

Disability and Education: Toward an Inclusive Approach

Gordon L. Porter*

This working paper is being published with the sole objective of contributing to the debate on a topic of importance to the region, and to elicit comments and suggestions from interested parties. This paper has not gone through the Department's peer review process or undergone consideration by the SDS Management Team. As such, it does not reflect the official position of the Inter-American Development Bank.

* Gordon L. Porter, President of Inclusion InterAmericana, is a Canadian educator who, for the past 20 years, has actively promoted inclusive educational practices. The author acknowledges the following individuals for their assistance with this study: Cameron Crawford, Grace Duncan, Mary MacDonagh, Maria del Carmen Malbran, Maria Amelia Vampre, Nadira Persaud, Roberto Madriz, and Diane Richler.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

CACL	Canadian Association for Community Living
EFA	Education for All
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
JAPMR	Jamaica Association for Persons with Mental Retardation
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
OAS	Organization of American States
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PIP	Primary Intervention Program
SOH	School of Hope
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WHO	World Health Organization

Summary

Educating children with disabilities is a challenge in the Americas, where only 1-10% of special-needs children have ready access to schooling. Of those who do, most must study in segregated schools, lacking the opportunity to socialize with their peers without disabilities. The problem is especially acute in rural areas.

Evidence is mounting that children with disabilities learn better when they are allowed to attend public schools in their own communities. In many cases, public schooling is their only chance to receive a formal education.

Both the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) have determined that inclusion is the preferred way to educate special-needs students. It has been widely accepted that the conditions required for successful inclusion are those that contribute to high levels of achievement for all children. As a result, inclusive education has received more attention throughout Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) over the past few years. The move toward more inclusive education now extends to most LAC countries.

Many examples from the region illustrate the difficulties students with disabilities can encounter when their families seek to enroll them in a country's regular educational system. Conversely, many cases show the opportunities that are created when parent-based groups and ministries work in partnership to nurture inclusive approaches and models.

Key initiatives identified to support the move toward inclusive education seek to:

- Establish pilot projects in individual schools or clusters of schools, incorporating best practices and developing local strategies;
- Train a cadre of teachers and school principals who can, in turn, train others;
- Pay teachers sufficiently so that they can focus on teaching and be held accountable for student success;
- Provide teachers training in classroom strategies so that they can accommodate children with special learning needs in regular classes;
- Staff schools with support teachers who collaborate with classroom teachers;
- Develop and disseminate information packages on best practices;
- Create educational institutions that prepare new teachers for inclusion; and
- Form partnerships among schools, parent groups, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), government, and professional groups to promote inclusive education in schools and communities.

Now is the time for key stakeholders to invest in programs and initiatives that will make inclusive education possible for all children. The sound practices that come with it offer hope to a region that needs to ensure educational equity for and participation by all.

The Case for Inclusive Education

Traditionally, children with disabilities have fared poorly in the established educational system. While much has been achieved over the past few decades in teaching students with special needs, success has been limited by the segregated settings in which they have been taught and the small proportion that have qualified to participate.

The low participation rate of persons with disabilities in the work force can be directly linked to their exclusion from the educational system. The resultant poverty, dependency, and despair represent a significant squandering of human potential (CACL 1997). Nonetheless, the concept of educational access has evolved from a mere privilege to a right for all, and expectations have been raised. Today, the commitment to universal education is interpreted as giving attention to all children, including those with disabilities and other special needs.

Toward International and Regional Endorsement

In 1994, UNESCO's Salamanca Statement set forth the challenge to provide public education to "all children, regardless of their physical, intellectual, emotional, social, linguistic, or other conditions." Not only was this commitment made, this service was to be provided in "ordinary schools." Articles 2 and 18 of the Statement, which were endorsed by 300 participants representing 92 countries and 25 international organizations, are particularly notable:

Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all.... (Article 2, UNESCO, 1994)

Educational policies at all levels...should stipulate that children with disabilities should attend their neighborhood school,

that is, the school that would be attended if the child did not have a disability. (Article 18, UNESCO, 1994)

At the regional level, 150 representatives from 34 countries met in Nicaragua in 1993 to develop a framework for promoting the rights of persons with disabilities. (This included individuals with disabilities, their families, educational professionals, and government representatives.) Together, these representatives developed and endorsed the Declaration of Managua, which states:

To ensure social well-being for all people, societies have to be based on justice, equality, equity, inclusion, and interdependence, and recognize and accept diversity. Societies must also consider their members, above all, as persons, and assure their dignity, rights, self-determination, full access to social resources, and the opportunity to contribute to community life. (CACL, 1993)

