

2007

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## Recommended Citation

Pudlas, Ken (2007) "Head and Heart and Hands: Necessary Elements of Inclusive Praxis," *International Christian Community of Teacher Educators Journal*: Vol. 3 : Iss. 1 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/icctej/vol3/iss1/3>

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# Head and Heart and Hands: Necessary Elements of Inclusive Praxis

Ken Pudlas

## Abstract

When David called for the physically disabled grandson of Saul, Mephibosheth, to dine at the king's table, he was demonstrating an extraordinary level of inclusion. This paper reports data gathered as part of a programme of inquiry into the efficacy of the Full Inclusion model of special education; discusses how educators might progress from a mere head-knowledge of what is right, to a heart conviction of what should be done; and then explores a hands-on approach of how educators might more effectively do the right thing. Additional phenomenological data are reported from practicing teachers regarding their experience with the inclusion of students with special needs.

The paper is based on a presentation given at an International Coalition of Christian Teacher Educators (ICCTE) Conference at Regent University. The conference theme addressed the question of praxis, defined here as both: the exercise or practice of an art, science, or skill, and; customary practice or conduct. This paper addresses the question of how teacher educators can enable and encourage graduating teacher education students to make the inclusion of all persons a part of their customary professional practice or conduct.

When David, the Old Testament King and man after God's own heart, called for Mephibosheth to join him at his table, he was demonstrating an extraordinary level of inclusion. Why? Because Mephibosheth, the grandson of David's late nemesis Saul, had a physical disability and the law stated that no unclean (or crippled) thing was to enter into the king's presence. Similarly under the Old Testament Law, no such animal was to be sacrificed to God. However, David's inclusive action was following God's extra-human law and was an archetype of God's call for all to join at His table. In fact, the table seating in David's time, where diners reclined, was such that Mephibosheth's physical

disability would not have been obvious, and he would have been on an equal plane with the king. Some time prior, David had made a covenant with Saul that he would not kill his descendants (contrary to the custom of eliminating all of the late king's relatives). But to invite Mephibosheth to dine with him went above and beyond. The New Testament table of Communion, like David's table, is a great equalizer where all persons, no matter what their status or ability, are accepted on equal terms at the invitation of Christ and through the salvation He offers. God created all humans in His image and does not exclude anyone including those with physical or other disability. A biblical worldview requires a similar inclusive response.

This paper builds on research (Pudlas, 2004, 2005) which examined inclusive educational practice in both public and Christian schools; it examines in greater depth data gathered to answer the question posed by the subtitle of an earlier article: Will they know we are Christians?. The purpose of this paper then is to discuss the progression from a mere head-knowledge of what is right, to a heart conviction of what should be done, and then to a hands-on approach of how that right thing can be done, specifically as it relates to exceptional persons.

Praxis, for the purposes here can be defined as both: the exercise or practice of an art, science, or skill, and; customary practice or conduct. The latter in particular is closely related to what Beechick (1982) called heart-set or self-discipline, which she suggested was a necessary precursor for wise self-directed activity which educators today might refer to as life-long-learning. The specific question addressed in this paper is: How can teacher-educators encourage and empower graduating teacher education students to make the inclusion of all persons a part of their customary practice or conduct? Embedded in this question is an even more important one:

How can all who identify themselves as followers of Jesus in the New Testament age be more consistent in the exercise of the kind of Christ-like inclusive practice that was demonstrated by David towards Mephibosheth? Among the implications of the aforementioned research (Pudlas, 2004) is that NIMBYism (not in my back yard) is alive and well – yes, even among Christian teachers. That is, while teachers may give assent to the validity of Full Inclusion as a valid ideological perspective, they add the “not in my backyard” (classroom) proviso. Consequently suggestions are offered here as to how the hearts and minds of teachers and students alike can be changed to make schools more inclusive. This paper adds to the ongoing discussion of these issues by giving suggestions for praxis and by calling for a biblical understanding of the nature of human beings and thus the source of their value and worth, and it presents data gleaned from an ongoing programme of research.

