teacher Training

First and foremost, an assessment should be conducted to better understand what teachers and school administrators are lacking in order to make their classrooms and schools inclusive.³⁴ As mentioned, according to the interviewees, there is an overwhelming lack of teacher training in diverse and inclusive education for veteran teachers.³⁵ The inclusionary guidelines were put in place, but training was not required.

³⁰ Professor F. Personal communications. July 31, 2017.

³¹ Bari Handelman. Personal communication. June 28, 2017.

³² Professor C. Personal communication. June 16, 2017.

³³ Professor F. Personal communication. July 31, 2017.

³⁴ Mrs. M. Personal communication. August 21, 2017.

³⁵ Bari Handelman. Personal communication. June 28, 2017.

Second, based on the results of the assessment, the Quebec Ministry of Education should allocate funds accordingly to support teacher training programs in inclusive education. Moreover, teachers that return to take courses in inclusive education should be supported with a grant that would cover tuition and costs of reading materials. To supplement this training, new teachers and resource teachers, who have been learning about inclusive education in their undergraduate or master's degree programs, should share best practices with their school principals and fellow teachers.³⁶

Third, the Ministry of Education should mandate a required amount of inclusive training for all teachers annually.³⁷ Teachers who want to continue their learning should be provided with an incentive such as reduced tuition or grants. It is also important to recognize and reward the efforts of teachers who have already created an inclusive educational environment for their students and who continue to do so.³⁸ Creating a fund to support and further these efforts would also be encouraging for teachers.³⁹ School board representatives should then follow up with teachers and schools under their jurisdiction to ensure that funds are being used appropriately.

Recommendation 3: Availability of Bilingual Resources

All documents published by Quebec's minister of education should be made available in both French and English. For example, the 'Education Adaptations' material, which gives insight into inclusive education, needs to be translated in order for it to be more widely accessible.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Professor F. Personal communication. July 31, 2017.

³⁹ Ministry of Education. Personal communication. August 1, 2017.

Moving forward, the Ministry of Education needs to ensure that all of its online resources are accessible in both languages.⁴⁰

Recommendation 4: Involving a Child's Micro and Mesosystem

“In order to properly implement inclusive education, classroom teachers need to collaborate with resource teachers, the student's parents, the school's principal, as well as the student, to ensure success.”⁴¹ The interaction of these actors is known as a mesosystem.⁴² This collaborative process should be occurring while establishing a child's IEP,⁴³ which, by law, every child who has a learning disability is required to have.⁴⁴ Beyond implementing IEPs, every school board should have a committee that works with teachers, administrators, parents, students, and community members to ensure that proper sustainable change is occurring in their schools.⁴⁵ Committees should convene once a month and discuss potential inclusive programs to implement. An example of an effective program to bring into schools is the Special Olympics Unified Sports Program, which aims to break down stereotypes and have children with and without disabilities play sports together.⁴⁶ Programs like these lead to the creation of more inclusive communities.⁴⁷ While the implementation of inclusive education takes time, these first steps help start the process.

⁴⁰ Bari Handelman. Personal communication. June 28, 2017.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Roundy, L. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory of Development: Definition & Examples. Chapter 1. Retrieved from <http://study.com/academy/lesson/bronfenbrenners-ecological-systems-theory-of-development-definition-examples.html>

⁴³ Ministry of Education. Personal communication. August 1, 2017.

⁴⁴ Ministry of Education. Personal communication. August 1, 2017.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ James Lapierre. Personal Communication. June 16, 2017.

⁴⁷ Robo, M. Social inclusion and inclusive education. *International Science Journal*. Retrieved from <http://www.academicus.edu.al/nr10/Academicus-MMXIV-10-181-191.pdf>

CONCLUSION

In the past, educational systems have attempted to segregate students with learning differences from their neurotypical peers. The solution is not simply to seat children with different learning abilities in the same class as their peers, but also shifting the classroom environment to make them feel valued and appreciated. A redefined meaning of inclusive education, where every child belongs, can break down social and educational barriers. However, this process cannot happen overnight.⁴⁸

The barriers to inclusive education in Montreal can be overcome with more research, teacher training, translated versions of resources for the Anglophone community, community wide support for inclusive education, and funding to support inclusive initiatives. Inclusive education provides students with the ability to be educated in their neighborhood schools and build a sense of belonging in a community that cares for and about their needs. Furthermore, it allows students to find their agency and ensures that their voices are heard.⁴⁹ Easing into the process of inclusive education with inclusive programs is a positive method for change. Focusing on building social connectedness will help students develop into socially conscious and caring human beings.

The recommendations in this report should be adapted to reflect changes over time and to include the voices of students and parents. Finally, further research in this area should focus on the effects of inclusive education on students in order to better understand its impact from their perspective.

⁴⁸ Gordon L. Porter. Personal communication. July 9, 2017.

⁴⁹ Professor F. Personal communication. July 31, 2017.

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APPENDIX: SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR GORDON PORTER

Interview Questions_ Porter

1. What is your role at the organization?
2. Please explain what social connectedness in a few sentences.
3. How does your program promote social connectedness?
4. How would you describe inclusive education and programming?
5. Do you believe there is a link between social connectedness and inclusive programming? If so, how would you express this link?
6. How does the CACL support and promote inclusion? Provide examples.
7. Does CACL have any governmental policy recommendations?
8. Do you and the organization you work for think the government is doing enough in terms of inclusive programming? Why or why not?
9. What are the pros and cons of inclusive programming?
10. How does inclusivity positively and negatively affect children with intellectual disabilities?
11. What affect does inclusive education/programming have on students without disabilities or special learning needs?
12. What is the most important element of the inclusion process?
13. How do you/your organization evaluate success in your area of programming?
14. What do you do and what does the organization do to foster social connectedness?
15. Does the organization offer any support or resources for inclusive programming?
16. Please elaborate on the ten areas of inclusive communities as outlined on the organizations website?
17. What are some of the programs the organization offers that promote inclusive programming?
18. What feedback does the organization receive regarding inclusive programming from the government and from the general public?
19. Do you know of any government policies regarding inclusive education in Quebec or Montreal?
20. What do you think the government should be doing in terms of education and programming for children with intellectual disabilities? Who else is responsible?
21. Do you believe that inclusive practices and environments are in the future for Canadian society? What would this look like?
22. Furthermore, this research is also looking at inclusive summer camps; do you know of any inclusive summer camp programs? Do you know of any strategies they implement that are working to create a socially inclusive setting?
23. Do you know of anyone/organization that would be interested in speaking with me regarding any of the topics we discussed today?
24. Do you have any questions for me?