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Inclusion's confusion in Alberta

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This hermeneutic paper interprets a recent series of reforms to inclusive education policy undertaken by the ministry of education in the province of Alberta, Canada. A 2007 Alberta Education review of the 16,000 student files in the province that school boards had claimed met the criteria for severe disability codification status – the level of disability that results in the most funding – showed almost half of the files did not meet the codification criteria. Alberta Education then claimed it was moving away from a disability and coding system through what it then called 'Action on Inclusion'. In what is now being called 'Diversity', Alberta Education seems to have withdrawn from its proposed actions on inclusion though it still claims to be committed to inclusive education. Alberta Education seems to be presenting itself as having made significant steps towards an inclusionary school system when it has not yet reformed what it had once claimed was the major obstacle to inclusion: special education. We explicate this position by sharing our six-year-long tracking of Alberta Education's moves around inclusion.

Keywords: inclusion; special education; diversity; funding; coding; disability

Introduction

Over the past 20 years (Winzer 2009), the concept of inclusion has become ubiquitous in discussions about programming for students with diagnosed medical disabilities and other 'exceptionalities' in public schooling in the western world (Gabel and Danforth 2008; Graham and Slee 2008; Winzer 2009). Critics have pointed out that while discussions about inclusion are often framed in opposition to or in tension with what has traditionally been called special education, they often are taken up within special education structures and policies (Graham and Slee 2008). Institutional communications about inclusive education, statements such as policy papers, Minister's statements, website updates, and promotional videos recently released by Alberta Education (Producer) (2009, 2012), for example, frame inclusion as social progress beyond special education but continue to seem derivative of special education thought and policy. In order to help inclusive education projects retain some of the activism that characterised earlier discourse about inclusive education, scholars have encouraged critical readings of claims educational ministries, school districts, and individual educational institutions make regarding inclusive educational practises (Graham and Slee 2005, 2008; Thomas and Loxley 2007; Valle and Connor 2011). In similar

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spirit, this paper attempts to understand Alberta's seemingly confusing positions on inclusion by asking questions both of what was and is currently publicly available on the topic.

Our position

We support an inclusive education system. An inclusive education system would be a reformed education system (Skrtic 1995; Slee 2011). In this reformed system, special education would no longer retain its status as a parallel and competing educational system to 'regular' education (Skrtic 1995). We believe that the medical model of disability supports the parallel system; thus, it often works as an obstacle to an inclusive education system. Currently, Alberta's inclusive education programme rests upon the medical model of disability. This model can be pernicious because it stigmatises labelled students as abnormal, subnormal, or bearing deficits (Gilham 2012a, 2012b; Goffman 1963; Hacking 2004; Nussbaum 2006). The splitting of society into those who are normal and abnormal is perpetuated through the categorisation of students into disabilities via the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual.

Furthermore, the medical model's notion of disability often encloses student differences as problems inherent to the student, which works to conceal larger systemic issues within an industrial and antiquated model of education (Gilham 2012a). Albertans also support the move away 'from addressing disability as a problem' (Alberta Education 2009a, 3); 71% of respondents to an Alberta Education special education reform initiative supported replacing disability-based coding and labelling with the identification of learning supports, for example (6).

The lenses through which we examine inclusive education policy in Alberta are that of concerned and cautious hope. We have been looking for, finding, and tracking the recent changes to what was once called 'special education' in the province in the hopes that a truly inclusive education system might arise. We strive to be aware of and attentive to what we are immersed in. We do not accept the policies, structures, and practices of Alberta Education without questioning the historical influences shaping them. We do not take special education or its various instantiations (e.g. exceptional learners and inclusive education) for granted as simply 'the way things are' or 'a new way of doing things'. We could also be described as concerned and critical hermeneutic researchers and educators, always seeking to engage in dialogue on those topics in our work that seem to have more to say than the appearance of things.

This paper is the explication of our ongoing inquiry, or critical noticing, of that which has been going on around us in both our work and our research. We wish to acknowledge that our position is not intended to 'throw the baby out with the bathwater'. In our work, we have both successfully applied practices drawn from the traditional special education field. Certain students, labelled disabled or not, benefit from unique and particular educational practices. We believe that this understanding illuminates the diversity of human life and knowledge, not its disabilities. Along with disability studies scholars, we believe that disability is a result of the conditions a culture can impose on particular people or, in this case, students (Reindal 2009).