Subsequently, the General Assembly of the Organization of American States (OAS) passed the Inter-American Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities. The Convention acknowledges that disability persists as a significant obstacle to full participation in the social, cultural, economic, and educational life of the region. It declares: "it is necessary, therefore, to encourage actions and measures to bring about a substantial improvement in the situation of persons with disabilities in the Hemisphere..."¹

Inequity of Exclusion

Even conservative estimates indicate that LAC has a large percentage of children with disabilities, of which only a small proportion has

¹ Resolution adopted at the first plenary session of the OAS General Assembly, held June 7, 1999.

access to education and agencies that promote childhood growth and development. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), for example, estimates that 11.6% of children in Central America have disabilities. Other studies make higher regional projections. A study conducted by the Canadian Association for Community Living (CACL) for the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), estimates that 18% of children in Central America have disabilities (CACL 1997).

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that only 5% of children with disabilities in developing countries have access to support or services of any kind, and that less than 2% attend school. Physical and attitudinal barriers often prevent families and communities from giving these children the same opportunities provided to children without disabilities (CIDA 2000). Moreover, children with disabilities are disproportionately represented in low-income families, even in developed countries. In income-poor nations, notes Kisanji (1998), "people who are currently being marginalized by education policies and practices, such as those with special needs, are likely to remain excluded from schooling for the foreseeable future, unless radical reforms in the structure of education systems are contemplated and implemented." Failure to ensure that children with disabilities receive effective educational services results in their later

exclusion from the labor market and other forms of marginalization and dependency. It even contributes to poor health.

Failure of Segregated Schooling

In LAC, the educational system for students with disabilities has been based primarily on a limited number of special schools. This has been true for smaller, less developed countries, as well as for larger, more developed ones, as the following examples demonstrate:

- **Nicaragua** has some 150,000 children with special-education needs. Of these, the country's system can accommodate only 2.4% (3,600 children), meaning that the needs of 97.6% of children with disabilities are unmet.
- In **Chile**, traditional schools direct their special-education efforts toward children with mild disabilities, ignoring those with more severe problems (Milicic and Sius 1995). Moreover, most special-education schools specialize in only one type of disability, meaning that children with multiple disabilities are often overlooked. The country's 300 special-education schools can accommodate only 30,000 students, one-third of those who need the service.

- **El Salvador** has some 222,000 school-age youths with disabilities (Inclusion InterAmericana 2000). About 2,000 of these take courses at one of the country's 30 special-education schools, meaning that less than 1% attend any type of school (Box 1).

Box 1. From Isolation to Inclusion

Elsa is the mother of a 10-year-old boy named Pedro, who has multiple physical and mental disabilities. Their town has various special-education schools for children with physical disabilities. However, to be admitted, a child must have average intelligence and only mild-to-moderate difficulty in learning. To remain in the school, s/he must demonstrate significant progress.

Sadly, for children like Pedro, no special-education schools are available. Though such children may be eligible to attend day-care centers supported by social security, Elsa says, "do not have any educational objective."

In February 2001, Elsa finally found a mainstream private school that was willing to take on the challenge of teaching her son. She is now working with a small team of teachers—both special education and regular—as well as school managers, to develop a suitable program for Pedro.

- In **Jamaica**, moderately or severely retarded children attend schools operated by the government-funded nongovernmental organization (NGO), Jamaica Association for Persons with Mental Retardation (JAPMR). The School of Hope (SOH), a private, segregated school founded in 1956, has 29 units spread throughout the country, serving a total of 1,250 students. However, JAPMR estimates that 3,000-4,000 children qualify for the program (Duncan 2001), meaning that, for every child that receives service, two-to-three eligible children are overlooked (Box 2).

Box 2. Barriers of Accessibility and Acceptance

Joyce, from Jamaica, is a single mother of two: Willa, a three-year-old girl, and Thomas, a six-year-old boy with physical and learning disabilities. Thomas's special needs, particularly his physical disability, make him unable to walk. His situation is made worse by not having a wheelchair. This means he must move about on his own by crawling, or when conditions allow, by using a wooden platform mounted on wheels. The rest of the time, Joyce must carry him.

Across the street is a regular public school where Thomas has nearly completed kindergarten. He has been granted permission to attend the first grade and could be taken to school by his grandmother, who lives with the family and provides child-care for Willa, allowing Joyce to have a full-time job.