## Introduction

First, by way of elaboration on the title of the paper, the intent is to convey that the relationship of head and heart and hands is not necessarily independent and linear, but rather dependent and cumulative as illustrated by Figure 1. Head knowledge is good and necessary, but it needs to be used to inform the heart. And heart or affect or a customary practice or conduct based on a particular worldview, is important but it needs to be tempered by knowledge and reason. When knowledge and affect are synchronous and when skills inform and are informed by the mix, then teachers can accomplish the goal of including all students and enabling them to be valued as participating members of their learning communities. So, to begin, what is the state of our head knowledge?

### Figure 1. Synthesis of head, heart, and hands toward inclusive praxis.

#### Head

What do educators know? For one thing, that there is a great deal of diversity within the regular school classroom. That diversity comes in many forms, and

while the focus of this paper is on diverse learning needs in the traditional categories of so-called special education, some of the principles apply more broadly. A quick overview of special education yields a kind of alphabet soup (upon which we might choke – without the explanations offered below) consisting of: IDEA which guarantees a FAPE in the LRE and noting that the President of the US wants NCLB and further that the CAP has now focused primarily on FI. For non-native eduspeakers the acronyms refer to: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA); Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE); Least Restrictive Environment (LRE); No Child Left Behind (NCLB); Cascade of Alternative Placements (CAP); Full Inclusion (FI).

It is also known that there are varying perceptions of what Full Inclusion (FI) means. Consistently however, one of the goals of inclusion involves community. It has been suggested that a school is inclusive if every student is able to identify and connect with the school’s social environment, culture and organizational life (Dei, James, Karumanchery, James-Wilson & Zine, 2000, p.13). The desired outcomes of the merger of regular and special education are illustrated in Figure 2. The factor which should resonate most strongly with a biblical worldview is that of community (see 1 Corinthians 12 or Ephesians 4 for example). At times the “R” in Least Restrictive Environment comes (inadvertently) from the educational ecology. That is, from any of a number of potential factors including both the skill-set and the attitude of teachers (also, see again Figure 1 regarding the integration of head, heart, and hands).

### Figure 2. Factors influencing positive inclusive outcomes.

Adapted from: Andrews, J. & Lupart, J. (2000). *The inclusive classroom: Educating exceptional children*. Scarborough, ON: Nelson.

Inclusion is variously defined, but invariably those definitions make reference to welcoming all students, including those with identified special needs, within the classroom and school community. For the pur-

pose of this paper, inclusion is defined as an ideology resulting in a pedagogy in which all students, regardless of any condition which presents barriers to their learning, are to be educated to the fullest extent possible in the regular classroom, and where the teacher of that classroom bears the primary responsibility for the learning of all students therein. Also part of head knowledge is that one of the desired outcomes of full inclusion is that all students in the class are valued and accepted, and are fully participating members of that community. We also know that one measure of community is a perception of acceptance. Finally, we know (Pudlas, 2003) using the Self-Description Questionnaire (Marsh, 1988) which is based on a theoretical foundation that acknowledges the multi-faceted nature of self concept, that those perceptions are not positive (see Table 1) and that perceptions do not necessarily become more positive in a Christian environment (Pudlas, 2004).

**Table 1**

### Peer Self-Concept Subscale Scores

#### Heart

The term heart is used here in a manner similar to that of Beechick (1982) who notes the word is used more than 800 times in scripture and who makes reference to heart set as being synonymous with self-discipline. Thus when educators come to discuss praxis, it results from heart set or what has become a natural bent for doing something or for doing it in a certain way. That relates also to Weltanschauung or worldview which comes from personal beliefs and values. A classic illustration from scripture is the question asked by Jesus' disciples in John 9 where, upon encountering the man blind from birth, they asked Jesus, "Who sinned, this man or his parents?" Note their worldview caused them to presume that the blindness must have resulted from sin. An Old Testament example is Proverbs 23: 7, "as a man thinketh in his heart so is he". In context the passage includes a warning not to crave delicacies of the rich man or to strive to get rich and to "cease from thine own wisdom" (v. 4). All of which are in keeping with the intent of full inclusion which involves build-

ing community and seeking the common good rather than individual gain.