We do, however, acknowledge that human beings have impairments which clearly impact their everyday activities (Reindal 2009). We also believe that as a self-identified democratic society, we have both an ethical obligation to support the participation of all of our citizens in public life and a practical interest in enjoying the contributions that all

can make when all are included. We have come to believe that the overarching process of student codification and placement into segregated settings is often antithetical to these principles.

Hermeneutics as questioning

In addition to having a perspective informed by disability studies' wariness of restrictive institutional framings of impairment, our inquiry about inclusive education policy is counselled by hermeneutic principles of openness and concern. Hermeneutics is about the practice of human understanding. Human understanding, according to Gadamer (1900–2002), arises out of misunderstanding, and our subsequent attempts to engage in dialogue with one another, including the topics and texts of our concern, because of our uncertainty (2004, 270, 385–7). In remaining open to the possibility that the other may be right, we are responsible to ask questions of the phenomenon around us (361). It is on behalf of our own openness to the continued possibility of an inclusive education system in Alberta that we ask questions of Alberta Education's public documents. Asking questions of education reveals the hermeneutic impulse in us to wonder if what is being called inclusion in the province is something taken for granted or not, and whether or not in either case, what is being proposed is a good idea for all students in Alberta's schools (Gadamer, Dutt, and Palmer 2001, 43).

Hermeneutics reminds us that, despite the allure of seemingly hard data such as Intelligence Quotients (IQs), and medical/psychological diagnoses, our understandings of disability and how to support people labelled as disabled are not events in which we have been given unmediated access to uncontestable realities. Like most human understandings, they are, rather, *interpretations.* Granted these interpretations do not appear *ex nihilo*, from out of nowhere. Human understanding is interpretation embedded in the concrete circumstances of the world; those circumstances complexly intertwined with all the richness of human lives lived over generations, through time. We are historical beings immersed in historical cultures that have their own deeply rooted prejudices – good and bad – that are taken for granted in our lives today (Gadamer 2004, 271). Hermeneutics asks us to review the circumstances of our places in the world to humbly ask if the other is right, and if not, what must we do in order to move beyond the negative prejudices of the past that continue to shape the present and project towards the future. We ask questions for the sake of projecting better possibilities for the future, together (Gadamer, Dutt, and Palmer 2001, 46).

In the case of Alberta's stated inclusive education policy, a hermeneutical attitude of question posing offers the possibility of refining our capacity to see beyond (or beneath) the exchange of taken-for-granted concepts and practises that appear to characterise the enterprise at the surface level. Alberta's recent changes to its *Action[s] on Inclusion* brought forth the demand upon us to look beyond or beneath the confusing rhetoric, as best we could, given our own limited horizons of understanding as educators working in schools. As Kearney (2011) wrote:

> In its most basic sense [hermeneutics] relates to the human capacity to have 'two thinks at a time', as James Joyce said. More precisely, it refers to the practice of discerning indirect, tacit or allusive meanings, of sensing another sense beyond or beneath apparent sense. (1)

Kearney (2011) goes on to describe a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' which unmasks 'covered-up' meanings (1). This understanding of 'covered-up' meanings does not

necessarily entail the conspiratorial 'cover-ups' of political theatre though that is possible, too; it speaks more fundamentally to the ways in which, in the midst of the uncertainty that characterises human life, we are always seeing our lives and those things around us in particular yet ever-changing ways. Truth is, by its very nature, the human action of remembering and forgetting that simultaneously and necessarily conceals some things while revealing others. In its largest scope, hermeneutics makes the claim that truth is not simply the accumulation of facts via the methods of the natural sciences: there is much more at play in human life, and our attentiveness to life can help bring some structure to that play. Hermeneutically then, the primary question this paper rests upon is: what remains concealed or at play beneath the glare of the recent shift from *Action on Inclusion* to *Diversity*?