But two major barriers have emerged. First, the first-grade classrooms are located on the second floor, to which Thomas lacks physical access. Second, no first-grade teacher is willing to accept Thomas in the classroom. The school principal says he can do nothing about this. Even the Ministry-of-Education official with whom Joyce met can only offer to enroll Thomas in a special-education school on the outskirts of town.

Since no transportation is provided to this special-education school, Joyce would have to accompany Thomas on a public bus for the one-hour journey each way. She would arrive at her job late and would then have to return to the school by 2:30 p.m. to accompany Thomas home on the bus. Because Joyce needs to work, Thomas's education is now jeopardized after only one year.

Urban-Rural Disparities

Country profiles do not always accurately reflect the reality of an entire nation. In fact, the diversity, coverage, and quality of education may be more diverse within a country than between countries. Kochhar and Gopal (1998) note that, in many developing countries, “the deleterious effects of inadequate or inappropriate education are compounded by disparities in the quality of education as one moves from richer to poorer municipalities, from industrial to agricultural areas, and from coastal to interior regions. Moreover, there seems to be a consistently higher rate of disability among young people who live in rural areas (UNICEF 1999).

In **Jamaica**, children with disabilities who live outside major urban areas are less likely to receive service. While children from Kingston and St. Andrews parishes comprise half of the SOH student population, they include only 25% of the total (JAPMR 2001). In **Guyana**, eight special-education institutions were operative in 1996, five of which were located in the capital city of Georgetown and the surrounding area (IBE 2001). Further illustrating the inequity, O’Toole (1995) noted that Georgetown provided 90% of the country’s special education, but serviced only 23% of the population. In **Uruguay**, all special-education services, whether public or private, are located in urban and suburban areas, thereby preventing rural areas from obtaining appropriate aid (de Lorenzo 1995).

Incompatibility with Socioeconomic Goals

Using the special-education model to cover the needs of all students with disabilities would incur enormous costs. For example, **El Salvador** now has 30 such schools serving approximately 2,000 students. To achieve complete, special-needs coverage, 3,300 special-

education schools would have to be built and 23,000 special educators hired to join the 210 currently employed.

Today, most LAC countries are seeking ways to reform their educational systems. Two pillars of this process are to 1) increase access and 2) maximize system efficiency. The special-education model, which reinforces segregation and marginalization of people with disabilities, is incompatible with the spirit of democratic, economic, and social goals.

Far-reaching Social Effects

Segregated education tends to perpetuate a way of thinking that isolates people throughout their lives. Children who have been segregated at school tend to be kept separate as adults through work, recreational programs, and institutions (including psychiatric hospitals). Such arrangements are inconsistent with the spirit of international declarations on human, economic, and cultural rights, which are based on notions of full equality, inclusion, and respect. Policies and programs that promote segregation also perpetuate social isolation and vulnerability. Arguably, the systematic marginalization of people with disabilities from mainstream society tears at the social fabric, thereby damaging the diversity of civil society as a whole.

Charting a New Course: Inclusive Education

UNESCO has clearly charted a course toward inclusive schooling. This was conveyed in the Salamanca Statement (and subsequent publications), which noted:

Those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools, which should accommodate them with child-centered pedagogy capable of meeting these needs. (UNESCO, 1994)

The OECD has also identified inclusive educational practices as a key ingredient in general educational reform. In a recent publication, it stated:

The rights of students with disabilities to be educated in their local mainstream school are becoming [increasingly] accepted in most countries, and many reforms are being put in place to achieve this goal. Further, there is no reason to segregate students [with disabilities] in public education systems. Instead, education systems need to be reconsidered to meet the needs of all students. (OECD, 1999)

LAC Countries at a Crossroads

Countries in the LAC region must now ask themselves a crucial question: “Should we continue to invest in the special-education model or seek a change in direction?” As they move toward achieving the goals of the Education-for-All (EFA) initiative (EFA 2000), many countries are paying increased attention to the advantages of developing an inclusive, community-based school model.

Using this model, students with special-education needs, including those with disabilities, receive their education alongside their peers without disabilities. While this approach is considered innovative, it has been, for many cultures, the traditional way to educate children. As one Jamaican educator has observed, “Historically, we have always practiced the principles of inclusion in our educational system, especially at the pre-school and primary levels” (Duncan 2001).

Carro (1996) stresses that inclusive education has two-way benefits for special-needs students and their peers without disabilities. For example, familiarity and tolerance reduce fear and the likelihood of rejection. In addition, unique relationships are formed that previously were not possible. In short, inclusive education contributes to greater equality of opportunity for all members of society.

