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Inclusive education policy: what the leadership of Canadian teacher associations has to say about it[†]

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In inclusive education research, rarely are teacher associations a topic of investigation despite their critical role in its implementation and efficacy. A study was conducted as part of the Canadian Disability Policy Alliance using a *learning collaborative* methodology that explored the extent to which Canadian provincial/territorial teacher association leadership personnel were aware of inclusive education legislation and policy. Using a semi-structured protocol, 14 participants were interviewed, representing 12 Canadian jurisdictions. Results indicated a complex theme with three linked issues: leadership participants stated that their teacher membership was well aware of inclusive education policy, that their membership generally endorsed it, contingent upon adequate resourcing. The particularities of this theme, awareness-endorsement-resources, are contextualised throughout the results, and the implications are raised in the discussion.

Keywords: inclusive education policy; teacher associations; federations; societies and unions

Introduction

This study is part of the *Canadian Disability Policy Alliance* (CDPA), a five-year Community-University Research Alliance funded project that focuses on policy and disability in Canada. The aim of the CDPA is to establish working partnerships between academics, policy-makers, and community stakeholders to examine and enhance disability policy that will support full participation and citizenship for people with disabilities. The CDPA addresses policy in the areas of health services, employment, citizenship, and education. This study is in the area of inclusive education.

Over the past two decades, there has been a shift in policy from traditional special education in separate settings to an inclusive approach in which all students are provided with the opportunity and requisite support to access and benefit from instruction within regular classroom settings in neighbourhood schools (Peters 2007). On an international level, inclusive education policy has been shaped by human rights agreements such as *The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action* (UNESCO 1994) and the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (United Nations 2006). The *Salamanca Statement* outlined belief statements that focused on the right to

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education for all children, the recognition of individual learning needs, and access to regular schools. More recently, the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (United Nations 2006) recognised the rights of persons with disabilities to an inclusive education system and stipulates that:

- (a) Persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability;
- (b) Persons with disabilities can access an inclusive, quality, and free primary and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live;
- (c) Reasonable accommodation of the individual's requirements is provided;
- (d) Persons with disabilities receive the support required, within the general education system, to facilitate their effective education;
- (e) Effective individualised support measures are provided in environments that maximise academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion (Article 24).

Finally, in preparation for the 48th International Conference on Education on Inclusive Education, UNESCO developed guidelines for the development of inclusive education policy (UNESCO 2009).

In Canada, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Part I of the Constitution Act (1982) provides a statement of rights for people with disabilities not to be excluded:

every Canadian is equal before and under the law and has the right to equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, sex, age, or physical disability. (Section 14[1])

Though this Charter is federal legislation, the responsibility for the development and enactment of education policy lies with the provincial and territorial governments; thus, there is a range of inclusive education policy. There is considerable diversity in geography, history, language, and culture across Canada. Geographically, Canada is the second largest country in the world encompassing almost 10 million square kilometres (Council of Ministers of Education Canada [CMEC] 2013). The estimated total population is 35,141,500 (Statistics Canada 2013a) which is spread unevenly over 10 provinces and 3 territories. Total populations in the provinces range from 145,800 in Prince Edward Island to 13,585,700 in Ontario and the territorial populations range from 34,000 in Nunavut to 43,300 in the Northwest Territories (Statistics Canada 2013a). It is estimated that 80% of the Canadian population lives in urban centres and 45% live in just six metropolitan areas (CMEC 2013).

Data from the Statistics Canada 2006 Census (Statistics Canada 2013b) indicated that 1,172,790 people (3.75% of the total population) identified themselves as Aboriginal (First nations, Métis or Inuit). The largest number of Aboriginal people lives in Ontario and the western provinces. However, the percentage of the population varies: for example, Aboriginal people make up 2% of the population in Ontario, 15% in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, 50% in the Northwest Territories, and 85% in Nunavut. Canada is also a bilingual country with French and English as the two official languages. Approximately, 85% of French-speaking Canadians live in Quebec (CMEC

2013). Canada's cultural diversity continues to grow and recent statistics indicate that international migration accounted for 73.3% of growth in the first quarter of 2013 (Statistics Canada 2013b).

The majority of Canadian jurisdictions provide some legislative or policy direction requiring inclusion of students with exceptional learning needs within general or 'regular' education. In addition, there has been increased government support for implementation within some jurisdictions. For example, the Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education began a four-year implementation of an Inclusive Schools Initiative in the 2009–2010 school year (Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education 2012) and the Government of New Brunswick announced a commitment of over \$62 million over three years to improve inclusion and intervention services (Government of New Brunswick 2012).

Changes in public policy appear to promote an inclusive approach, yet there is some indication that implementation is lagging and there is a gap between policy and practice (Timmons 2006; Statistics Canada 2008). For example, the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC 2008), reported that students with physical, emotional, mental, and learning challenges are among the groups considered most vulnerable to exclusion (40). Although there is no national database on educational provision for students with diverse learning needs across Canada, some information was previously available through the Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS). PALS¹ was a post-censal survey that collected information about children aged 5–14 who were identified by their parents as having one or more disabilities (Statistics Canada 2008). In the most recent survey in 2006, 62.4% of children with disabilities (aged 5–14) received part-time special education and 37.6% attended special classes full time. Within the latter group, 49.1% attended a separate special education school (Statistics Canada 2008).

Despite decades of advocacy and research on inclusive pedagogy and outcomes of inclusive education (Kalambouka et al. 2007), its implementation efficacy is varied. Inclusive education is widely recognised as a challenging undertaking requiring interrelated actions to remove barriers and provide resources at multiple levels including policy and legislation, educational reforms that address the entire system, and teacher support and training (CMEC 2008). When examining inclusive education policy, we are faced with the complexity of belief systems that underlie policy-making and practice, and the extent to which policy drives practice and practice shapes policy. While policy may specify underlying legal and value systems (CMEC 2008) and set the direction for inclusive education (Vlachou 2004; Young 2010), policies are ultimately enacted within schools and within classrooms (Fulcher 1989).