Alberta Education's economical move towards inclusion

In the fall of 2007, Alberta Education carried out a review of 'severe disabilities profiles'. At the time, over 16,000 students were designated as having 'severe disabilities' (Alberta Education 2008). From 2001–2002 until the 2012–2013 school year, students identified with a severe disability were assigned provincial dollars separately from instructional block funding. Block funding goes towards both basic instructional costs and supports for mild/moderate categories of disability (Jahnukainen 2011). In 2011–2012, a student with a severe disability came with a $16,645 severe funding grant. These dollars went directly to school boards. Though school boards were ultimately free to apply that money the ways they wanted to, they were also required to annually document the severely coded students' receipt of a range of specialised (and costly) services including specialised assessment, a ratio of a two students to one adult (teacher or teaching assistant) for significant portions of the day, specialised equipment or assistive technology, assistance with basic care, frequent documentation of medical and/or behaviour status, or direct support services at a cost to the system (e.g. behaviour specialist, orientation, and mobility specialist) (Alberta Education 2011c).

Throughout the last 20 years, there have been massive increases in severe disabilities. According to Winzer and Mazurek (2011):

> The period between 1998 to 2003 saw an increase of 64% in identification of students with severe disabilities and an increase of 140% for students with mild/moderate disabilities, compared to a general increase in the school population of 5%. (51)

The correlation between the rise in severe disabilities and the attachment of dollars directly to the severe disability designation in Western school jurisdictions has been described as 'the bounty phenomenon' (Graham and Jahnukainen 2011).

The bounty phenomenon can be interpreted as the rapid rise in numbers of students identified as having disabilities because it is the only mechanism through which schools, and school boards, can acquire additional funds to support students. When school administrators are faced with what they deem to be exceptional student needs, they can either choose to work through those challenges in their schools within the limits of their current means or they can start the referral process for student assessment which often results in the identification of severe disabilities and the additional funding. This leads to ever-increasing demands on school psychologists to work on assessments.

In turn, the need for school psychologists to complete assessments is an additional strain on the resources of school boards. In an odd move of inversion, the bounty phenomenon perpetuates the disabling of students, in effect, producing a variety of systemic sicknesses including increases in the numbers of students labelled as severely disabled, an emphasis on diagnosis over support on the part of district-employed specialists (Specht 2013), and a pervasive emphasis on the ways in which so many students are 'sick', and thereby abnormal and in need of special education's best practices. This complex series of cascading consequences reinforces the need for a parallel and often separate special education system for the 'abnormal', which runs counter to the democratic intent of inclusive education. Ivan Illich (1926–2002) described this cyclical process of ever-increasing disability as a result of the application or introduction of a perceived treatment or antidote, as iatrogenesis (1976).

The 2007 severe review required that school boards produce documentation to justify the severe disability codification of students or to meet the burden of proof that all of their severe coded students actually qualified for funding. The province wanted to determine if school boards were consistently conforming to provincial policy. Criteria included an updated or current and appropriate diagnosis by qualified personnel; descriptions of how the disability affects or impacts a student in the learning environment; and identification of the types and intensity of supports provided to students (Alberta Education 2008, 5). The review found that 48% of the files submitted did not conform to Alberta Education's criteria. As Alberta Education stated in its report:

> The review results suggest that there is inconsistent application of special education severe disabilities coding criteria across the province, which raises questions about the interpretation and application of mild and moderate coding [as well]. Given the magnitude of these concerns, the results of the severe disabilities profile review are a catalyst for thorough examination of the overall special education framework. (2008, 1)

We believe this was the impetus for Alberta Education's publicly driven inquiry into special education in the province, known as *Setting the Direction*. Less than a year after the review was completed, Alberta Education announced the establishment of working groups to propose policy and initiated the first round of province-wide consultations with various stakeholders about reforming special education. The then Minister of Education, David Hancock, in a short video message, promised that the reform would include 'The development of policy, accountability measures and a funding mechanism' (Alberta Education 2009b).

While the *Setting the Direction* documentation (Alberta Education 2009b) speaks extensively to the need for the reformed system to support all students inclusively, these statements by the then Minister suggest that economic factors figured prominently in initiating the process. The bounty phenomenon's ever-increasing consequences, the subsequent review, and policy reform measures spoke to a parallel economic crisis surrounding the resources needed to appropriately and effectively support all students so that they can thrive in learning. Even as the rhetoric described the need to reduce the sense of otherness of students with disabilities, a major issue to be dealt with in the reform policy remained how to best manage and plan for the cost of the other. This has been an issue for Alberta's governments since its inception in 1905 as a province of Canada (ATA 2002; Dechant and Muttart Foundation 2006).