Jönsson (1995) supports and strengthens this argument, noting that interrupting the normal development of a child with a disability “may have far more severe consequences than the disability itself.” Inclusive education allows a child with a disability to remain with his or her family and attend the closest school, like all other children, which is vital to personal development.

Progress and Key Challenges

“In numerous countries, the integration of students with special learning needs into mainstream education has sparked a process of educational renewal that has greatly benefited the schooling system as a whole.” (Blanco, 1997)

Inclusive-education services are more sustainable, both politically and fiscally, than dual networks of regular and special-education schools because they aim to benefit all students; are not perceived by taxpayers as catering to special-interest lobbies in the disability sector; and strive to achieve optimal pedagogical results for every public dollar invested.

Countries that have appropriately implemented the inclusive-education model have found it can:

- Be less costly to implement and operate than special-education services;
- Have broader educational and social benefits for children than the special-education model;
- Contribute significantly to the ongoing professional development and job satisfaction of educators; and
- Improve morale and team effort in the school environment.

Countries with highly developed, special-education systems that wish to implement inclusive education face the challenge of how to transfer resources. While the difficulties inherent in this process deter wider

implementation of inclusive education, they should not be overstated. With the right partners, the transition can be effectively managed. Nonetheless, it requires time and possibly additional investment. Countries unable to spend substantial amounts on special-education services will need to generate new money to enhance the effort.

Proposing to implement the inclusive education model, like other innovative ideas, can generate fear and resistance, mainly from special educators who wrongly view it as a threat to their jobs. At the same time, many regular teachers are uneasy about the possibility of having children with special needs in their classrooms. They believe, for good reason, that they are unprepared and that much extra work will be required of them.

Facing Policy and Implementation Inadequacies

To promote special-needs education, policies and legislation must be firmly anchored in the commitments made to EFA and equitable opportunity for every child. Clearly, LAC countries face serious challenges in achieving the desired goals of the EFA initiative. No matter how difficult these challenges may be, the goals should include guarantees for students with special needs, including those with disabilities. In fact, now is the ideal time for governments to seize on the EFA initiative to transform educational practices and outcomes, as well as educational promise.

In country after country, the story is the same: Education is poorly supported and is producing inadequate results.² Although educational reform and restructuring are on the public agenda, funding and progress are limited. While change in special education is discussed among a small group of parents and practitioners in the

² In many LAC countries, funding for full basic education is not assured; the inequity for students with special-education needs is even more glaring. This significant proportion of the student population is simply overlooked as being eligible for schooling.

field, it is largely ignored and rarely viewed as part of the larger reform agenda.

Establishing Clear, Consistent Policies

To correct the situation, the public-school mandate must require the education of all children, irrespective of the degree of diversity in their learning needs, as well as physical and intellectual characteristics. Policy and political commitments should be viewed as clear and consistent. Teachers and school principals must not be allowed to establish educational policy, which is the domain of legislators and ministers. The fact that this occurs, under the guise of professional competence and knowledge (Box 2), is a sad commentary on the state of understanding the issue.

Building Coordinated Local Action

Denying a child access to schooling carries immediate costs of neglect and undeveloped potential. The economic and social costs for parents, siblings, and other family members are equally devastating. The social and political interests of the community demand that political leaders and public officials create an environment in which common sense and fairness prevail. Health agencies, social-services departments, and educational institutions should be structured and mandated to ensure that the holistic needs and interests of the child, his or her family, and the community are met. The cost of putting a mother out of work or plunging a family into economic crisis because effective schooling is out of reach is the price countless families throughout the LAC region now pay. Building a community able to support families responsively and flexibly requires coordinated action, guided by clear principles of empowerment.

Ensuring Informed Policy Implementation

Sound policies and legislation must be complemented by operational strategies that

catalyze key officials and leaders to implement them. Ministries of education should ensure that leaders of the system are fully knowledgeable of the rationale for inclusive-education schools and the social and educational benefits that can result. Leaders must be trained in the skills needed to ensure that inclusive schools work well. Skrtic (1991), for example, suggests that they focus on ad hoc processes of problem identification and problem solving. He argues that, since schools are institutions where the work is always unique, teachers need to create new strategies, on an ongoing basis, to meet the unique needs of a diverse student population.

