The Case for Inclusive Education as a Social Determinant of Health

Presented by Kathryn Underwood, PhD candidate, OISE/UT
Lupina/OGS doctoral fellow, Comparative Program on Health and Society
University of Toronto
November 23, 2004

ABSTRACT:
This paper presents an argument for the policy of including all students, especially those labeled with a disability, as a social determinant of health. Empirical evidence to date does not allow for statistical analysis of the link between educational provision for students with disabilities and their lifelong health status. However, using the existing research and literature on inclusive education, the case for a relationship between inclusion and health status is made. Three main points are used to support the argument for inclusion as a social determinant of health: 1) Education is a basic human right because of the benefits it affords, including access to the economic and social fabric of society; 2) These benefits are best achieved in inclusive education systems that provide students with and without disabilities access to a wide range of quality teaching; 3) The benefits of inclusive education are likely to have both a direct and indirect relationship to the health status of people with disabilities.

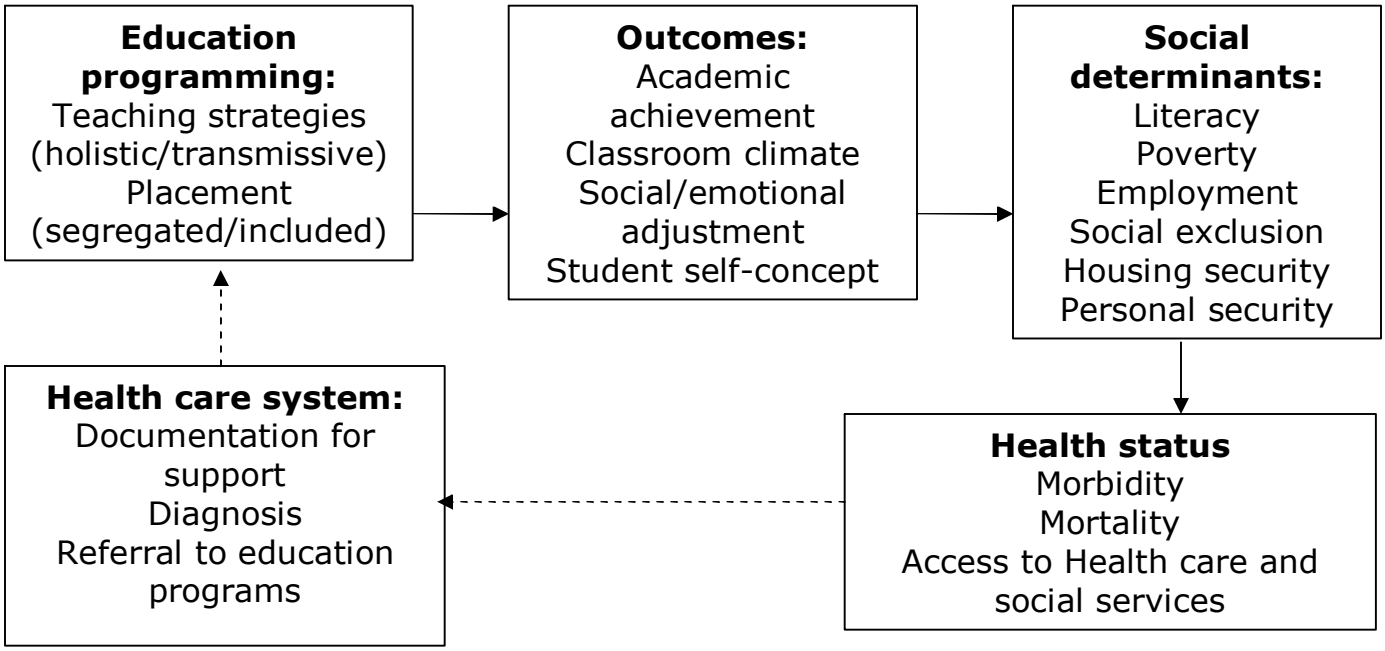
Canada has committed to inclusive education through several international agreements, including the *Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action* (UNESCO, 1994). But, detractors from this policy argue that inclusion violates the rights of non-labeled children in regular classrooms, and that the needs of students identified with disabilities are not adequately met in the regular classroom. The education research contradicts these claims with evidence that inclusive policy provides the best educational provision for both students with and without disability labels. Students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms are likely to do better on academic, social and behavioural evaluations (Hunt, Farron-Davis, Beckstead, Curtis, & Goetz, 1994; Centre & Curry, 1993; Epps & Tindal, 1987; Eshel, Katz, gilet and Nagler (1994); Meadows, Neel, Scott, & Parker, 1994; Vaughan, Moody & Schum, 1998). Students without disabilities in regular classrooms show no academic disadvantage from inclusive practices (Sharpe, York & Knight (1994), and may have an emotional/social advantage (Giangreco, Edelman, Cloninger, Dennis (1993). Further, in inclusive classrooms, teachers who have a positive attitude toward inclusion are better able to adapt their teaching practices for the needs of individual learners, an advantage for all students in their classes (Jordan & Stanovich, 2004). This evidence supports the claim for inclusion as a superior public policy to segregated education, but the education research in this area is mostly small scale. This type of research is impeded by the difficulty in controlling education programs and student characteristics for experimental purposes. Thus a different approach to understanding the benefit of inclusion is proposed.