The *Setting the Direction* consultations were broad and deep. The project resulted in a set of reform recommendations known as *Action on Inclusion*. *Action on Inclusion*

spoke to a fundamental ethical shift in Alberta's classrooms. Some important examples of the recommendations included

> Moving from tolerating difference to valuing diversity.
> Moving from special education founded on a medical model based on the student's diagnosis to [a practice] of understanding a student's strengths and needs through [collaboration] in which teachers, parents, students and specialists … identify supports and services that best match the student's strengths and needs. (Alberta Education 2010b)

Importantly, *Action on Inclusion* was driven by this promising definition of inclusion:

> One inclusive education system where each student is successful.
> Inclusive education system: a way of thinking and acting that demonstrates universal acceptance of, and belonging for, all students. Inclusive education in Alberta means a value-based approach to accepting responsibility for all students. It also means that all students will have equitable opportunity to be included in the typical learning environment or program of choice. (Alberta Education 2010b)

Key in the above definition was the equitable opportunities for students to be included in the typical learning environment or programme of choice. This statement reflected the possibility that we would begin to see our specialised settings and streamed course offerings, determined by coding/disability status and/or IQ score, as inequitable or unjust, as sites and places of historical traditions that speak of marginalisation and segregation (Dechant and Muttart Foundation 2006) despite our beliefs that we have been caring for such students through the deficit model of disability.

To include or not to include

In 2011–2012, a number of confusing changes occurred on the website Alberta Education maintained to explain inclusive education reform. Alberta Education seemed to profoundly alter the ambitious scope of the inclusion project. In the spring of 2012, the *Action on Inclusion* website and the *Setting the Direction* materials were removed and replaced with this short statement: '*Action on Inclusion* no longer exists as a project or initiative, but the work continues as part of our collective practice to build an inclusive education system in Alberta' (Alberta Education 2012, para. 4).

Months later the *Setting the Direction* webpages, its policy statements, and supporting resources were re-posted in the archives, along with a definition of inclusion that resembled the definition used during the reform period in 2009, notwithstanding a small but important change in adjectives. The 2009 definition promised to have students in '*typical* learning environments and programs of choice'. In the most recent (2012) definition, that has been dropped and replaced by '*appropriate* learning environments'. Currently,

> The goal of an inclusive education system is to provide all students with the most appropriate learning environments and opportunities for them to best achieve their potential. Some have said, this is what should already be happening in education, and they're right. However, some children, youth and their families do not feel that they have the same opportunities as their peers.
> In Alberta, inclusion in the education system is about ensuring that each student belongs and receives a quality education no matter their ability, disability, language, cultural background, gender, or age. (Alberta Education 2012a)

This change in definition returns us to original special education policy which hinges on the notion of 'Least Restrictive Environments (LRE)' (Kauffman et al. 2007). This traditional special education legislation permits students to be placed in different settings, at the discretion of school boards, which is usually based on student difference as pathology or disability. We are concerned that the continued support of the LRE policy, clearly supported in the newest and current definition of inclusion, is the continuation of traditional practices of the segregation and integration of students into an unchanged school system. We wonder if it is indeed the case that Alberta Education has, for reasons we do not yet know, returned to its previous special education structure, but continues to publicly say substantial changes to special education have and will continue to be made.

Diversity's messaging

Currently, under the title of *Inclusive Education* one can find a short video on Diversity as well as links to the past projects and other related information links. We think 'Diversity in Alberta schools: A journey to inclusion' (Alberta Education (Producer) 2012) points to Alberta Education's misleading self-presentation that we noted above. Near the start of the video, the then Education Minister remarks, 'When you are looking at becoming an inclusive society there really isn't a beginning or an end. It is all about a process, it is all about becoming accepting and inclusive and not reaching a finite goal'. Despite this process-oriented message, the video seems to be strong evidence of the observations of Slee and Allan (2001) '[w]e are still citing inclusion as our goal; still waiting to include, yet speaking as if we are already inclusive' (181) as well as Graham and Slee's (2005) criticism that the appealing concept of inclusion is often used as a means of 'explaining and protecting the status quo' (3).