Funding Physical Access and Support

To accommodate diverse student needs, the educational system must be funded to provide physical access and support. For example, buildings must be made accessible for those in wheelchairs; including ramps, wider entrances, and accessible washrooms. Moreover, personal assistants must be available if schools are to accommodate students with multiple and severe disabilities. Sadly, most schools are not equipped to meet such needs. Until they are, however, achieving the goals of the EFA initiative and inclusion itself will remain difficult.

Lessons Learned

For inclusive schools to succeed, critical elements must be in place to enable teachers to achieve positive outcomes with all students. Based on results of the First Comparative International Study (PEIC) (*Primer Estudio Internacional Comparativo*), conducted in 13 countries,³ Willms (2000) cites the following factors as key to quality, inclusive schooling:

³ The PEIC was conducted in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Honduras, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, and Venezuela.

1. Positive Learning Environment

A positive school and classroom environment are key indicators of a sense of community, in which teachers play key roles in establishing expectations and modeling appropriate standards. A positive learning environment is particularly critical for special-needs students who previously were excluded from school or isolated in segregated programs. When the PEIC study created an index to assess this factor from students' perspectives, it found that approximately 50% of students in the LAC region did not have positive learning environments.

2. Heterogeneous Grouping of Students

An inclusive-education approach calls for grouping students heterogeneously, not by ability. Heterogeneity tends to produce higher levels of student achievement as a whole. Nonetheless, only 38.7% of all children in the LAC region attend schools that practice heterogeneous grouping.

3. Optimum Class Size

Although enrollments of 25 students or more are considered too large, throughout the LAC region, it is not uncommon to find class sizes of 40-50 students. Only 54.2% of all children across the region are enrolled in classes of 25 or fewer students.

4. Single-job Teachers

Because of low pay and schools that operate two sessions per day, many teachers (representing 47.5% of schools) must work at two jobs. In some cases, both jobs are in the teaching profession; however, in many cases, the second job is outside the education sector. In either case, the consequence is detrimental to student success because of the reduced time to plan

lessons, participate with colleagues in meetings to improve and enhance instruction, and meet and work with parents.

5. Strong Parental Involvement

Strong parental involvement is necessary if special-needs students are to be fully included. However, the PEIC study found that 46% of students are enrolled in schools where such involvement is missing.

6. Teacher Support Strategies

If inclusive education is to succeed, educational managers must ensure that teachers have various support strategies available to them.

In-class Assistance

One of the most promising approaches in inclusive-education classrooms is the collaborative role played by the support teacher. In many cases, this individual is a former special-education teacher who has been given a new mandate. Instead of providing direct service to students, the support teacher offers the classroom teacher professional assistance in planning and teaching strategies. This assistance may take the following forms:

- Meeting students' unique learning needs;
- Developing classroom strategies and activities for day-to-day use;
- Facilitating structured sharing among teachers in the same school (for example, through problem-solving teams that focus on practical, site-specific strategies or meetings in which teachers learn to act cooperatively to help each other improve their teaching practices) (Porter 1994);
- Working with parents and outside agencies involved with the special-needs child; and

- Assisting the teacher with all other complications associated with providing high-quality instruction to special-needs students in regular classrooms (Porter 1991).

Yet, as Blanco (1997) has noted, collaboration must extend beyond the support teacher to broader collaborations between teachers, teachers and specialists, teachers and parents, and students. It is also important that the school principal or director be involved in the collaborative process of planning and review (Perner 1991). Modeling effective teamwork in the ad hoc manner suggested by Skrtic (1991) can help teachers feel comfortable with this new approach.

Although schools have institutionalized the model of having one teacher per classroom, the assistance of a second (or even a third) adult can enhance a school's capacity to adapt to students' special needs. Successful school programs ensure the availability of such flexible support (Porter and Stone 1998). The physical, behavioral, and, in some cases, learning needs of children can be effectively met by the individualized attention that a classroom assistant provides. This assistant may be a paid staff member with specialized training or, in certain cases, a parent or volunteer that helps students achieve success.

Training

Teachers require thorough pre-service and ongoing in-service training to ensure the success of inclusive education (Perner and Porter 1998). Throughout LAC, however, as Willms (2000) notes, only 54.8% of students are considered to have well-trained teachers. The OECD (1999) finds that inclusive education programs require the training of all those involved to succeed. Essential skills include adapting curricula, using a variety of instructional strategies, identifying individual needs, collaborating and solving problems, developing individualized education plans, and monitoring student progress. Weaknesses in training initiatives, Blanco (1999) argues, focus on teachers in isolation,

which fail to address schoolwide issues or significantly transform school culture.