The benefits of inclusion evident in the education research are improved teaching, and better academic, social and behavioural outcomes. These benefits logically provide other benefits outside of school. These include access to better jobs, and thus income and food security and reduced poverty, as well as access to social networks through school

and work, and thus better housing, reduced risk of violence and increased access to health care. All of these social benefits are known as social determinants of health, and ample evidence of the links between the social determinants of health and the health of the Canadian population is available in the health literature (Raphael, 2004). This paper presents an argument for the link between the education outcomes and the social determinants of health. The most compelling evidence comes from national survey data which indicates that in provinces with the most special education provisions in place (Ontario, Newfoundland and Labrador) parents report having the most difficulty accessing support services. Further, in the same provinces the gap in literacy skills between students without disabilities and students with cognitive disabilities is dramatically larger than the same gap in provinces with the least special education provision in place (PEI) (Statistics Canada, 2004). Literacy is a significant contributor to other social determinants (poverty, employment, income security, social exclusion), but it is one of the most significant social determinants in its own right. Ronson and Rootman (2004) say that "literacy skills predict health status more accurately than education level, income, ethnic background, or any other socio-demographic variable" (p. 155).

Preliminary empirical evidence indicates that inclusive education leads to higher achievement in such areas as literacy skills and social integration. There are also compelling human rights arguments to support inclusion, including our obligations under international agreements. This early evidence suggests we should be tracking the impact of this broad policy shift using population data. If we understand education policy from a population perspective that incorporates the theoretical framework of the social determinants of health we may better understand the place of education policy amongst other social phenomena and reduce some of the risks which are greatest for people with disabilities.

FIGURE 1. The Relationship between education outcomes (as determined in the education research) and the social determinants of health (as determined in the health research) Note: There is a possible feedback effect of the health care system into the education system through the identification and placement process which is often the responsibility of health care professionals.



REFERENCES:

Barrow, R. (2001). Inclusion vs. fairness. *Journal of Moral Education, 30*(3), 235-242.

Brophy, J. (2002). Introduction. In J. Brophy (Ed.) *Social constructivist teaching: Affordances and constraints. Advances in research on teaching,* (Vol. 9). Boston, MA: JAI.

Bunch, G. (1994). Canadian perspectives on inclusive education from there to here: The passage to inclusive education. *Exceptionality Education Canada, 4*(3-4), 19-34.

Bunch, G. & Valeo, A. (1997) *Inclusion: Recent research.* Toronto, CA: Inclusion Press.

Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Part I of the *Constitution Act, 1982*, being schedule B of the *Canada Act 1982* (U.K.), 1982, c.11.

