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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the history of special education in Saskatchewan (Canada) since the 1960s and proposes policy initiatives for future changes. Emphasis in the discussion is on trends and Canadian reports that led to Saskatchewan's 1971 passing of legislation mandating an "appropriate" free public education with procedural due process, individualized education programs, and least restrictive environment. Overall, the legislation reflected a major change in policy, from congregating students with special needs to mainstreaming and inclusion. Also mentioned as influencing the policy changes are charismatic advocates (such as Wolf Wolfensberger, Frederick Weintraub, and Lloyd Dunn), policy development and legislation in both Canada and the United States, and the development of Developmental Centers and Early Childhood Intervention Programs. The paper then looks at emerging policies in the following areas: economics, professional staffing, advocacy, technology, diversity, and integrated service delivery. Contains 16 references. (DB)

Special education policy: A retrospective and future prospective--a view from Saskatchewan

A paper presented at "Celebrating 75 Years of Serving Exceptional Children" , the International Council for Exceptional Children's seventy-fifth anniversary convention, Salt Lake City, Utah, April 9-13, 1997.

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Special education policy: A retrospective and future prospective--a view from Saskatchewan

One of the most effective ways of judging the quality and maturity of a society or educational community is to study how it treats its most vulnerable citizens, students with special needs. When society, through its government, accords these students full membership and participation in the regular socialization system, it is always because that is the accepted wisdom and will of the community. The converse is also true; community norms permit the establishment of second-rate programs and services for some students with special needs. The aspirations a community has for special students are reflected in policy statements which are then operationalized into legislation and regulations to guide practice. It is the policies underlying such laws which are most enduring, and most likely to govern our longer-term expectations for these students. Special education policies, the theme of our presentation today, are perhaps the most accurate and persistent reflections of a society's aspirations for students with special needs.

Special education policy reflects the practical wisdom of a society, evolves over time and thus precedes and informs special education legislation. Because policy develops over time and persists longer than legislation, it is often a more reliable basis for understanding past and potential future special education practices. The writers explore the factors which contributed to the development of past special education policies in Saskatchewan. We also consider the factors which are now influencing, and likely to influence future special education policy development.

Special Education policy in Saskatchewan: 1960s and 1970s

Some provinces such as Saskatchewan have been pioneers in creating and sharing dreams of more appropriate ways to include students with special needs in the mainstream of education. Perhaps our unique history as an agriculturally-based province, always at the mercy of the weather, and having to make do with less, has led us naturally to a policy of inclusion. We could not afford the cost of a dual "special education" system. The ways our services for students with special needs evolved in Saskatchewan is an unique and fascinating story. It shows clearly the provincial, national and international events which influenced our policy for educating students, leading to enlightened mandatory legislation in 1971, four years ahead of Public Law 94-142 in the United States. In Saskatchewan, like in the rest of North America, the 1960s and 1970s were a time when we dreamed great dreams, established enlightened policies for educating students with special needs and legislated and funded those programs.

In the early 1960s we had permissive special education legislation, allowing school boards to establish "special classes or special schools" for students with disabilities. School boards did not have to establish programs for these students, though when they did, the services were provided in congregated settings with other students with disabilities. When parents found appropriate placements for their special needs students outside the home school district, they had to pay all the costs of tuition, room and board, and travel--unless the sending board agreed to voluntarily pay some part of the costs. We had a provincial school for the deaf, transported our blind students for schooling at residential schools out of province, had a number of schools for mentally handicapped students, and still sent some students to a long-term residential facility for the mentally disabled. Our policy was to socialize and educate students with disabilities in separate, dedicated classrooms, schools, and institutions. Parents and advocacy groups had worked tirelessly with school officials to establish these programs and services. In the latter part of the 1960s and through the 1970s, a number of key

reports, charismatic individuals, and significant events moved us strongly toward a major change in our policy for educating students with special needs

Landmark Reports: Toward the close of the decade of the 1960s, a number of influential educational reports were published, and subsequently had a great deal of impact on special education policy development. In 1968, the Province of Ontario released *Living and Learning,* the report of the Provincial Committee on the Aims and Objectives of Education in the Schools of Ontario. The committee was co-chaired by the highly respected Supreme Court Justice E. M. Hall, and the report was widely read across Canada. It provided a powerful endorsement for a free, appropriate public education for all students, and for the primacy of the rights of parents to choose the kind of education their children should have. The report had wide input from the educational community, was carefully researched, well illustrated, and very well written. At approximately the same time, a national study, *One Million Children,* was under way. It was sponsored by six national advocacy groups for the disabled, and conducted by a national commission working with Provincial study committees. Once more, the resulting report was carefully researched, and coherently written. The chapters on "Proposals for Change", "New Ideas and Programs", and "The Citizen's Role", included recommendations which were very influential in special education policy development. Because *One Million Children* was based on a national study, and widely sponsored in the communities of the disabled, its recommendations had an extraordinary impact on policy development across Canada, including Saskatchewan, where we were in the process of writing mandatory legislation for students with special needs.