7. Innovative Pedagogy: Multi-level Instruction

Innovative teaching strategies, such as multi-level instruction, are essential to accommodating special-needs students in regular classrooms (Collicott 1991). Perner and Porter (1998) define multi-level instruction as an approach to classroom instruction and curriculum organization that provides students with varying levels of academic skills and appropriate learning opportunities through the same core lesson. This model requires that teachers consider the underlying concept of a lesson, as well as methods of teacher presentation, student practice, and evaluation.

In terms of teacher presentation and student practice, teachers might consider the following:

- Modes of activities (Wood 1992);
- Types of questions asked and thinking skills required of students (the cognitive levels of knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation could be used) (Bloom 1969);
- Student learning styles (visual, auditory, tactile);
- Degree of participation (full or partial);
- Use of multiple intelligence theory (Gardner 1983), which encourages nurturing seven types of intelligence (logical/mathematical, verbal/linguistic, visual/spatial, bodily/kinesthetic, musical/rhythmical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal).

Multi-level instruction and similar pedagogical models are required to open students to varied,

flexible activities to stimulate learning. Students are thereby given a certain amount of choice in how they demonstrate their learning and practice new skills. This approach has proven useful in helping teachers to develop new instructional strategies (Perner 1993).

8. Overcoming Curriculum Rigidity

Overemphasis on high academic standards and achievement can lead to high drop-out rates and grade retention, low attendance, and poor learning achievement in many LAC countries (Artiles, Trent, and Hallahan 1995). When followed by grade retention, a rigid school curriculum can cause high rates of dropout among students from low socioeconomic, minority, and other at-risk groups. Moreover, the expense of keeping repeaters in the system is not directed toward addressing their learning difficulties (Palacios 1999).

While curriculum goals and outcomes are needed to shape expectations for most students, a responsive school program must be capable of making reasonable accommodations for students who require them. The receptivity of school personnel, as well as parents and the public, to this flexibility needs strengthening. Blanco and Duk (1995) observe that flexible curricula are key to meeting the diverse needs of students within the social and educational settings in which the teaching and learning processes occur. They encourage schools to move toward creating a single curriculum whose built-in flexibility allows for adjustments that respond to student differences. The multi-level instructional approach described above, together with such complementary strategies as cooperative and activity-based learning, can equip teachers with the tools needed to accomplish their goals (Porter and Stone 1998).

Country Experiences in Inclusive Education

Despite the progress that has been made in implementing the inclusive-education model, the concept continues to generate fear and resistance, mainly among teachers.⁴ Regular teachers genuinely believe that they are unprepared for the challenge, and fear that needed training and support will not materialize. Moreover, they doubt the model's practicality. Many special-education teachers fear that school administrators may view inclusive education as a means of eliminating their jobs in order to save money. Others wonder whether they have the requisite knowledge and skills to assist regular classroom teachers effectively. The cases from Jamaica and Brazil, presented below, well illustrate the strides that have been made to overcome such fears, as well as the challenges that have emerged as a result of this progress.

Jamaica: Primary Intervention Program

Since 1996, Jamaica's Primary Intervention Program (PIP) has assisted schools and teachers with children designated as slow learners. These children are ineligible to participate in the country's SOH program, but are failing in regular school classrooms. As their learning problems intensify, many become frustrated and drop out of school, often to the classroom teacher's relief. PIP was created in response to the Jamaica Association for Persons with Mental Retardation (JAPMR) being inundated by requests from school principals for help in dealing with such children (Duncan 2001).

PIP's underlying principles are that all children can learn and that teaching styles must match learning styles. The program's key objective is to allow students to remain in their community schools to achieve their fullest potential.

⁴ The consensus now is that inclusive education is an alternative to segregated special education. According to the new model, children are schooled in the educational centers of their towns or villages, regardless of their disabilities.

Pilot Program Results

PIP's first year began by having JAPMR staff assess the learning needs of 144 first-grade students at two regular schools. Only 50 of these students were found to meet the readiness criteria established jointly by the Ministry of Education and JAPMR. The other 94 were assessed as at-risk students. The 25 students considered the most at risk were individually assessed (see results below).

Assessment of 25 At-risk Students

Assessment Type	Number	
	Male	Female
Mentally handicapped (mild)	11	4
Learning disabled	2	0
Slow learner	6	2

Although this screening process raised awareness about the diverse learning needs of students entering the first grade, the teachers reacted by wanting the children removed from the classroom. However, JAPMR staff worked with these teachers, through workshops and strategy-sharing sessions, on how to identify and meet the children's special needs.