Classroom teachers create the context for learning and have been regarded as the key to successful inclusive education and the drivers of change (Stanovich and Jordan 2004; Ainscow and Miles 2008; Pijl and Frissen 2009). Some research has focused on teacher training and inclusive education, particularly ways and means of impacting teacher beliefs around disablement. However, little, if any, research has looked at teacher associations, federations, unions and/or societies,² and inclusive education. Certainly, inclusive education impacts the traditional role of the classroom teacher, and some argue affects the working conditions of teachers. Therefore, the perspectives of such associations are significant in inclusive policy-making. Indeed, several persons in teacher association leadership positions, as the reader shall soon see, stated that inclusive education was *the* main policy issue. It seems reasonable

then to investigate the understandings that such persons bring to their roles. It may be helpful to state at the outset that this research is not about our view of inclusive education – or even the efficacy of inclusive practices; it is about the views of those in leadership of teacher associations.

This study began with a scan of inclusive education policy in Canada. Through consultation and discussion with policy-makers from four Canadian jurisdictions, it was subsequently decided that involvement of teacher associations across Canada would be integral to understanding and exploring inclusive education policy. Our general intent, then, is to explore inclusive education policies from the perspective of the leadership of various teacher associations; reiteratively, it is their view of inclusive policy that is at issue, therefore, we purposefully did not define inclusive education policy in advance for them. In particular, this study (a) explores the extent to which provincial/territorial leaders of teacher associations are aware of inclusive education legislation and policy in their respective jurisdictions; (b) investigates whether, and how, this information is shared with their membership; and (c) identifies salient issues from the perspective of leaders within teacher associations.

Methodology learning collaborative: a new approach to disability policy research

This study is one of a series of investigations within the CDPA that used the *learning collaborative* methodology (McColl et al. 2013). Learning collaborative methods involve community and academic research collaboration through four phases: Plan, Do, Study, and Act. In the *planning* phase, academics assume primary leadership to review current policy to identify main issues related to (in this case) inclusive education policy and disability. Based upon this, a research agenda is discerned, and some action is taken to engage policy-makers in the *doing* phase. The *study* phase may involve a range of activities, but usually involves some reflection on the actions that occurred. Finally, within the *act* stage, community partners share in the insights gained and attempt to mobilise consumers. Our research project consists mainly of the first three stages: plan, do, and study.

Plan

Given that this is a national research grant, a net was cast nationwide through the CMEC, an association of provincial and territorial ministers responsible for education that serves as a national voice for education in Canada (CMEC 2013). An official letter of invitation briefly detailing the research project was sent to CMEC members. Although no Ministers of Education were able to participate, our education team consisted of representatives from Special Education and/or Student Support Services from Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, some academics, Dr Gordon Porter, from *Inclusive Education Canada* (the community lead) and ourselves. In preparation for our team meeting, a scoping review was conducted (Arksey and O’Malley 2005); this provided the basis for discussion to focus our study. Through dialogue, the education team identified the need to understand teacher association perspectives on inclusive education policies. Also, we wished to know the extent to which teachers were reportedly aware of inclusive education policies, and to identify some implementation issues.

Do (action)

Subsequently, leadership from 18 teacher associations within Canada were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews. Ten interviews were conducted during the Canadian Teachers' Federation annual general meeting (AGM); the first author conducted seven face-to-face interviews; the second, two telephone interviews, and a colleague conducted the remaining three (also, face-to-face). Twelve interviews were conducted with a total of 14 participants (some participants wanted to be interviewed together) representing 10 jurisdictions (Table 1). Seven interviewees were in administrative positions within their teacher associations, such as a General Secretary or an Executive Director, and seven were Presidents (of these, one was an incoming and one an outgoing president). Generally speaking, presidents of associations were elected from their membership, were typically drawn from and returned to the field after their presidency. Thus, presidents' connection to teaching was recent; those in administrative positions tended to have a less recent connection.

Our primary data collection tool was face-to-face semi-structured interviews, many of which occurred in a small office adjacent to the large AGM meeting room during the week of 11–15 July 2011 in Ottawa, Ontario. Due to scheduling conflicts, not every participant was able to be interviewed face-to-face; two interviews were conducted by phone. Regardless of modality, every interviewer used the same interview guide (see the appendix). Interviews lasted between 20 minutes and 1.5 hours; they were tape-recorded (whether face-to-face or over the telephone), and professionally transcribed. Every participant verified their transcript and four requested changes. The alterations came from the longer interviews. Given the political positions our participants held, it is perhaps not surprising that some were quite careful in their re-readings of their comments. These actions constituted our member checks. A solid audit trail (Brantlinger et al. 2005, 201) has been maintained through a record of the dates and locations of the interviews, the interviewer, the interviewee(s), as well as changes made to transcripts.

Table 1. Teacher associations and their abbreviations.

Abbreviation	Name of association
NLTA	Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association
NBTA	New Brunswick Teachers' Association
NSTU	Nova Scotia Teachers Union
QPAT	Quebec Provincial Association of Teachers (English)
OTF	Ontario Teachers' Federation
OECTA	Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association
MTS	Manitoba Teachers' Society
STF	Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation
ATA	Alberta Teachers' Association
NTA	Nunavut Teachers' Association
NWTTA	Northwest Territories Teachers' Association

Notes: Missing are interviewees from Yukon Teachers' Association, the Prince Edward Island Teachers' Federation, and the British Columbia Teachers' Federation. From provinces where their government personnel chose not to participate, we did not ask a reason for that decision, and so we have no data on that. We cannot provide that. We simply respected their decision. Even if they had provided reason(s), we could not use this information in the study as they would have had to give informed consent for the study, but obviously, they chose not to participate.