Centre, Y. & Curry, C. (1993) A feasibility study of a full integration model developed for a group of students classified as mildly intellectually disabled. *International Journal of Disability, Development, and Education, 40*(3), 217-235.

Eaton v. Brant County (1996) 142 D.L.R. (4th) 385 (S.C.C.), rev'g (1995), 220. R. (3d) 1 (C.A.)

Education Act, Ontario regulation 181/98, Identification and Placement of Exceptional Pupils.

Epps, S. & Tindal, G. (1987) The effectiveness of differential programming in serving students with mild handicaps: Placement options and instructional programming. in M.C. Wang, M.C. Reynolds & H.J. Wlaberg (eds.), *Handbook of special education: Research and practice* (Vol. 1, pp. 213-320). Oxford: Pergamon.

Eshel, Y., Katz, M., Gilet, S. & Nagler, C. (1994) Mainstreamed or self-contained classes for students with mild learning disability: The case of Israel. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education, 41*(3), 185-200.

Environics Research Group Limited (2004) *Canadian attitudes towards disability issues: 2004 benchmark survey* (Report No. PN 5431). Ottawa, ON: Office for Disability Issues. Retrieved April 27, 2005, from http://www.sdc.gc.ca/asp/gateway.asp?hr=en/hip/odi/documents/attitudesPoll/index.shtml&hs=pyp

Farrell, P. (2000) The impact of research on developments in inclusive education. *International Journal of Research in Inclusive Education, 4*(2), 153-162.

Fuchs, L.S., Fuchs, D., Hamlett, C.L., Phillips, N.B., & Karns, K. (1995) General educators' specialized adaptation for students with learning disabilities. *Exceptional Children, 61*(5), 440-459.

Frazee. C. (2003) Thumbs Up! Inclusion, rights and equality as experienced by youth with disabilities. *Perspectives on Social Inclusion: Laidlaw Foundation working paper series.* Toronto, CA: Laidlaw Foundation.

Fulcher, G. (1998) *Disabling policies? A comparative approach to education, policy, and disability.* London: Falmer Press.

Giangreco, M.F., Edelman, S., Cloninger, C. & Dennis, R. (1993) My child has a classmate with severe disabilities: What parents of nondisabled children think about full inclusion. *Developmental disabilities bulletin, 21*(1), 77-91.

Hunt, P., Farron-Davis, F., Beckstead, S., Curtis, D. & Goetz, L. (1994) Evaluating the effects of placement on students with severe disabilities in general education versus special education classes. *JASH, 19*(3), 200-214.

Kenworthy, J. & Whittaker, J. (2000) Anything to declare? The struggle for inclusive education and children's rights. *Disability & Society, 15*(2), 219-231.

Jahnukainen, M. & Jarvinen, T. (2005) Risk factors and survival routes: social exclusion as a life-historical phenomenon. *Disability & Society, 20*(6), 669-682.

Jordan, A. & Stanovich, P. (2004) The beliefs and practices of Canadian teachers about including students with special needs in their regular elementary classrooms. *Exceptionality Education Canada, 14*(2&3), 25-46.

Kagan, D. M. (1992a) Implications of research on teacher belief. *Educational Psychologist, 27*, 65-90.

Kauffman, J.M. (1999) Commentary: Today's special education and its messages for tomorrow. *The Journal of Special Education, 32*(4), 244-254.

Larrivee, B. (1986) Effective teaching for mainstreamed students is effective teaching for all students. *TESE, 9*(4), 173-179.

Leicester, M. & Lovell, T. (1997) Disability Voice: educational experience and disability. *Disability and Society, 12*(1), 111-118.

Lipofsky, D. (1997) A report card on the Charter's guarantee of equality rights to persons with disabilities after 10 years – What progress? What prospects? *National Journal of Constitutional Law, 7*(3), 263-431.

Lipsky, D.K. & Gartner, A. (1996) Equity requires inclusion: The future for all students with disabilities. In C. Christensen & F. Rivzi (Eds.) *Disability and the dilemma of education and justice* (pp. 144-155). Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press.