During the pilot program, many of the children missed school. Nonetheless, by the end of the school year, post-testing showed that all students had made gains, and teachers acknowledged that students with mild disabilities could achieve in the regular school system. The pilot experience showed the need to revisit the primary-school curriculum to ensure that the first term be dedicated to student differences and school-readiness skills.

Building on Success

JAPMR has begun to refer 12-to-15-year-old students from the SOH to regular schools so that they can further develop and learn. JAPMR staff report that most of their involvement centers on regular schools, which continue to struggle with at-risk children. PIP has increased the number of schools that participate in the pilot program from two to four. If resources were to become available, many more schools would participate.

Brazil: APAE São Paulo Project

The APAE (Associações de Pais e Amigos dos Excepcionais) São Paulo Project, initiated in 1999 under the leadership of APAE São Paulo (APAE SP), an internationally recognized, Brazilian NGO, includes 100 students with mental disabilities, representing 32 regular public and private schools from the city of São Paulo.

For many years, APAE SP had operated a school for children with mental disabilities. Although the student population had reached 600, educational leaders acknowledged that many more children needed help. Given that APAE SP lacked the resources to support each deserving child, educational leaders concluded that the best chance for most of these children to receive an education would be through local public schools.

Lessons Learned

Added Value of Project Staff

The nearly one-dozen support teachers selected for the project all had experience working in APAE SP special-education classes. While many had limited experience in regular schools, they brought a unique perspective to this environment. Because of their special-education knowledge and skills, they could assist in developing instructional strategies and training

in the principles of inclusive education. They also could help solve behavioral and other social problems. Moreover, their assistance gave regular teachers more time to work with parents to design individualized plans for their children.

All of the regular teachers welcomed assistance from the support teachers and worked cooperatively with them. Their main concerns were that support was not frequent enough and that insufficient time was available for the support teacher and parents to jointly plan.

Schools directors also played an important role in the process. Clearly, in the most successful experiences, their participation was high.

Teacher Training Needs

From the outset, project directors recognized that, in order for the transition to inclusion to succeed, classroom teachers would require new knowledge and skills. To date, these teachers have received adequate theoretical training; however, all agree that they need more hands-on training in practical strategies and methods.

Parental Empowerment

Having been encouraged to ask questions and collaborate with those in similar situations, parents are learning to speak on behalf of their children's future and the needs that must be met in order for this future to be realized. As parents have gained more confidence in exploring their dreams and fears for their children, they have begun to speak more specifically about their children's needs. This, in turn, has allowed professionals to better enhance parents' insights and suggestions.

Benefits of Ministry Partnerships

APAE SP has gained cooperation and support from both the federal Ministry of Education and the Municipal Department of Education, whose mandate is primary education. The Ministry of Education has been especially supportive with

regard to providing support teachers, teacher training, and development and distribution of materials. The Municipal Department of Education, responding to classroom teachers' desire for more frequent support-teacher assistance, believes that support teachers are

already overburdened. Meeting classroom teachers' expressed needs, the Department believes, will require either creation of more support-teacher positions or coverage of fewer schools.

Looking Ahead: Conditions for Success

Increasingly, inclusive education is viewed as a strategy to improve schools and ensure the equitable participation of special-needs students. A major challenge facing countries with already highly developed, special-education systems is re-directing funds from traditional services to regular schools. With determined leadership, however, this transition can be effectively managed. In countries that spend relatively little on special education, the challenge is to generate new money with which to establish support programs for schools to move toward inclusion.

Motivations for Reform

Too often, proposals for inclusive-education initiatives end up being argued among special educators and others in the disability field. Discussion and debate are largely wasted in this context since inclusive education is a topic for those engaged in the general education system. It is among regular school principals and teachers that discussions ought to occur.

In many cases, special educators with an inclusive vision are found at the forefront of the struggle for inclusive schools. For them, developing inclusive options is simply pursuing best practices for their students.

Public officials and political leaders are always looking for more effective programs that can produce better results and that make the most beneficial use of limited funding. In some countries, this is a key motivator for special-education reform.

Spending on segregated, special education is clearly inadequate to meet the special-education needs of students across the region. Increasing the current level of spending by three or four times (or even up to 10 times, in some cases) would still fail to meet all needs. Ironically, making these extra investments would only reinforce the notion that the general-education system does not have to deal with children who

are different. This logically would result in even more children being rejected from regular schools. For example, before the reform process was initiated in The Netherlands, special education had reached a point where 14 types of special schools were providing segregated education to students judged to have special needs (Meijer 1994).

