

*family*

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### Abstract

This paper is a summary of a workshop facilitated by Bruce Uditsky, an educator who has worked extensively with families, individuals with disability and organisations. It briefly covers the stories shared by participants and some of the strategies presented for putting inclusive schooling into practice.

**Keywords:** Education, School age



INTEGRATION WORKSHOP - 1-3 AUGUST

Two of our new Committee Members, Amanda Lyons and Donna Ball (along with several other parents) attended the Integration Workshop facilitated by Bruce Uditsky - here follows their accounts.

On 1st, 2nd and 3rd of August 1991 I was fortunate to attend a workshop on integration, or inclusive education, facilitated by Bruce Uditsky, a parent and educator, based in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Talk about dynamic speakers!! I found this to be an inspirational workshop, with Bruce speaking more than eloquently and putting into words all of the feelings, beliefs and wishes I have, not just for my son's education, but for all children with disabilities.

On the first two days, the workshop was open to parents, teachers in schools, educators and other interested persons. The diverse range of attitudes existent with regards to integration was apparent at question times. The third day was for parents only (approximately 60 in attendance) with people speaking of their personal experiences to date and of their hopes and wishes for the future.

Integration is here to stay; the question is not "if", but "how", and Bruce Uditsky put this in very succinct terms. A bibliography will be available from the Community Resource Unit-Telephone 870 1022

Amanda Lyons.  
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Day One  
Melissa Ryan and Rhondda Poulton challenged us on the topic of "Coming Ready or Not". Melissa likened her experience of segregated education as being marooned on an island, the process of her inclusion at an integrated school was her escape and journey across the water to join the real world. Melissa's message to us was clear and rhondda reiterated when she spoke about her experience as a parent who successfully advocated on her daughter's behalf for an inclusive education. Melissa and Rhondda's stories were an excellent introduction to Bruce Uditsky (parent, educator and advocate), who spoke in his first session on the topic of "Critical Issues in Integration: quality, inclusion and curriculum".

with families in Canada (and for a short while in Adelaide, SA), who wish to enrol their son or daughter with a disability for an integrated or inclusive education at the school of their choice. Inclusive education should be seen as a right and not as a privilege and to exclude people on the basis of disability is to deny their basic human rights. Seen in this way, inclusive education is a moral issue and as such, should be available to all. Inclusive education is successful when teachers receive adequate support and in most cases the level of support needed is over estimated. Teachers need to work with an "every child" curriculum with appropriate support.

The underlying rationale - Every student is inherently and equally valued, that all have the same fundamental needs, that all require the same powerful and normative pathways and that the education be consistent with the principles of social justice and success for all students - models of education.

The afternoon sessions were a sharing of stories of inclusive education, battles fought & won, and struggles that are continuing. Parents, students educators, family and friends shared their experiences of life before and after integration. Always the same message - the end result was worth the struggle. It was also a reminder that once an integrated placement has been attained, it is not necessarily the end of the fight. We must continue to work on changing the attitudes of those who do not understand the difference between acceptance and charity if our children with disabilities are to be valued as true members of the community.

Day Two  
Bruce described the day's program as being strategies for putting inclusive education into practise. He started from the parents perspective and described three main points that parents want for their children.

- These were
1. to live and learn in an integrated world;
  2. to be valued and a real member of the community;
  3. to have the best possible education and friends.
- Bruce summed these three points by stating, "All children should be able to receive a quality education by attending their neighbourhood school, going to class together."

## INTEGRATION WORKSHOP (cont'd)

learning together and becoming friends".

What is integration? Total, full or inclusive integration must contain the following

1. the neighbourhood or local school;
2. a regular classroom;
3. approximately the same age peers;
4. the regular curriculum with modifications and adaptations;
6. individualisation;
7. a regular teacher responsible for the class with support as needed;
8. parents as partners.

Facilitation of relationships is a factor in successful integration and will enable the student to feel a part of the school culture. The best educational practices (with modifications), develop character and have an emphasis on values and responsibility which enable the student to have the same focus as his/her peers.

Common concerns regarding integration include:

1. teacher adequacy;
2. effects on other students;
3. increased workload;
4. class size
5. future of special educators;
6. risks;
7. costs;
8. supports.

1. In regards to regard to teacher adequacy - Regular teachers are actually trained in inclusion while special education teachers are trained in exclusion. Regular teachers need only be convinced by others who have done it.

2. There are reported ill-effects on other students. To the contrary students reported an increase in self-esteem, understanding and awareness.

3. There is an increased workload at the beginning which may require extra support. The load evens out and the support may not be necessary after a while.

5. Special educators would be called upon for specialist and consultancy support for the integrated students.

6. There has been no significant risk to students unless they have been segregated.

7. There is a need to emphasize this area and reallocate money as this is an area that is underfunded. It is usually a social/political decision

8. Teachers should not have to beg for support.

Outcomes of Inclusive Education include -

1. Teacher attitudes become more positive.
2. There are improvements in self-esteem and social status of the non-disabled students.
3. Regular teachers are as accepting as special education.
4. Co-operative learning produces better learning than one to one.
5. Inappropriate behaviour decreased spontaneously.
6. Mutual interest grouping helps acceptance by peers.
7. Integrated classes are more cost effective.
8. Learning of non-disabled students is not impeded.
9. Improved motor skills.

### Day Three

Parents only and everybody was encouraged to speak about why they there. Lots of stories with many commonalities. Parents were concerned about lack of support for their integrated children, fearful about leaving the "safety" of the segregated system, under-confident about taking on the struggle, disappointed that their children in segregated settings were not receiving enough academic work, fearful of retribution, not sure which way to go etc. etc. etc.

Listening to Bruce Uditsky describe what's happening in many provinces in Canada was like a tonic to me. He reinforced my beliefs and gave me the incentive to continue to push for totally inclusive education for my child and all children. I came to the conference thinking that Bruce would be preaching to the converted and left with a new and wider perspective. I see our children as pioneers in the area of integration and while things might not be perfect right now, I feel we must keep on working to make it right in the future. Parents must be allowed to have the same dreams for their children with disabilities as they have for the able-bodied siblings. As Bruce said, "a segregated education leads to a segregated work life and subsequent segregation from the community". I for one will not give up. Who will join me?

Donna Ball

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