Meadows, N.B., Neel, R.S., Scott, C.M. & Parker, G. (1994) Academic performance, social competence and mainstream accommodation: a look at mainstreamed and nonmainstreamed students with serious behavioural disorders. *Behavioural Disorders, 3*(19), 170-180.

Mosoff, J. & Grant, I. (1998) *Intellectual disability and the Supreme Court: Implications of the Charter for people who have a disability.* Toronto: Canadian Association for Community Living.

(Ontario) *Human Rights Code*, R.S.O. 1990, c.H-19.

Ontario Human Rights Commission (2003) *The Opportunity to Succeed: Achieving Barrier-free education for students with disabilities.* Retrieved October 2003, from www.ohrc.on.ca.

Ontario Human Rights Commission (2004) *Accessible Education Guide.* Retrieved October 2004, from www.ohrc.on.ca.

Oliver, M. (1990) *The politics of disablement.* Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan.

Oliver, M. (1996) *Understanding disability: From theory to practice.* New York: St. Martin's Press.

Raphael, D. (Ed.) (2004) *Social determinants of health: Canadian perspectives.* Toronto, CA: Canadian Scholars' Press Inc.

Ronson & Rootman (2004) *Literacy: One of the most important determinants of health today.* In D. Raphael (Ed.) *Social determinants of health: Canadian perspectives* (pp. 155-169) Toronto, CA: Canadian Scholars' Press Inc.

Sasso, G.M. (2001) The retreat from inquiry and knowledge in special education. *The Journal of Special Education, 34*(4), 178-193.

Sharpe, M.N., York, J.L. & Knight, J. (1994) Effects of inclusion on the academic performance of classmates without disabilities. *Remedial and special education, 15*(5), 281-287.

Stanovich, P. & Jordan, A. (2004) Inclusion as professional development. *Exceptionality Education Canada, 14*(2&3), 169-188.

Statistics Canada (2001) Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS): A profile of disability in Canada. Retrieved June 2005, from http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/89-577-XIE/.

Statistics Canada (2004) Children with special needs in Canada. Presentation for the Canadian Educational Statistics Council. Statistics Canada.

Swanson, H.L. & Hoskyn, M. (1998) Experimental intervention research on students with learning disabilities: A meta-analysis of treatment outcomes. *Review of Educational Research, 68*(3), 277-321.

Trent, S., Artilles, A., & Englert, C. (1998) From deficit thinking to social constructivism: a review of theory, research, and practice in special education. *Review of Educational Research, 23,* 277-307.

UNESCO, World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality (June, 1994) *The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on special needs education*. Salamanca, Spain.

Underwood, K. (in progress) *Teacher and parent beliefs about barriers to learning for students with disabilities: An analysis of theory and practice.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto.

Underwood, K. (2002) *Parents' understandings of disability: An exploration of the culture of special education in Ontario*. Unpublished Master's thesis: University of Toronto.

Underwood, K. & McGhie-Richmond, D. (2005) The acquisition of affective teaching in inclusive classrooms: An analysis of incremental teaching practice. *International Special Education Conference,* Glasgow, Scotland, August 2005.

United Nations (1975) *Declaration of the Rights of Disabled Persons* Retrieved from: http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/72.htm.

United Nations (1993) *Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities* Retrieved March 18, 2001, from: *http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/dissre00.htm*

United Nations (1989) *Convention on the Rights of the Child.* Retrieved from: http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2crc.htm.

United Nations (1990) *World Declaration on Education for All*. Retrieved from: http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/ed_for_all/background/jomtien_declaration.shtml

Vaughan, S., Moody, S.W. & Schumm, J.S. (1998) Broken promises: Reading instruction in the resource room. *Exceptional children, 64*, 211-225.

World Health Organization (2005) *Towards a conceptual framework for analysis and action on the social determinants of health* (Draft paper). Commission on Social Determinants of Health. Retrieved September, 2005 from: http://ftp.who.int/eip/commision/Cairo/Meeting/CSDH%20Doc%202%20-%20Conceptual%20framework.pdf