For example, the video's unrelentingly upbeat outlook implies that the various forms of social inequality that led to historical practices of exclusion are a thing of the past. Students with learning disabilities and physical disabilities, students from cultural and linguistic minority groups, and gay students are all shown as happily participating in the educational and social activities in their school, receiving appropriate support when necessary (peer and teacher support, assistive technology, adaptations to the physical space, and a gay-straight alliance club) and enjoying broad acceptance of their peers and teachers. There is no mention of students with emotional and behavioural disabilities (EBDs). It might be argued that despite the soundness of the discrete forms of support and accommodation the video portrays, supporting any of these groups of learners would, in practice, be a more complicated enterprise than the video suggests. Moreover, the needs of the group of learners who were the source of greatest concern in documents related to the severe review and the source of greatest concern to teachers (Alberta Education 2008; Cook 2001) – students with severe EBD – did not appear to warrant even the sort of generalised mention that those of the other groups of students received.

Again, Alberta Education's move to diversity could be seen as the call to remedy-through-inclusion which is conveniently, supposedly, already happening. This allows the current conservative agenda of accountability through standardisation to continue (Giroux 2006) while idealising inclusion as already something well on its way. Like Jahnukainen (2011), we believe that a neo-liberal market ideology via accountability measures (standardised tests), choice (charter and private schools), and publication of test results (for the public and by the government for school boards) are general policies

and practices that can block an inclusive education system because school cultures tend to become overly focussed on 'results' as success rather than social democracy.

Likewise, given that one of the new values for education in Alberta is an 'entrepreneurial spirit' (Alberta Education 2011b), we wonder how much these reforms cater to a conservative political agenda to keep Alberta 'economically competitive'. What place do 'disabled' students have in that agenda, especially given the rapid rise of other world economies? For example, in Alberta Education's (2011a) *Action plan for education*:

> The continued development of a highly skilled, knowledgeable, innovative and productive workforce is critical to ensuring that Alberta sustains its competitive advantage in a global economy, allowing the province to attract investment, and high value-added industries. Alongside its role in strengthening the economy, the ECS–12 education system will continue to teach the qualities and characteristics of citizenship which are essential to building communities across Alberta. (3)

A similar situation has already played out in New South Wales, Australia (Graham and Jahnukainen 2011). Inclusive language shifted back to that of integration, changes in the school act gave school boards greater powers to remove students presenting with emotional and behavioural challenges, and additional funding is framed as, in the words of Graham and Jahnukainen, '"something extra" for those who cannot meet the standards by way of "general" provision' (268). In Alberta, this is officially called 'accommodation' (Alberta Education 2006) and is *post hoc* to instructional planning for 'mainstream' or normal learners.

We are led to ask: How can we call our educational system inclusive, as a place of beliefs and practices that value diversity as human life (Stiker 1999, 8), while at the same time directly frame children and youth who are different as disabled, sick, or abnormal? Slee's (2011) assertion comes to mind:

> The story of inclusive education is also the story of the reworking of a concept to render it compatible with the priorities of power. It is a story of the assignation of values; it is the story of those who are and those who are not valued. (191).

Feedback from the public during the *Setting the Direction* initiative echoed our concern: 'If you say ALL students, you should mean ALL students' (Alberta Education 2009a, 14)

What happened to *Action on Inclusion*?

At this time, we are still left wondering whether or not the inclusion projects are archived because they are indeed 'shelved' projects, which the website does state explicitly, or if the new minister of education is attempting to move them forward once again because of their return to the website as archived data, and continued talk of inclusion on Alberta Education's website. In a recent professional development presentation with an Alberta Education Inclusive Education Manager, we were told that while the *Action on Inclusion* project was announced, the results from a larger consultation with the citizens of the province had just started to take shape and suggested that the entire school system needed reformation (Alberta Education 2012b). This was known as the *Inspiring Action on Education Initiative* which included discussions with all Albertans about inclusion, curriculum, technology, parental, and community engagement, to name a

few of the many broad-based areas Albertans considered important in an open discussion about the future of education in the province (Alberta Education 2010a). *Setting the Direction*, Alberta Education claimed 'informed Inspiring Education' (27). *Action on Inclusion* was put on hold while these larger reforms were being discussed. One outcome of this and several other initiatives by Alberta Education was an extensively revised School Act of December 10, 2012 (2012d).