Data analysis

All transcripts were coded separately by the first two authors, who then code-checked each other's transcripts. Codes were amalgamated into categories with representative quotes and placed into a large multi-page matrix. We reiteratively visited the data, and simultaneously, current studies. As categories gave way to the themes, our main three-part theme stood out so prominently that disconfirming instances were repeatedly solicited. Such actions served to contextualise this theme in finer detail, but not negate it, as will be evident in the results section. The discussion was similarly constructed; first by the lead author, then with input from the second and third authors.

As previously noted, the initial scoping policy review was chiefly used to formulate a research focus. Our results stand primarily upon the transcriptual evidence, and not on a policy analysis. Although some leadership participants made reference to actual policies and laws within their jurisdictions, they could not really quote these accurately, which is perhaps to be expected. Our purpose was not to compare the policy on paper with its recollection; rather, our intent was to gain perspectives of lived inclusive education policy from informed partners (the teacher association leadership), who are usually absent from research.

The final two stages in the learning collaborative methodology are *study* and *act*. In short, this careful analysis represents the study phase, where we have reflected on the data gathered in the *do* phase. As we pass on our findings to our community partners, such deeds constitute the *act* phase. As per the learning collaborative methodology, it is largely in the purview of the community partners at this latter stage.

Results

To introduce the results, we describe participants' views of the functions of their associations and their notions of inclusion. Interviewees identified three purposes for their organisations. First, the most frequently mentioned functions were those related to the membership and occupational well-being. This included activities such as negotiating salaries and working conditions (mentioned by representatives of NLTA, NBTA, NSTU, QPAT, OECTA, OTF, MTS, STF, ATA, NTA, and NWTAA), protection of teachers (NLTA, MTS, NTA, and NBTA), advocating for membership (ATA and NTA), advocating for resources to implement policies (NLTA), communication and liaison between teachers and government (NLTA), and providing a voice for teachers (NLTA). The second most frequently mentioned area was professional development (NLTA, NBTA, NSTU, MTS, STF, and NTA), including developing and sharing teacher resources (NLTA, QPAT, OTF affiliates, OECTA, STF, and ATA), notably in the area of inclusive education. The third pertained to the teaching profession more generally, such as promoting and protecting quality education (NLTA, NSTU, NBTA, OECTA, ATA, and MTS), improving the teaching profession (ATA), and serving as a disciplinary body in areas of competence, ethics, etc. (STF and ATA). In short, we wish to emphasise that teacher associations did not see themselves as advocates for themselves only; rather, there was an articulated commitment to education more generally. We further situate the results by looking at how interviewees characterised inclusion and inclusive policy.

Inclusion is . . .

Participants were asked whether inclusive education was defined in legislation and/or policy within their jurisdiction and, if so, to provide the definition. All indicated that

inclusive education is defined to some extent within current policy and/or legislation. Some interviewees made reference to specific sections or clauses within Acts and Regulations; others referred to policy documents within their jurisdiction, and some provided a general description of their understanding of provincial/territorial public policy on inclusive education. The reported definitions of inclusive education varied in terms of (a) who was included in the definition; that is, whether inclusion is broadly defined to include children of varying abilities as well as diverse demographic, personal, and familial characteristics or whether policy refers only to inclusion of students with disabilities or *special needs*; and (b) whether inclusion was defined as access for all without qualification, or access that is dependent on the nature or extent of disability and/or perceived potential impact on other students. It should be noted that the following is a summary as reported by the interviewees and not a summary of the content of current legislation and policy documents within the respective jurisdictions.

Descriptions of policy and practice in inclusive education revealed a continuum ranging from (a) inclusion as automatic with supports to access and benefit from regular class curriculum and instruction; (b) inclusion as the preferred option with consideration of other special class or special school options; and (c) inclusion for students who are deemed to qualify for the regular class. At one end of the continuum, inclusive education was described as a responsibility to ensure access to, and benefit from, regular classroom and curriculum and instruction for all students. For example, the representative from the Northwest Territories³ stated that 'every student regardless of their ability is to be included in all classes at age appropriate classes as well regardless of whether it's a physical, mental educational handicap or condition.' In Nunavut, the focus is reportedly 'on the supports that students need to be successful in schooling' (NTA). Similarly, an interviewee from Newfoundland and Labrador stated, 'essentially the policy talks about inclusive education being based on the philosophy that the whole school shares in responsibility for inclusion.' Some responses suggest a definition that is arguably at the other end of the continuum; that is, inclusion as an option for students who qualify for regular class placement.

So, articles 234 and 235 say that you can integrate a student in a regular class or into a special class, depending on his abilities. So, we have to do an evaluation of his needs and abilities before you integrate him; 235 says that if there's any excessive constraint or infringes on the other students rights, then you cannot integrate them into a regular class. (QPAT)

Most respondents described public policy that supports inclusive education with the provision to limit regular class involvement and to be able to offer instruction in other settings for some students as considered appropriate. As one interviewee stated,

Before considering the option of placing a student in special class, the committee must first consider whether placement in a regular class with appropriate special education programs and therapists would meet the student's need and be consistent with the parent's preference. And so if they can't then there's a range of options, regular classes with direct support, regular classes with in-class assistance, regular classes with withdrawal assistance, a special class with partial integration, or full-time Special Education class. (OECTA)

Finally, some interviewees commented that practices vary among school districts/boards within the province or territory. What follows is our main theme, which consists of three interconnected issues: first, participants reported that their membership was

aware of inclusive education policy; second, that their membership was generally supportive of such policy, (and third), that support was contingent upon adequate resources.

