

RESEARCH REPORT

High School Teachers' Attitudes Toward Inclusion: A Canadian Perspective

Randeen M. Cayer

This study investigated Canadian high school teachers' attitudes toward the inclusion of students with special education needs in the general classroom environment. Teachers' cognitive, affective, and behavioural attitudes toward inclusion were examined. Data were collected by using a 7-point Likert scale survey called the Inclusion Scale for High School Teachers created by Dr. Catherine Ernst (2006).¹ The survey, which included a demographic questionnaire as well as cognitive, affective, and behavioural attitude statements regarding inclusive practices, was conducted with a population of 150 high school teachers from a single urban school division in a large city in central Canada.

Participants' demographic information was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The Somers' Delta (*Somers' D*) statistic was used to determine the strength and relatedness of the independent variables of teacher demographics and school environmental variables to the dependent variable of teacher attitude. Findings showed that high school teachers' attitudes toward inclusion were more positive than negative. The teachers' behavioural attitudes toward inclusion were most positive, while their affective attitudes toward inclusion were least positive.

The demographic variables with the greatest influence on teacher attitudes toward inclusion were (a) experience as lead teacher in an inclusive setting, (b) access to human resources and supports, and (c) professional development and training related to inclusion. This study is of particular importance because it is the first study to focus specifically on Canadian high school teachers' attitudes toward inclusion.

Recommendations for Future Practice

Actions at the Provincial Government Level

- Increase funding to support school divisions' equitable access to specialized clinicians province wide.
- Establish measurable standards that school divisions must meet to support professional development in the area of inclusion.
 - example: School divisions must provide 5 hours of professional development on the topic of inclusion each school year.
- Establish measurable standards that teachers must meet to further their training.
 - example: Teachers must attend 75 hours of professional development for each 5 years of teaching (equates to 3 teaching days per school year).
- Implement a data base to track teachers' professional development.

Actions at the School Division Level

- Have specialized clinical supports available to all staff.
- Provide 5 hours of professional development on the topic of inclusion each year.

¹ Ernst, C. (2006). *High school teachers' attitudes toward inclusion of students with special needs* (Doctorial dissertation). University of Rhode Island, USA.

- Permit two days of paid leave per year for teachers to attend external professional development sessions on the topic of inclusion.
- Permit one day of paid leave per month for teachers who are pursuing university degrees or specialized certifications in the field of education.

Actions at the School Administrative Level

- Ensure that all staff gain experience as lead teachers in inclusive classrooms .
- Ensure that staff are aware of human resources that are available and how to enlist support.
- Develop a systematic approach to support teacher collaboration, such as mentorship programs or co-teaching models.
- Provide school-based professional development related to inclusion each year.

Actions at the Teacher Level.

- Be open and willing to be lead teachers in an inclusive classroom.
- Seek out human resources and supports available within the school to support inclusion.
- Be active participants in peer mentorship or co-teaching models.
- Attend 5 hours of professional development related to inclusion each year.
- Pursue professional development goals to maintain standards of excellence in teaching.

Actions at the Manitoba Teachers' Society Level

- Address professional development on a contractual level.
- Negotiate professional development requirements for all teachers.
- Negotiate the school division's role in supporting professional development of teachers.

Direction for Future Studies

This study has revealed important demographic information and findings regarding Canadian high school teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. However, the study also raised many questions that future researchers should endeavour to explore. More studies are required to determine high school teachers' attitudes toward inclusion for other provinces in Canada (or a broader Canada-wide study to compare high school teachers' attitudes from province to province). Future studies should also strive to investigate teacher attitudes from geographically rural areas of Canada, where access to resources and supports may be more challenging. Finally, future researchers are encouraged to take a closer look at teacher professional development in Canada. Questions have been posed as to (a) what level of ongoing professional development should be required to maintain professional integrity, (b) how professional development is supported by schools, school divisions, and provincial governments, and (c) how can information and communication technology (ICT) be used to support teacher education and professional development. More information in these areas is crucial in identifying best practices for supporting high school teachers who are responsible for carrying out inclusive practices in our Canadian classrooms.

About the Researcher

Randeen Cayer is a former special education teacher who now spends her time escaping terrible weather by sharing her time between Winnipeg, Arizona, and the Virgin Islands. She looks forward to sharing her research findings in hopes of increasing inclusive opportunities for all students.