Indeed, a province-wide curriculum re-design is afoot, including a re-visioning of the values of education around core competencies, rather than curriculum objectives (Alberta Education 2011b). Despite this, Alberta Education believes there is still a need for special education in the province. This can be evidenced on its website with the continued posting of disability-specific support documents that continue to address disability singularly through a deficit framing (Alberta Education 2012a). It is also apparent in the continued reliance on a system of provincial standardised testing that demands that students provide 'proof of disability' in order to be eligible for testing accommodations (Williamson and Paul 2012). We believe there may be educational reform on the horizon but it appears that it will still sit upon traditional special education and the deficit model of disability.

Our concerns are not alone. The head of the Alberta Teachers' Association Research Branch, J.C. Couture, wrote in 2012:

> The Alberta government's policy on inclusion in schools has become reminiscent of ancient palimpsests by continually reoccupying the same space with an unending series of revisions, scribbling and new texts. It's not that the intent is malicious – it's just doing the same thing over and over. (Alberta Teachers' Association 2011, 54)

As a result of these turns back to the special education tradition, we believe the government and school boards are still talking inclusion in a way that reflects what Slee (2011) has termed 'Neo-special education' (63): the co-opting and appropriation of inclusion by traditional special education. In this appropriation, more current special education students are invited into regular classrooms with stronger forms of *post hoc* differentiation and accommodation, educators teach under the continued reign of the traditional pathology of students into disabled categories of abnormality, and Alberta's educational system is deemed to be more inclusive.

A stalled journey to inclusion or a cautious one? Where are we now?

Alberta Education's website for inclusion currently emphasises a commitment to inclusive education. It notes how change towards inclusive education takes time. For this year, some significant changes have occurred. The coding criteria booklet (Alberta Education 2012c), published yearly, no longer requires the severe EBD codification process to include updated formal assessments from psychologists or psychiatrists after the first initial assessment. In the past, a formal reassessment was required every three years. This requirement, inherent to the bounty system, resulted in school board psychologists spending most of their time on psychological assessments. As early as 2001, Janzen and Carter wrote of the increased pressure on school psychologists to complete paperwork necessary for government funding. Specht (2013) argued that assessment has been one of the priorities for school psychologists. Unfortunately, as we have shared, that resource-intense work on behalf of the acquisition of further resources for individually coded students did not measure up well against Alberta

Education criteria: most of the severe codes in the province came from the EBD category, and half of those failed the review:

> Special education funding in Alberta would better serve students who are diagnosed with emotional and/or behavioural disabilities if there was a base level of funding provided that was not attached to coding. Schools would not have to engage in extensive, time-consuming coding processes in order to access needed resources. It is highly detrimental to meeting students' needs to have the funding system leading the pedagogical decision-making, labelling students inappropriately and watering down the real meaning of 'severe disability' or 'severe behavioural disturbance', which has (and still is in many other countries/regions) been relatively rare and associated directly with mental illnesses. (Wishart and Jahnukainen 2010, 185–86)

The province seems to have seen how school resources can be put to better use by directly assisting all students in schools, rather than have psychologists constantly assessing particular students for disabilities. In one of Alberta's urban public school boards, school psychologists can now be regularly found working alongside teachers in specialised classrooms, for example. Parrish's (2001) major review of special education spending in the USA (used by the *Setting the Direction* policy-forming group) found that only about 62% of special education dollars went directly to students (13). As of this year, school boards can use other informal means of reassessment to help determine the best needs for students giving them the flexibility to direct resources to students.