Talking inclusion: many regions, similar issues

No matter how teacher leadership suggested that inclusive policy was defined, almost without exception participants reported that their membership was 'very, very aware' (OECTA participant) of inclusive policies. Indeed, inclusive education appeared to be a primary matter with which association leadership grappled. Though most reported their membership demonstrated a high degree of familiarity, they reported that membership awareness was connected to in-the-classroom experience, rather than specific policy wording 'I don't know that they're [teachers] aware of the policies. I think they're aware of the beliefs ... because they're congruent with our own organizational policy on inclusive education ... So our members are very aware of that' stated the representative from the STF. Another representative from New Brunswick said 'Our teachers are very aware of this [inclusive education] policy. They may not be aware of all the ins and outs of it.' In fact, many teacher associations have their own official statements, and some produce teacher resources to effect inclusive education. Not only did leadership claim that teachers were aware of inclusive education policy, but also, that teachers generally endorsed it.

*Teachers, for the most part – that's not strong enough – *teachers, in large numbers, have supported the movement to inclusion* in our province ... Having said that, there are struggles for resources and the struggle with workload that we continue to deal with.* (Emphasis added, NBTA)

Although associations were in the main positive, there were provisos. Certain participants connected their endorsement of inclusive policy to their definition of inclusion.

*We're not opposed to an inclusive *school*, right? But, they took it like an inclusive *classroom* and we're saying that's a big difference. Some kids do not fit in a regular classroom. They fit in a regular school ... For us, that's integration; into an inclusive school.* (Emphases added) (QPAT)

At other times, the declared endorsement, though positive, was not connected to a clear articulation or vision of inclusion.

Bearing in mind the sometimes muddy relationship between purported affirmation of inclusive policy and its localised definition, there was one consistent caveat: the need for adequate resources or funding. Indeed, a tri-fold interconnected theme emerged; that is, policy awareness and membership approval could almost not be discussed without resource issues invoked. For example, the interviewee from OECTA commented

*There isn't philosophical opposition to including students with special needs in whatever occurs in our schools. What the challenge is [in order] to do that successfully, [is to be able] to meet the needs of those students *within a realistic resource framework*.* [Emphases added]

Similarly, a participant from the NBTA stated, 'We have a policy statement that's in support of inclusion, given adequate resources and supports [emphasis added]' The essence of these quotes might well be attributed to any of our interviewees.

As noted earlier, there was one exception regarding teachers being aware of inclusive education policy. According to the NTA representative,

I would have to say that the majority of our membership would be highly informed, *not all*. Now, here's the reason why, not all. We have a fairly high teacher turnover rate in Nunavut, upwards to 20, 25 percent of our teachers every year are new to the territory coming from various jurisdictions in the south, bringing with them their own vision of inclusive education that corresponds to the district or the jurisdiction from which they're coming. *Sometimes they think that it's the same, when in fact, it is not.* (Emphasis added)

Significantly, the suggestion here is not that teachers were unaware of inclusive policy; rather that teachers may not be aware of *Nunavutian* policy. Our point here is more than an illustration of the potential to variously define inclusion in policy, rather our purpose is to underscore that however so-defined, the awareness-endorsement-resources theme was maintained.

We continue to explore this theme. In particular, we hope to show how interviewees elucidated this theme within a number of dimensions: (a) how inclusion is understood (i.e. as limited to disability or as including other identities); (b) where inclusive policy is implemented (i.e. within richer or poorer regions); (c) how long inclusion has been in the works (i.e. whether it is a recent or well-entrenched provincial/territorial mandate and/or practice); and (d) how inclusive policy is developed (i.e. whether and how teacher associations are involved in policy development). Each of these dimensions will be taken up in turn.

Inclusion includes whom?

We have already provided evidence that certain representatives tended to speak of inclusion meaning *all* students (NBTA, MTS, NLTA, NWTAA, NTA, and STF); however, even in such conversations, disability tended to be *the* topic around inclusion. For example, the NLTA interviewee commented that

the policy ... talks about embracing diversity, *ensuring again, that all necessary supports are provided, learning supports are provided*, and are utilized for all children, and to provide flexibility in learning experiences that would embrace *different learning styles, different capabilities*, and so on. So it is very, very broad.

These comments speak directly to the resource issue, while seeming to understand inclusion broadly.

Some representatives from Ontario and Quebec referred to policy and legislation that defined inclusion less broadly, as inclusion for students with disabilities (or special needs). For example, Ontario representatives referred to Regulation 181/98 which requires that all school boards set up an Identification, Placement and Review Committee to make decisions regarding the identification of a student as *exceptional* and to determine appropriate placement. In Quebec, the interviewee referred to Article 235 of the Education Act which refers to 'handicapped student or student with a social maladjustment or a learning disability' and the requirement that the board adopts a policy on integration. The interviewee from QPAT said:

They [Department of Education] are promoting full inclusion. And full inclusion and they keep on saying, 'You don't need to assess a child. You don't need to identify them to give

them services. If you see that there's a difficulty, give them services.' But, the teacher's union is saying, 'If the kid is not identified, there's no obligation for the board to provide the services.' . . . A doctor has to [make] a diagnosis before he gives you the medication and treatment . . . The purpose is to assure services will follow.

Again the issue of resources is paramount. Disability is narrowly described as a medical issue, and one that requires treatment (or resources).