The aforementioned article (Pudlas, 2004) speaks further to the issue of ideology or heart-set. Additionally, Anderson (2003) has, to extend the heart metaphor, written an insightful article which in effect gives some supernatural supplements that can ingested to improve the condition of educators' (and others') hearts. He refers to special education as reconciliation. That is, all need to be in a right relationship: first with God, but also with one another. As it relates to special education, reconciliation comes about by ensuring that all students are members of the community. Anderson gives good scriptural bases for his argument and quotes numerous credible sources. As suggested earlier in the discussion of Mephibosheth, God desires that all persons be in right relationship to Him and that when clothed in the righteousness offered by Christ's sacrifice, this is in fact so, and will be fully realized in eternity. However, for the here and now, fallen human beings need more help in their spiritual lives in order to meet the full potential that God has available for all. One of the key scriptures for this discussion is 1 Corinthians 12 which speaks of the importance of each member of the body of Christ. That is, if the body – the church – is to function well, all parts of the body must function, even the so-called lesser parts. Even a seemingly inconsequential part such as a small toe can, if fractured, greatly impede walking for example. A full exploration of the implications of inclusion for church life is beyond the scope of this paper. A selection of the additional scriptures germane to this discussion include: Ephesians 2:10, speaking of the good works we are to do; Ephesians 4, speaking of the unity of the body; and Ephesians 5, giving instruction to be imitators of Christ who sacrificed himself for the sake of others. So, with this ample instruction why are educators in general and Christians in particular not as inclusive as they ought to be?

#### Hands – Praxis

What are some of the missing bits, the impediments to full inclusion, and what are some solutions? There are several areas of promise. Each relates to the primary participants in the inclusive educational enterprise: students and teachers. Teachers play a crucial role (see again Figure 1 regarding the confluence of head and heart and hands). Note also in Figure 2 the School

Ethos component regarding educators' characteristics and professional preparation. Since this paper is addressed primarily to educators, their role is the main focus. However, students with diverse learning needs must also bear some responsibility for the success or failure of full inclusion.

## **Students**

Scripture says we are blessed when we are persecuted or reviled – but note the qualifier: for my name sake or for righteousness (Matthew 5:10, 11). If a student behaves as a total reprobate there is no blessing to be expected; less drastically, what of students with other kinds of emotional or behavioural disorders? To put it in practical terms, if students do not know the basic skills for relating within community, it should not come as a surprise when they are not well-accepted within that community. Thus prosocial skills may be a crucial missing link in the success of the inclusive education model. Prosocial behaviour means "...positive actions that benefit others, prompted by empathy, moral values, and a sense of personal responsibility rather than a desire for personal gain" (Kidron & Fleischman, 2006, p. 90). The same authors go on to suggest that educators can have a tremendous influence on students' social growth by creating a school-wide culture in which each student has opportunity to see prosocial behaviours modeled by other students and by adults (Kidron & Fleischman, 2006, p. 90). Prosocial skills and community have a mutual cause and effect relationship and that relationship should be more fully explored in the examination of the efficacy of the full inclusion model. Some promising work in this area is reported in a study done at Trinity Western University in Langley, Canada by Schoyen (2004) which reports the positive effects of social skills training. Those data illustrate that in an elementary school setting, simply by adding a short but purposeful amount of instruction in specific social skills, all students involved in the study, including those with special needs, increased their social skills and concomitantly increased their level of acceptance among peers and increased the number of friendships they experienced in school. In fact friendships and peer nominations generally increased, and social skills showed a statistically significant ( $p < .01$ ) level of increase over the relatively short (six week) duration of the intervention. This research is supported by anecdotal evidence from an experienced kindergarten teacher who has worked with students

with autism and with Down syndrome for the past seven years in a Christian school. She begins building community by teaching social (conflict resolution) skills and notes that, "...as you educate the special needs child ...you educate the community". She endeavours to "help them become as normal as possible" and recognizes, as an integral part of that process, the importance of teaching social skills (Van Brummelen, 2006). There is promising empirical and anecdotal evidence to support the value of teaching social skills in an effort to build community and foster inclusion.