Benefits of Mandating an Inclusive Program

Countries in the LAC region have little extra money available to spend on education. By mandating an inclusive, general-education program, funds could be focused almost entirely on improving program capacity to serve all children—both children without disabilities and their special-needs peers. Moreover, funds now directed toward segregated special education, as well as future increases, could be added to the pool of resources available for raising the standards of practice in regular-school classrooms. In this way, the social benefits of the investment would be available to the population as a whole.

Partnerships with Parents

Parents are the most consistent advocates for their children's best interests. In many cases, parent-based groups—some formal and broad in scope and others informal with highly specific goals—are making a significant difference in the movement toward inclusive-education programs. Analyses of developments in the region have noted the importance of partnerships with parents in building the conditions for progress:

The formulation of policies designed to help individuals [with disabilities] requires a global, integrative, and participative approach that involves various institutions. The Intersectoral plans developed must involve the different ministries, and must

rely on the participation of Parents Associations and Organizations for the Assistance of the Disabled. (Blanco, 1997)

Role of Policymakers: Transforming Commitment into Reality

Although most LAC countries are committed to the EFA goals of equity and inclusion, turning these commitments into reality is a difficult task. Progress depends largely on policymakers who view the inclusive community school, not as an issue limited to the special-education field, but as a key component of the general effort toward educational reform and restructuring. Throughout LAC, there are hopeful signs that this is happening.

For example, in October 2000, Central America's Council of Ministers of Education met in Antigua, Guatemala, where they discussed the need for more inclusive education, as well as the need to maximize the results of limited resource use. The ministers agreed that, for most students with disabilities in Central America, ensuring access to local public schools is the only reasonable way to ensure access to education. They agreed to an ongoing process of developing model inclusive schools and building on best practices and innovations. Currently, the Council of Ministers and Inclusion InterAmericana are working on a plan to provide in-service teacher training and informational materials designed to assist teachers and parents in this area (Inclusion InterAmericana 2000).

In Central America, several rectors of pedagogical universities, led by a university rector from Honduras, have agreed on the need to prepare teachers for the diversity that schools must accommodate in the future. They have begun discussions with Inclusion InterAmericana and the Roeher Institute of Canada on a plan of action, which, together with other initiatives, holds promise for preparing teachers for inclusive schooling (Roeher 1999).

The movement toward inclusive-education practices can be expected to continue. Some

initiatives will be limited to creating a new option for providing special education, while others may be more ambitious, including the goal of inclusive schools as a component in actions to modernize and reform public education. Stakeholders can work together so that the commitment and capacity to serve all children can be nurtured and supported in every school and community.

Agenda for Action

Various constructive actions can be taken to promote the development of inclusive education in the LAC region. Those that primarily require policy development and leadership can be initiated without significant financial investment, while those that require more systemic action call for considerable investment of both human and financial resources.

Specific actions that stakeholders—ministries of education, NGOs, donor agencies, and donor countries—should consider include:

1. Investing in pilot projects to support individual or clusters of schools committed to serving all children in their local zones and implementing inclusive strategies and practices to ensure a high level of success for every child.
2. Supporting needed changes in teacher-education programs—including significant training in pedagogical practices and instructional strategies, as well as knowledge about special-needs children—to prepare teachers to accommodate the diverse needs of students in regular classrooms.
3. Developing an informed cadre of skilled educational leaders and school managers, principals, and directors who can work on a daily basis to transform school practices. (This includes providing these individuals training, planning time, and the tools to make the

community public school truly a school for all.)

4. Analyzing and disseminating knowledge on best practices (through pamphlets, books, manuals, videos, and other communication formats) to teachers, parents, and other stakeholders. (Research centers, university projects, and academic institutions will need funding for this purpose.)
5. Developing an Internet-based information system to ensure widespread, low-cost access to information and resources. Support for a regionwide initiative, with selected support sites, holds great promise.
6. Strengthening partnerships among national and international agencies dedicated to special-needs children.

Disability rights, parent advocacy, faith-based, and social groups should be enabled to establish a common cause through this endeavor.

7. Prioritizing inclusive-education initiatives in national EFA efforts and other school improvement programs to foster gains for all students—both children with disabilities and their peers without disabilities.
8. Nurturing and creating partnerships between government and action groups at all levels—community, regional, and national. Such partnerships are achievable, highly productive, and hold the greatest promise to ensure that special-needs children are not excluded from the educational system.

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