Admittedly, there was some variation in the interviewers' use of probing questions to clarify and extend interviewees' definitions of inclusion. Perhaps because of this, few interviewees spoke of inclusion with *named* reference to other student differences. Some notable exceptions were interviewees from the NLTA, STF, and MTS. The Saskatchewan interviewee spoke of the

Broader definition [of inclusion] away from the medical model, [in order] to look at the diverse needs some of which might be things like the traditional learning disabilities or other disability based kinds of needs to being more around everything from learning styles to gender issues to cultural diversity in all of that as well.

Similarly, the MTS representative commented,

What I was just talking about was mainly the inclusion related to either physical or mental barriers or behavioral. Certainly, in terms of inclusivity with respect to gender or race or any of those things, there's not even a question. . . . There is a growing call for us to be more accepting and to certainly, in terms of homophobia, to develop practices and policies . . . that stops the bullying and harassment that goes around those issues. (MTS)

Interestingly, the above quote is one of the only instances where we found a call for services, resources, and support for a category beyond disability. Although the responses were not universal in our findings, it is noteworthy that some interviewees who tended to use categorical language when describing disability, also tended to be the most firm in articulating the need for funding and resources. This finding may be related to the many services/resources typically associated with disability, such as, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, speech and language pathologists, etc. However, students with other differences may also benefit from services such as professional or peer counselling, and anti-bullying measures. In short, the awareness-endorsement-resources theme seemed to be associated with disability only, regardless of how participants defined inclusion – broadly or solely within the purview of disability.

Including the haves and the have-nots

We now turn our attention to provincial/territorial fiscal capacities. In Canada, we have provinces and territories that are often colloquially referred to as 'have-not' and 'have' provinces/territories (Government of Canada, Department of Finance Canada 2011). The awareness-endorsement-resources theme was evident in the responses of all interviewees regardless of whether they were from have or have-not jurisdictions. For example, the Nova Scotia respondent, from a traditionally have-not region, noted

The NSTU has a policy that supports an inclusive education system as does the Department of Education, Boards of Education and Education Act. . . . Funding has never adequately been provided for inclusion; each [school] board must supplement the 'special

needs' budget provided by the Department [of Education] just to meet the basic needs of the students within their system.

Similarly, a respondent from a region considered to be more affluent commented

Our belief is that students should be included in the regular school program and activities, but that needs to happen with the appropriate supports. We don't believe in inclusion where a student is simply dropped into a classroom without the necessary supports provided to the student or the teacher. (ATA)

Within the folklore of Canada, the economic disparity between regions has been a matter of heated debate; given that, it may be somewhat surprising that the awareness-endorsement-resource finding was consistent across regions, across all our participants.

Inclusion: what is new is old is new (again)

We continue to explore the awareness-endorsement-resources theme. Whether respondents represented associations in which inclusive practice was reported to be well entrenched for a period of time or from provinces/territories in which inclusive education was said to be relatively new, the theme held.

We've been 26 years at this, virtually; probably 90 percent of our membership knows nothing else. It is what public school is all about. Yes, there are challenges . . . teachers are very aware of [these challenges]—the fact that there are resources needed in order to support this inclusion policy and when it was brought in...all the resources were going to be in the classrooms, definitely in abundance, to support the students and support the teachers. That was the general philosophy and the grand idea. The actual practice of that, well, it didn't actually occur as was first anticipated. (NBTA)

Conversely, Nunavut's stand-alone own educational policies are very recent and/or currently in development. So, the educational enterprise that is uniquely Nunavutian is very new indeed, including its policy on inclusive education.

The new Education Act that was just created in Nunavut, (it is actually referenced in that Act), that Nunavut with have the lowest teacher/student ratio in Canada" because "*teachers believe, generally speaking, in inclusive education as long as all the necessary supports are in place* to allow that to happen. You can't have a child included in the everyday classroom if the supports are not there, so that that child can have a legitimate chance of success within their own learning path, learning outcomes. For us, as an organization, we are continually lobbying the employer, the government of Nunavut, to ensure that these supports are put in place. (Emphasis added)

The awareness-endorsement-resources theme held true across jurisdictions regardless of its particularised history.

Inclusive policy development and funding

Teacher associations in several jurisdictions reportedly interpret policy and advise the membership on the implementation of government policy (MTS, NWTAA, NTA, and QPAT). However, in most jurisdictions, involvement appears to extend well beyond interpretation and advice to membership. Several interviewees described being actively

involved in, or consulted about, education policy development (ATA, MTS, NBTA, NLTA, NTA, OTF, OECTA, and STF). Involvement was described as being invited to give input (NLTA, NTA, OECTA, and OTF); responding to draft policy (ATA); and ongoing participation in provincial committees to advise on legislation and policy development (e.g. ATA, MTS, STF, and NBTA). Finally, in one jurisdiction policy on inclusion is reportedly negotiated through the Collective Bargaining Agreement (QPAT).

Policy documents are typically provided through the provincial/territorial Ministries responsible for Education and, in some jurisdictions, the provincial government also develops teacher resources. Additional policy documents are developed within some teacher associations as reported in the following comment:

We have a section of policy related specifically for education of students with special needs. And then we have another section of our policy on diversity, equity and human rights, which looks at a different aspect of inclusion that isn't necessarily covered in the provincial regulations. (ATA)

We are undergoing a review right now of all our social justice and equity policies. So those policies will be brought under that broader umbrella of social justice equity. (STF)

Finally, some associations assist teachers with the implementation of inclusive education through professional development activities, print resources, and online venues for teachers to share ideas and resources. The STF representative reported that 'We've got a really active professional development unit. We have three full time consultants that work out of that area doing onsite work or hosting workshops and they also do resource development through the Ministry' (STF). Interviewees from Ontario spoke about professional development, resources, and web-based resources:

The affiliates usually have someone dedicated within their staff to sort of manage special education issues in general. So out of that often come workshops, come resources, those sorts of things. We have what we have at OTF is an award winning website called the Special Education Gateway and that provides extensive documentation, resources, links, et cetera, et cetera and it's free for all members to use. (OTF)

Conversely, one representative expressed the viewpoint that development of resources is not within the role of the association and another commented that, given the size of the association, they simply did not have the capacity to develop teacher resources or provide professional development activities.