A second important national report, *Standards for Educators of Exceptional Children in Canada,* was published in 1971. The report was written by an inter-provincial group co-chaired by the Head of the Special Education Department, University of Saskatchewan. At the heart of the report was a three-level model for "preparing" special education teachers, "deploying" them, and "utilizing" them. It is the first report to suggest that regular classroom teachers have a role to play in special education, and therefore need special education training for that role. The teacher education model included in *Standards for Educators of Exceptional Children in Canada* became the established model for the University of Saskatchewan in the early 1970s and persisted for almost twenty years. It led us to be the first province in Canada to have a mandatory special education course for all regular elementary teachers-in-training. It also focused the way we prepared several hundred resource teachers and special education consultants. Since the co-chair of the committee was from our university, and because the model incorporated in the report was innovative, it greatly affected policy development in special education staff preparation in Saskatchewan.

Saskatchewan's Mandatory Legislation: Writing of Saskatchewan's mandatory special education legislation began in 1969, followed by passage of the law in 1971. Influenced by the reports just mentioned, the writers of the legislation moved away from the concept of special education as congregated education, and introduced the concept of an "appropriate" education for each student--as *Living and Learning* had suggested. It is interesting that Saskatchewan's 1971 legislation included mandatory provision for four of the five elements mandated in Public Law 94-142, passed in 1975. These were, a) A right to a free public education; b) Procedural due process; c) Individualized education programs; and, d) Least restrictive environment. The fifth component of Public Law 94-142, Nondiscriminatory evaluation procedures, was not an issue at that time in Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan's mandatory legislation reflected a very significant change in policy, from congregation of students with special needs to mainstreaming and inclusion.

Charismatic Advocates: For two years, from 1970-72, Wolf Wolfensberger was a Visiting Scholar at the National Institute on Mental Retardation (now the Roeher Institute) at York University in Toronto. During those years he made several powerful presentation in each province in Canada. His twofold message was "deinstitutionalization" and "normalization" for all persons with disabilities. He advocated tearing down all residential institutions for persons with special needs, which he saw as not fit places for human habitation. It is easy to see the direct connection between his powerful message and the change in Provincial policy in 1974, to exclude all children from the Valley View Center, a residential institution for persons with mental disabilities. The publication of his book *The principle of normalization in human services* in 1972 provided a second medium for his policy-changing message. Additional eloquent views were heard from the professional community. Burton Blatt, a teacher, writer, and frequently invited speaker at special education conferences, used powerful visceral imagery (Christmas in Purgatory, 1966; Revolt of the Idiots, 1976) to convince all who would listen that contemporary approaches to housing and educating persons with mental retardation were fundamentally inhumane.

The Council for Exceptional Children's own Frederick Weintraub was particularly eloquent in speaking and writing about the need for the special education community to be politically active in seeking policy changes that would radically enhance services for exceptional children. Also, in 1968, Lloyd Dunn published an important article in which he questioned whether it was justifiable to congregate students with mild mental disabilities. Once more, because of Dunn's stature in special education, his paper had a very significant effect on educational policy.

Policy and Legislation: Realizing the importance of legislation as a means of implementing policy, in 1972 the Council for Exceptional Children in Canada commissioned a Saskatchewan-based group to develop model special education legislation for Canada. After considering their mandate, the group argued that model statutes are time-bound and often out-dated before they are published. Instead they wrote *A matter of principle: Principles governing legislation for services for children with special needs.* This slim volume presents and illustrates 33 principles which should underlie good legislation. After 23 years, some of the principles are out-dated, while others still reflect current special education policy. Since *A matter of principle* was presented personally to senior education authorities in each province and widely distributed otherwise, it had an impact on special education policy through the 1970s and into the 1980s. The passage of Public Law 94-142 in the United States in 1975 had a very significant effect on Canadian special education policy. It was seen as the most significant bill of rights for students with special needs ever passed into law anywhere in the world. Much was published about it in journals read on both sides of the border.

Developmental Centers/Early Childhood Intervention Programs (ECIPs): When the policy of sending school-aged students with severe disabilities to institutional care stopped in Saskatchewan, community-based boards established more that 20 developmental centers across the province. These developmental centers would provide preschool intervention for severely and multiply disabled children in their communities. While these centers were funded initially by the Department of Social Service, a Provincial Core Services task force recommended they be administered by education. In 1976, control of all developmental centers passed to local school boards, greatly enhancing the transition of these students from developmental to school programs. At the same time, a home-based Early Childhood Intervention Project was piloted successfully, and very early home-based intervention for severely disabled preschool children became provincial policy, as it is to this day. Both of these programs have greatly enhanced the possibilities of mainstreaming and even including

these students in regular education settings.