Also this year, the province stopped the funding for severe disabilities and replaced it with an inclusive education funding initiative. This funding model is based on assumptions of what special needs services should be required to provide services for the entire student population. This is known as a census model:

> Advantages associated with such a system are that it is very simple and has very limited administrative requirements. It also tends to allow a great deal of local flexibility in that it creates no fiscal incentive for putting a student in one placement or category of disability over another. In the case of the census-basis for determining the flat grant amount, it also does not create an incentive for placing students in special education. (Parrish 2001, 10)

This additional money for every student is allocated in block funding while extra funding is provided for differential factors. These factors are based on a formula that uses census data like the number of single-parent families and household income. There are disadvantages to the census model which is perhaps why Alberta Education also included the differential model of extra-inclusive funding. This funding attempts to account for actual regional differences in student populations. Taking into account factors like income levels and single-parent families could also be interpreted as an acknowledgement that disability is more complex than the logic of inherent abnormality: social capital plays a role in the creation of disabling learning conditions (Thomas 2012). The census model also runs the risk of coming under threat because dollars are no longer earmarked to particular students (Parrish 2001).

This first year of the census model saw all school boards in Alberta receiving no less than they normally would have under the previous funding model. However, it is important to know that the previous severe disabilities funding was frozen for three years while the *Setting the Direction* and *Action on Inclusion* projects were in review. Some educators have claimed that the current inclusive education funding

model is not really 'extra' money but rather money school boards should have had each year for the past three years.

Regardless, funding is now provided based on a model meant to be used for all students in need, that need determined at the discretion of each school board. Given a recent landmark Supreme Court decision regarding the rights of students to the provision of special education supports and services in the province of British Columbia, Canada, 'the onus is on school boards to allocate funding in a way that students with special needs get the supports they require to have meaningful access to education. Doing any less amounts to unlawful discrimination' (Teghtmeyer 2012). On the one hand, this seems encouraging because it requires school boards to provide appropriate education for all students and, at least at the level of recent institutional rhetoric, the more inclusive education is, the more meaningful it will be. On the other hand, it remains potentially problematic because it may, depending on institutional/legal interpretations of meaningful access to education, actually support the continued segregation of students under the popular learning and medically influenced beliefs. Future interpretations of the Supreme Court ruling will tell how this will play out.

Parents, advocacy groups for people with disabilities, and private schools catering to students with disabilities were among the stakeholders included in the consultation process for *Setting the Direction* (Alberta Education 2009b). While many spoke to their hopes for a more inclusive education system, others worried that the proposed reforms would result in the cutting of services for students with disabilities and a blurring of institutional accountability (Alberta Education 2009b). With a very active public shaping educational policy in Alberta, we fear that the normalisation of disability as a rights discourse empowers stakeholders who continue to support the segregated model. What it means to talk about meaningful education for all students is at the core of debates around inclusion. For example, we know that at least some school boards in Alberta still use the disability codification model as criteria for access to specialised classrooms and supports. We suggest that this sustains a traditional special education system that is parallel to and different from 'regular' education, despite the claims of learning for each and every student so ubiquitous these days.

Though these changes to the funding model may influence more inclusive practices at the school level, we also note that the only substantial province-wide change *Action on Inclusion* resulted in before being shelved were adjustments to policies directly or indirectly (through diagnostic proof of disability) related to funding. While funding has remained constant or increased and school boards have been given greater autonomy to use the funds as they see fit to support students, the relative stability of block/census funding formula has inoculated Alberta Education from the costly vagaries the rapid increase in severe disability diagnoses/codes would have entailed under the per severely disabled pupil funding system. Whether the intent of this economic reform was informed more by the need for greater justice for students or for more manageable forecasting of funding obligations for special education, it does, pragmatically, seem to have the potential to help alleviate the various sicknesses brought forth by the bounty phenomenon.

We continue, however, to await the resumption of the discussion of meaningful change, beyond economic reform, that stalled with the shelving of the *Action on Inclusion* project. As the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) President wrote in the spring of 2012, the Education Minister of the time 'failed to even mention special education or Setting the Direction' in his announcement of the government's newest plan for education in the province (Henderson 2012, 59). Speaking on behalf

of the ATA, she also wrote that 'we have consulted with our education stakeholders, yet we have heard nothing from government' (59). With the very recent release of an austerity budget the likes of which Alberta has not seen for approximately 15 years, we wonder if the conversation has the space to continue at all.

Alberta Education seems, with its reforms to date, to have largely dealt with the bounty phenomenon through a model that has the potential to fund more inclusively. Given the pervasiveness of the medicalised model of disability and the policies and programmes it has informed, however, considerable concern and effort is still required to support all educators and students in living together more inclusively in educational settings.

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