As an interesting aside, among jurisdictions, participants generally described a positive relationship with *unelected* government personnel in the student support services/special education departments (with one exception). However, the relationships between the associations and their respective *elected* provincial/territorial governments (i.e. those with legislative power) appeared to be qualitatively different. Funding decisions to implement inclusive education occur within legislatures, as noted by an interview from Newfoundland and Labrador:

It's a good relationship from the point of view of information flow, of understanding of needs, understanding of concerns, and we have good information coming in terms of what are the thrusts of the department in meeting those implementation needs. . . . From a department position, we can understand that a director can only work with the resources they've been provided by the department. So if there's lobbying we have to do, it's not to the people there. It's to the larger government.

Besides such lobbying efforts, leadership talked about other ways they created, interpreted, and implemented inclusive education policy with their respective jurisdictions, as described above. This final dimension in which we considered the awareness-endorsement-resources theme is somewhat different than the former three. Although participants reported a range of practices in the creation of inclusive education policy, as we see from the NLTA representative above, resources remained a key issue in however policy was produced.

Considering the diversity of teacher associations across Canada, and considering the range of exigencies within the provinces/territories from which they are drawn, this tri-fold theme of awareness-endorsement-resources of inclusive education policies presented itself nearly universally – albeit in different and complex ways. It appears that no matter how disability is defined, resources operate almost as a rider on implementation of inclusive education: No matter if the provincial/territorial government is from a richer or poorer region, no matter how far along in the inclusive education policy implementation, and no matter how inclusive policy is developed, the theme is maintained. Our intent is not to present awareness-endorsement-resources as a static and simplistic reality; rather, our hope is that we captured at least one iteration of the many kaleidoscopic turns that is inclusive education policy. Given that the resources piece is so central to this analysis, it is to that we now specifically turn.

Talking inclusion, talking resources: let me tell you what we need ...

Most participants articulated *specific* resources that the government needs to provide or increase for effective implementation of inclusive education policy. Only two participants talked about resources in general terms, such as 'proper funding, proper supports for students in these classrooms, supports for teachers as they work with students' (NTA). Most interviewees clearly identified what they viewed as necessary supports for inclusion and many discussed human resources.

Unlike some jurisdictions where money flows with students that may have an aide, that doesn't happen in the Northwest Territories. So, if a student comes in from another jurisdiction where they may have had supports whether it's a full time aide or part time aide, that doesn't happen in the territory. So, if you [move to] a school that has already a lot of 'inclusive' students, resources can be very tight. (NWT TA)

Human resources here are associated with a lack of paraprofessionals or educational aides/assistants. Interestingly and contrastingly,

the NSTU has concerns around the increase of EA's [Educational Assistants] or paraprofessionals entering our educational system for reasons other than required within the Department's report which states an EA is to be hired for safety reasons, behavioral concerns or person[al] care. Other than that only a teacher is skilled in supporting every child's educational need and therefore should be hired. (Emphasis added)

This participant saw classroom teachers as the human resource that is in weak supply, and is concerned about the 'cuts to education and tough economic times, [such that] more EA's are coming into the system to support a child beyond the stated reasons.'

In addition to paraprofessionals and classroom teachers, some interviewees also expressed the need for more specialists, stating that there is a need for a 'level of special education teacher support in schools' (OECTA). Although there were

differences in the types of human resources requested, most interviewees identified personnel in general as key to facilitate successful inclusive practice.

While there were some different priorities in terms of human resources, respondents were consistent in the call for more teacher training.

Resource support in terms of . . . how do you get a classroom teacher to that point where they can do that [effectively differentiate instruction] . . . to get them to that understanding of how to take the Ontario curriculum and break it down into chunks where kids [with disabilities] can be successful, and still continue to challenge everybody else that's in your classroom? (OECTA)

Some interviewees called for professional development, some for more courses during initial teacher training, and some for both. Another robust finding is the call for more time; time for collaboration with other professionals, teachers, and parents; and time to prepare more in-depth and comprehensive lesson plans. 'If you're a special service teacher and you're helping a [mainstream] teacher in grade three, you cannot be doing this on the fly.' (NLTA). Other consistently named issues/resources were more simplified documentary processes. 'Teachers also have struggled with workload related issues, be it paperwork, be it developing educational plans, be it meeting with parents as outlined within the Act and policy in developing those plans, reporting' (NBTA). This quote also exemplifies another significant and coherent pattern in the data; the fact that teachers were reportedly feeling overwhelmed with the workload. Relatedly, a leadership interviewee from NLTA suggested that teachers were frustrated by not only the documentation requirements, but their seemingly ever-changing nature. Sometimes processes are 'changing so quickly . . . the forms can change within the year.' Perhaps most tellingly, a participant suggested that governments ask teachers what they needed in order to make inclusive education policy work ' . . . what the association has been saying to the department about its [inclusive education policy] implementation. What are some of the needed resources out there?' (NLTA).