## **Teachers**

However, as others such as van Manen (2002) have suggested, and as is shown in Figure 2, the tone of teaching, the timbre of the classroom, is largely set by the teacher. Purkey and Novak (1996) use the terminology inviting and disinviting classrooms and suggest that if the classroom is to be inviting then the teacher must be personally and professionally inviting. Thus if the schoolroom is to be an inclusive community, the teacher has a larger responsibility to make it so. How does this relate to head/heart/hand? Stated simply: attitude matters. If teachers betray a negative attitude (are disinviting) toward students with diverse learning needs, it is highly unlikely that those students will perceive themselves as valued members of the community. So, what factors determine teacher attitude? At least two things: worldview and professional efficacy. The former relates to heart, the latter is heart plus head and hands. Both are malleable in pre-professional teacher education programmes and must be addressed if those programmes are to educate and graduate teachers who are inclusive.

### **Teachers' Heads, Hearts and Hands**

Earlier research (Pudlas, 2003) determined that students with diverse learning needs perceived that their peers did not accept them (as previously noted in Table 1). Does it really matter if that perception was accurate? No; in this case, perception is what matters. Worldviews are based on what is perceived to be true and behaviour tends to be in accordance with that perception. What then of teachers? Does it matter to students if their teachers accept them? Yes! And, are teachers more likely to accept students with special needs if they do not see them as a burden or a threat to their professional efficacy? Yes. So, what are the implications of this, and can it be supported by any data.

The more recent phase of the programme of research into the efficacy of FI has attempted to assess teachers' attitudes toward inclusion of students with diverse learning needs.

People often fear what they do not know; in the extreme this may result in phobias (such as xenophobia). While scripture says that God has not given that spirit of fear and also that perfect love casts out fear, one cannot love what is not known. So the question guiding this phase of research was: Will a course that explicitly addresses a theology of exceptionality as part of a biblical worldview, and that gives knowledge about learners with diverse needs, inform sufficiently so as to change the attitude of pre-service teachers? A related question pertained to how pre-service teacher attitudes compare to those of professionals. The study is described in greater detail elsewhere (Pudlas, 2005) but germane to understanding the implications is the fact that all student subjects had at least third year standing in university and had at least one semester of field experience in regular school classrooms. Teachers in the study had a range of professional experience but in all cases more than three years.

**Table 2**

**Educator Opinion Questionnaire Scores of Pre-professionals and Professionals**

**Table 3**

**Pre and Post Instruction EOQ Scores**

The research utilized the Educator Opinion Questionnaire (Bunch, 1993), and sample questions together with summary results of the study are presented in Table 2 and 3. The data indicate that attitudes were less negative after the course and that in numerous facets students' scores were the same as those of seasoned professionals. The overall change in total score was found to be significant. Thus the data indicate an affir-

mative answer to the research question: Yes, attitudes can be significantly changed. The next phase of the research will follow-up on some of those graduates, and determine how their real-world experience with diversity influences their attitudes toward the full inclusion model. Anecdotally, one respondent with four years of teaching experience in the public system wrote, "I have felt that SN [special needs] students 'slip through cracks in our system' though strong efforts have been made to support in most cases" (Pudlas, 2006).

**Summary and Conclusions**

So, is Full Inclusion a good thing? A recent article out of Great Britain, reports that the National Union of Teachers there issued a report by academics out of Cambridge University calling for an end to the policy of inclusion (Halpin, 2006). In the same article the union's general secretary is quoted as saying, "inclusion has failed many children...It demonstrates very clearly the failures in policy and practice in our education system and in our schools." This paper has addressed the scriptural imperatives to be inclusive and has indicated that the efficacy of the model of FI is less than ideal in its current practice. However, there is also evidence that it is possible to integrate head and heart and hands and to bring about at least a potential for more inclusive praxis. Further work needs to be done and certainly collaboration would be welcome in order to replicate or expand some of the research described here (researchers love a large N).

One area of promise, and something that might be added to the curriculum of teacher education programmes, is how to teach prosocial skills to students who, in many instances, do not come to school with the same skill set that previous generations did. Also, to the degree that worldview is informed through literature, educators might purposely strive to address the reality of diversity in schools and culture by bringing into appropriate courses literature that speaks about persons with diverse learning needs. If nothing else, we can call to mind the story of Mephibosheth and remind ourselves of the lesson to be learned from David, known as a friend of God, and the manner in which he modeled inclusion as a precursor to the New Testament model.

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