Clearly, Provincial, national and international events and people influenced our policy for educating students with special needs, leading to enlightened mandatory legislation in 1971, four years ahead of Public Law 94-142 in the United States In Saskatchewan, like in the rest of North America, the 1960s and 1970s were a time when we dreamed great dreams, established enlightened policies for educating students with special needs and legislated and funded those programs.

Twenty-five years later (1997)

The passage of twenty five years has brought many changes and adjustments to the "dream". Today, virtually the whole community shares in the dream of better access to appropriate services, as close to home as possible, and in as normal a setting as feasible. Today, greater numbers of students with disabilities have been placed in regular school settings than ever before (Sanche & Dahl, 1991). The many different advocacy groups have coalesced and frequently act together, when speaking out or advocating for change. Parents expect high quality services as a matter of course. The vast majority of professionals in the human service system have not worked in larger institutional settings, nor considered traditional institutional options for persons with disabilities; indeed when considering options, parents have major influence on the exercise of choice. Contemporary professionals are immersed in a language and experience of "community based" or "community centered" services.

What is the dream now? The dream has become a vision of seamless services, in which clients, according to their special needs, are shared among and between agencies lessening bureaucratic barriers or entanglements that interfere with service access or provision. Services are provided on the basis of the clients' needs and thus are very individualized. The overarching goal of services is to facilitate persons who are appropriately interdependent, with independence as a secondary goal. The dream has refocused on the building of communities and neighbourhoods within which persons with disabilities can function as fully participating citizens. Indeed, during the last twenty five years there has seen an explosion of knowledge about how people learn best, and what conditions facilitate learning. Program design and service delivery have become much more complex, because they apply not only to persons with disabilities, but also to minorities, those with gender influenced differences, persons with linguistic differences, people in poverty, and people who are transient.

Though many facets of the current dream are laudable, the dream occurs in a changed societal context. A philosophical shift toward supporting human services, including special education, has occurred. Value is placed on a utilitarian model of services, rather than a human development model. Survival skills, social skills, and employability are all pragmatic values in society today, and schools have become central expressions of these values. Persons with disabilities today can not rely on the extensive safety nets created during the post-war years. The joint impacts of fiscal control and restraint in the human services sector have reduced the extent and quality of special education services.

Difficulties and challenges in designing and delivering the complex array of services needed by persons with disabilities have been "off-loaded" by provincial governments to new structures at the community level. This policy has had a profound impact on education, even though schools have historically exercised local control and continue to do so to this day. All health care services are now offered through District Health Boards, and aspects of the social services sector, particularly

residential and day-programs for persons with mental retardation/multiple disability, are now locally controlled. The re-focus of educational policy from service provision to the legal rights of students with disabilities (Smith & Foster, 1996) has allowed the Provincial Department of Education to sidestep some issues in service provision, and redirect problem resolution to the Human Rights Commission, which has a mandate to deal with issues of discrimination. A charity model of human services provision has emerged as "governments" no longer support all of the services needed. Community boards are much more widely used as service providers, while governments cut back on the level of financial support for special services.

The emerging potential of technology in all sectors of society, and especially for students with disabilities, is a relatively new factor. Used well, such technology can greatly enhance the quality of services we provide students with special needs. While it is clear that technology will have a significant impact on all our lives in the future, much care needs to be taken to assure that it improves the quality of life for the students using it.

Needless to say, the dream continues. When basic human needs are met in the community, the unquenchable human curiosity for challenge and change prevails. The dream of freedom, the dream of self actualization, and the value of every person in all human interactions is ongoing. Testing the outer limits of what full participation in society means for persons with disabilities generates new possibilities. Sharing the dream through the global networks, and exporting its values, culture, and ideas will generate a broader policy consensus which in turn will support appropriate local public policy related to special education services.

Future prospective

If indeed policy underpins legislation, and hence the quality of special education services, then what can we expect for the future? Are emerging policies today predictors of the kind and quality of services the present society will accord its most vulnerable citizens in the decade ahead? We believe so, and we share the following policy perspective for contemplation and critical reflection:

1. Economic policies: At the present time there is a trend toward Provincial policy to provide school boards "block" funding, rather than individual funding to cover the actual costs of services for students with special needs. The policy began at the Federal level in Canada and is now widely practiced in Saskatchewan and in other provinces, With a block grant system, it is the program, rather than the individual student funded, Under such a policy, it is much easier and less personal to cut funding further. This kind of policy also leads school boards to allocate program dollars on the basis of short term financial need rather than actual on-going needs. Such a policy reduces the traditional accountability of government and of service providers such as school systems.