Discussion

It seems obvious that a closer look at policy and resource issues is required. Before we proceed, however, we want to be explicit as researchers about four things. First, given that a primary consideration and purpose of teacher associations is membership well-being, it has been suggested to us that the call for resources is (solely) an effort to negotiate better working conditions for teachers. Although this may be a possibility, we view this as a rather cynical perspective. As the first author and researcher who conducted the bulk of the interviews and did so face-to-face, this was not my impression. In fact, I well-remember leaving each interview with such a positive feeling about the worth, dignity, respect, and complexity of teachers, students, and inclusive education. Second, *differentiated instruction*, though not synonymous with inclusive education, is a concept and set of skills that undoubtedly support its implementation. Tomlinson (2004, 2010), an author and researcher probably most closely associated with differentiated instruction, claims it is both an art and a science. Our point is that if differentiated instruction is at least partly an art, perhaps this accounts for its complexity, and the plethora of complicated implementation and resource issues described by our interviewees. Third, we obviously chose to interview these select participants, since we believed that they logically would be knowledgeable about their respective teacher

associations *and* relevant inclusive education provincial/territorial policy; at the same time, we do acknowledge that this is an assumption. Fourth, in many ways, it must be stated that teacher association presidents (and as noted earlier, *not* general secretaries and executive directors) are much closer to schools than we are, as researchers and teacher educators. Though the first two authors supervise student interns in local schools, and the third is deeply connected to these issues mostly through research, we are no longer daily connected to the ongoing enterprise that is education, thus we take very seriously the voices of our participants. Given these four issues, we would like to gingerly move our discussion to open questions that may assist in appreciating the complexity of inclusive education policy.

Results reveal that while participants conveyed that their membership is aware, and broadly supportive, of inclusive education in principle, they essentially did not (or *could not*) make this assertion without stipulating that their support was conditional on the provision of appropriate resources. This awareness-endorsement-resources theme was evident regardless of how inclusive education was defined; regardless of whether there is a long history of inclusion or the jurisdiction is just beginning to move in an inclusive direction; regardless of the extent of teacher involvement in policy development; and regardless of have/have-not status. This finding may give rise to two deceptively simple, and arguably reductionist, questions: *What exactly is needed?* and relatedly *How much is enough?*

The participants in this study advocated for additional human resources; however there were some differences in which particular resources they sought. Some interviewees specifically identified the need for more educational assistants while another identified the growing number of educational assistants as a problem and argued for an increase in the number of qualified teachers. There was relative consistency in the call for resources such as increased teacher training, time for collaboration and lesson planning, and less onerous and more stable paperwork processes. This is certainly not new information; indeed, teachers have been advocating for additional training and resources to support inclusion since its inception. Over the past three decades, it may be argued that resources have been increased across jurisdictions. We contend that the nature and extent of what may be defined as *appropriate resources* may be, at least in part, influenced by how teacher associations vs. how government defines inclusive education.

Visions of inclusive education policy: (at least) two solitudes

Inclusive education began within the purview of special education during the 1980s (Winzer 2007). Hallmark articles of the day called for the merger of regular and special education into a unified system that would meet the needs of all children (Stainback and Stainback 1984; Reynolds, Wang, and Walberg 1987). Even though early proponents of inclusive education called for restructuring, in some situations, the response was to maintain a medical model of remediation and simply relocate to the regular classroom. The types of supports often associated with *relocation as inclusion* emphasise the *special needs* of students with disabilities and are characterised by a preponderance of particularised medical and psycho-educational specialists and individualised support in the form of paraprofessionals (which we refer to as educational assistants). It may be argued that a net effect of the *relocation* view of inclusive education is an *additive enactment of inclusion* (Lyons 2013). The go-to solutions for effective implementation are to add more services and supports to the classroom; more

educational assistants, more speech-language pathologists, more consultation, and so on. Within this iteration of inclusion, students are placed in regular classrooms with what may be considered *appropriate supports* yet the culture of exclusion (Slee 2007) remains. Indeed, it has been argued that a new form of segregation has emerged in which students with disabilities appeared to be inordinately connected to their educational assistants in ways that hamper learning and socialisation (Giangreco, Suter, and Doyle 2010).

Within the current literature and practice, we see a different iteration of inclusion; *inclusion as transformation* of educational structures and pedagogy with an increasing emphasis on the need to build teacher capacity to teach all students. Within a transformative approach, all students are connected to class and school communities in meaningful ways and are participating beyond the reach of an educational assistant. To be clear, we recognise and emphasise the importance of the educational assistant role as well as other related professionals and their potential contributions to the students and teachers; at the same time, we note, as have others (Giangreco, Suter, and Doyle 2010), the overuse of paraprofessional support, particularly in the absence of providing teachers with the training for which they are asking. Teachers are required to provide instruction for students with an increasing array of characteristics, backgrounds, and capabilities; for many, this may not be the way they have been taught to teach. The participants in this study clearly indicated that teachers want to develop the requisite knowledge, skills, and practices for the inclusive classroom and are explicitly asking for help in this endeavour.

So, if we look at our data in this light, we see the possibility for different questions and implications to be considered in policy development and allocation of appropriate resources. First, what if a teacher association and its provincial/territorial government have different views of what inclusive education is? What if, for example, the teacher association sees inclusive education as relocation of a model of special education? The participant from QPAT seems to suggest that such a scenario is possible:

The people at the ministry . . . the bureaucrats . . . have developed their own mentality of – they call it Department of Adaptation School of Integration, and *they have their own policy*, their own set of minds. This is how it has to be done . . . they are promoting full inclusion . . . They keep on saying, ‘You don’t need to assess a child. You don’t need to identify them [students with disabilities] to give them services. If you see that there’s a difficulty, give them services.’ But, the teacher union is saying, ‘If the kid is not identified, there’s no obligation for the board to provide the services.’ So, that’s why we’re insisting that there be identification. *So, it’s two philosophies.* So, they’re saying, ‘You don’t need to put a code. You’re going to stigmatize the child by putting a code’ and all this. And we’re saying, ‘Look, if you don’t have that code, there’s no guarantee there’s going to be services.’