2. Professional staffing policies: At the same time, while school boards are reducing the numbers of special education professionals in the schools, the employment and use of non-professional teacher associates (paraprofessionals) has emerged as a significant trend. With the employment of many teacher associates to support special education programs, there is a blurring, or an overlap of roles among classroom teachers, school-based special education or resource teachers, and teacher associates. There is also a clear trend toward employing teacher associates who have some post-secondary education. The need for well prepared teacher associates has led, for example, to the development of a preservice, distance education program at Kelsey Campus, Saskatchewan Institute

of Applied Science and Technology. Preservice education opportunities for persons serving as special education teacher associates will likely expand, and future staff will be better educated. A policy of hiring less expensive workers to replace professional special educators will force a fundamental rethinking and repositioning of professionals in the human services sector.

3. Advocacy policies: Two decades ago, advocacy groups in the province were powerful voices calling for the establishment of special classes and schools for students with special needs. Today those same advocacy groups are pressing as strongly for inclusion of these students in the community schools, and regular school programs. The outcome of the Supreme Court decision in the case of Eaton v. the Brant County Board of Education will spur parents of students with disabilities to strive even harder for policies of inclusion for their sons and daughters in the community programs serving all other students. Parents today are a much more informed and articulate group than those of two decades ago. They will exert an ever greater pressure on advocacy groups and service planners, to establish long-term policies in this area.

4. Technology policies: In Saskatchewan, it has become policy to provide full funding for assistive technology for students with moderate and severe disabilities. Computer technology is also used as a medium of instruction for students with special needs. At the present time, there is emerging computer technology to support collaborative teamwork among those who are jointly responsible for a student's educational program. There is a pressing need for clear policies on the use of technology for instructional and transition planning among those who share responsibility for the same students. Such policies need to be developed to guide both the Provincial and school system levels of education. At the present time, only limited use is being made of technological tools which could greatly enhance the teaching and learning of students with special needs.

5. Policies related to diversity: Our increasing knowledge about disabling conditions and the usually strident advocacy for "new" categories of students with special needs have challenged educators. Very recent examples include the focus on students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/Effect, Acquired Brain Injury, and the differentiation among students once considered autistic (Rett, Asperger's, Pervasive Developmental Delay). There is evidence that such differentiation frustrates teachers by developing expectations that they should understand the unique needs of such students, and be professionally competent to use unique instructional methods or differentiated curricula. Added to the complexities of a teacher's life are three additional sources of pressure. The aspirations of Saskatchewan's aboriginal community can no longer be ignored as they assert their right to an equitable education and one that is culturally appropriate. Canada's immigration policies have encouraged Saskatchewan communities to welcome new Canadians, many of whom are refugees, thus requiring school staffs to develop new understandings and sensitivities. Finally, poverty and the impact of poverty on children presents a particular challenge to educators regardless of other circumstances within the milieu within which children grow up. The expectation that teachers will develop the skills needed to cope with all these new types of students including those with disabilities implies a need for specialized inservice education There is great need for new policies on effective, timely, accessible inservice for educators who teach in inclusive settings. Such policies should include life-long learning for professionals and paraprofessionals working collaboratively.

6. Policies on integrated service delivery: In the later part of the 1990s, the preoccupation of both the national and provincial governments is on balancing the budget and paying down the debt

incurred in the last two decades. When the focus is on policy to deal with balancing budgets, every human service agency will be expected to make do with less. In this environment it is reasonable to plan for efficient and effective ways of collaborating, in order to get the best results from our reduced capacity. In Saskatchewan, government has made significant strides toward identifying the legislative and policy barriers to interdepartmental collaboration at the regional and school levels. The overarching framework was provided by Saskatchewan's "Action Plan for Children" (1993), which helped to re-establish enthusiasm for solution building at the community level for childrens' issues. The policy framework "Integrated School Linked Services" (1994) provided a focus and a direction for the efforts required by educators to enhance interdepartmental and interagency collaboration in support of special needs students at the school level. Perhaps it is here, in a concept which holds so much promise, that we can dream the important dreams for the third millennium.

Conclusion

Revisiting our noble past can't help but remind us of the important role public policy has played in the development of the high quality services we have provided for students with special needs over the years. Even today it is clear that the most effective services exist in those areas, and for those students for whom there are clearly articulated public policies. Indeed, where policy is weak or non-existent, services may be vulnerable, and lose ground to those areas which are more clearly mandated under current government policy. In looking to the future, there is urgent need to spell out public policies for special education services which are even more important than balancing the budget. It is in policies which bring about collaborative efforts for students with special needs that we are likely to create the success stories of the future. If parents and advocacy groups do not appreciate the power of public policy, and do not remain active participants in developing these policies, the most important agenda of government may be cutting essential special education services to balance the budget. That is a challenge we share.

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