If a provincial/territorial education ministry and its teacher association hold different views of inclusive education policy and practice, is it possible that the government is resourcing a vision of inclusive education in ways that a teacher association may deem as inappropriate, irrelevant, or extraneous to their understanding of inclusive education? And, to be fair, at least teachers have some idea of the kinds of services they might expect (or wish for) within a relocation view of inclusive education. Teachers and teacher associations might wonder what services are available from a transformative view of inclusive education.

To be clear, we are not suggesting that there are two discrete categories of inclusive education policy; each with its own sets of resources and distinct human resource infrastructure. Creating yet another binary is, in our view, counterproductive. Nor are we suggesting that a transformative approach to implementation does not include individual supports for students. A student with a disability may simply require an educational assistant, or small group instruction outside the classroom from time to time – even if the overall approach within a particular jurisdiction is one of transformation of instruction. One interviewee recalled the following heartfelt story:

I walked into staff and we sat down. I was there for lunch with them [teachers] and we're talking and chatting and then this teacher sat next to me and she started to cry. I thought, 'What did I say,' because I can just go yak, yak, yak, yak, yak. She said to me, 'I can't do it anymore.' I said, 'What can't you do?' She said, 'I have an autistic child who's melting down every day. I'm supposed to be with these other students. I'm pulled away from them. I have to deal with the meltdown and they're telling me he has to be in the classroom 100 percent of the time' ... So that's how severe the miscommunication was. There's a severely autistic kid, *had been getting all kinds of services the year before but because now they were going to be an inclusive school some of the services were pulled back and he was melting down.*

We contend that the move from an additive (or relocation) view of inclusive education to a transformative one is not about removing all services previously accessed by students with disabilities. Such an approach seems doomed for failure and the recreation of segregated classes may not be far behind. However, we argue that the provision of individual supports *in the absence of* better preparing teachers for inclusive pedagogy has not been successful (Lyons 2013).

Again, our intent here is to illuminate the complexity exemplified within questions of 'What exactly do you need?' and 'How much?'. The findings in this study suggest that the pervasive issue of resourcing inclusive education is influenced by understandings and beliefs about what inclusion *is* and how it is enacted. Finally, it is important to recognise that, in some situations, there may be no need for a change in resource allocation as implied in the following comment:

Now there are schools that have been inclusive as far as I'm concerned forever. I taught special services for 27 years. We were not exclusive. We included everybody. But anyway, what happened was some schools' principals said to teachers at a staff meeting in September, 'Inclusion is here; do it.' *Nobody knew what was different than what we were doing before ... (NLTA)*

It is possible that some school divisions insist on inclusive practices, when really, no change is necessary; currently practice is exemplary.

Conclusion

To reiterate our main theme, all heads of teacher associations reported that their respective membership was aware, and generally in favour, of inclusive education policy, given adequate resourcing. As we have seen, governments and teacher associations may have similar, or quite dissimilar, notions around inclusive education policy. Further research may explore these potential differences and/or similarities; and perhaps even how they came to be. Not unrelated to the (potentially differing) definitions of inclusive education, facilitating change within schools is at times a tricky endeavour. When administration, for

example, deems that a transformative approach to inclusive education needs to be implemented, perhaps before that, an evaluation of the current practice is warranted. Are students already included? Is there, in fact, a need for a change? Furthermore, regardless of how inclusive education is enacted, it needs to be supported. And certainly not the least of our conclusions, teachers need to be significantly involved, it would seem, in directing the changes necessary to enact inclusive policies.

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Notes

1. PALS has since been discontinued by Statistics Canada.
2. There were several kinds of official names used to describe these teacher organisations; in descending order of frequency, they were: association, federation, society, and union. For the sake of brevity within the text of the article, we will use the term 'association' as a generic term meant to be understood as including all these organisations.
3. We attribute leadership interviewees' quotes to their jurisdiction and/or association only; (e.g. an interviewee from Saskatchewan or a participant from the Nunavut Teachers' Association). Though all participants agreed to allow their affiliation and association named, some participants asked pseudonyms to be used. We interviewed some presidents, elected members with the associations usually with a limited term and a close connection to the field (i.e. many were practising teachers). We also interviewed general secretaries and executive directors, paid staff positions within some associations, usually with somewhat less of a connection to the field. Within some associations we interviewed both, and in one instance we interviewed an incoming and an outgoing president. Qualitative analysis demands rigour, not the least of which is a basic understanding of participants' positionality as it may enter into the interpretation and presentation of the results. We had a quandary, on the one hand, we had a highly visible and identifiable group of participants, some of whom did not want to be easily discerned; on the other, we needed to be as transparently and analytically rigorous as we could be. It is for these reasons, as indicated, that we have chosen to attribute quotes to the association, and not a specific person or title.

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Appendix

Interview questions

1. What is your role within the provincial (territorial) teachers' association?
2. Please tell me about the main purpose of your association.
3. Is your association involved, in any way, in providing information to teachers regarding provincial legislation and/or policy? (Prompt: could you please expand on the type of information that is shared and how?)
4. We want to focus specifically on legislation and policy related to inclusive education for students with disabilities. To begin with, does your province/territory define inclusive education in legislation and/or policy? (Prompt: please describe)
5. What does your provincial (territorial) legislation say about inclusive education?
6. What is the provincial (territorial) policy on inclusive education?
7. In your opinion, to what extent is your teacher membership aware of inclusive legislation and policies?
8. In your opinion, how does the teacher membership view the legislation/policies? (Prompt: what issues have been raised?)
9. (a) Has your association developed a policy or position statement relative to inclusive education? (b) Has your association developed guidelines and/or resources to assist teachers with implementation? (c) Does your association have any future plans to develop policy and/or resources?
10. Are there any comments that you would like to add?