



STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING
THE EMERGENCE OF AN INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY
A GUIDE FOR PARENTS AND PRESCHOOL WORKERS

Paul Boudreault, Ph.D.
André C. Moreau, Ph.D.



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Authors Paul Boudreault Ph.D.
André C. Moreau Ph.D.
Département des sciences de l'éducation,
Université du Québec à Hull

Collaboration **Rachelle Bélisle**
Psychoéducatrice, Centre de réadaptation
du Pavillon du Parc – RSDI, Gatineau (Québec).
Monique Lafontaine
Consultante en services de garde, Longueuil (Québec).
Lucie Landry
Orthopédagogue, commission scolaire Val-des-Cerfs.

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Geneviève Parisé

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Judy, Marie-Ève et Denis

Contact:
VISION-INCLUSION
Paul Boudreault, Ph.D.
Département des sciences de l'éducation
Université du Québec à Hull
Case postale 1250, Succursale B,
Hull (Québec) J8X 3X7



THE CHILD WHO HAD TWO EYES

There was once a planet very much like the Earth. The only difference between inhabitants of the Earth and those of this planet was that the latter were one-eyed. But with this one eye, they saw the stars as if through a telescope and germs as if through a microscope. One day a child was born with a very strange physical defect: he had two eyes. His parents were sad.

It wasn't long before they were consoled. After all, he was a very happy child. Every day, his parents grew more cheerful. They took great care of him. They took him to many physicians, but his condition was incurable.

As the child grew up, his problems grew daily. Little by little, the child with two eyes fell behind in his studies. Each time he fell behind, his teachers paid more attention to him. It was constantly necessary to help him.

This child thought he would be good for nothing when he grew up... until the day he found out that he could see something the others could not. His parents were amazed. His schoolmates were enchanted by his stories. Everyone wanted to know how he saw things. And after a time, he became so famous that his physical defect no longer mattered to anyone. In the end, it didn't even matter to him. Because even though there were many things he couldn't do, he was far from being useless. Eventually, he became one of the most admired inhabitants of his planet.

Courrier de l'Unesco, March 1979.¹

¹ (qtd. in Association québécoise des parents d'enfants handicapés visuels, 2001).





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HI. I'M CARL. LET ME TELL YOU ABOUT MYSELF.

My name is Carl. My mother is Portuguese and my father is Quebecois. I live with my parents and my little sister Renée, who's two years old. Just like everyone around me, I have good and bad qualities.

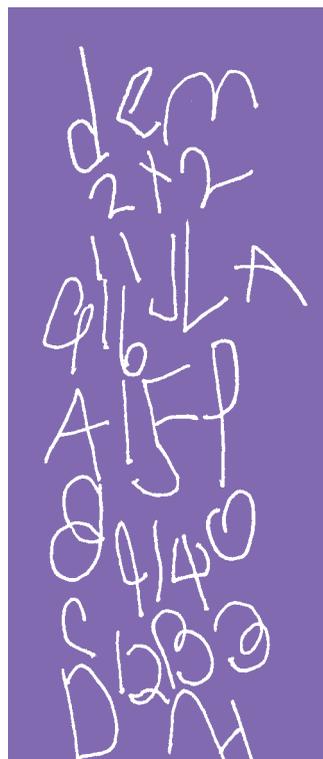
My character is a bit like my father's: I'm a happy, agreeable person; I like playing with other children; I'm affectionate and calm and I don't cause much trouble; I'm rarely angry; and I'm proud of my appearance. I like doing cognitive tasks. I love having a story read to me, and I look attentively at the pictures and try to repeat the words. Be careful: don't change the story, because I know several of them by heart. My parents have taught me to recognize certain words, letters, and numbers. I can read more than twenty words and I can count to seven.

I make a big effort to communicate with those around me. Since I have trouble communicating, sometimes I express my feelings through gestures, and they're not always the most suitable ones. I can form sentences that are two or three words long.

I've been going to the Little Ones Daycare Centre since I was two. There, I've integrated well with all the groups I'm a part of. The daycare workers say I function very well. Sometimes I need help. I'm not the only one who needs help, though. I especially need help with instructions. You have to explain them to me really well for me to grasp them. Also, my fine motor ability isn't strong.

My need for support isn't constant, you know. There are lots of activities I can do alone. Once I've learned something, you can count on it to stay in my head for a long time!

Carl's father



INTRODUCTION

In reading what Carl's parents wished to share about their son, it's not easy to guess from their description that the child has trisomy 21, or Down syndrome. His parents' goal is for Carl to experience success in participating in the activities of his life setting – at home, in daycare, and at school. Their efforts are geared towards supplying him with quality services. They subscribe to a vision of inclusion.

An inclusive² educational community³ aims to develop public services that go beyond maintaining the child in his natural life setting. As a value,⁴ inclusion promotes the independence and self-determination of individuals with impairments or difficulties through their full participation in the activities of their life setting, including involvement in leisure activities, childcare services, school, and so on. An educational community welcomes and accepts the “differently situated” individuals in its setting, values diversity, and provides quality services to meet these individuals' special needs.

As a shared value, inclusion raises several questions of concern to all. What is the true meaning of inclusion for the child, for the parents, and for those who work in and manage educational services? What does educational inclusion mean for a childcare service or school? What educational strategies would foster inclusion in my childcare service, my classroom, my school, my community?

To answer these questions, we have adopted an educational approach that places the child at the centre of our concerns. This approach is intended for parents, professionals, and everyone who is interested in education for all within a given community. Our main objective is to provide a set of strategies that will help in developing practical knowledge about educational inclusion.

² Stainback & Stainback (1990, p. 15); Boudreault, Kalubi, Bouchard & Beaupré (1998).

³ “An educational community is an educational setting, such as daycare or a kindergarten class, that mobilizes all its players and banks on exchange and the quality of relationships in fulfilling its educational mission.” (Quebec: Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, 1998, p. 15).

⁴ A value is “a way of being or acting that an individual or community recognizes as ideal” (Rocher, 1969, p. 56).

INCLUSION :

A QUESTION OF PERSPECTIVE

The scholarly literature⁵ contains abundant information on inclusion. New approaches in inclusive education bring together a whole set of concepts, principles, and educational tools. The table below provides an overview of the main components of an approach in which the child is at the centre of everyone's concerns.

Table: Paradigm of Strategies for Inclusion

CHILD-PUPIL

- Creation of attachment ties, positive relationships
- Participation in activities of life setting
- Access to forms of support needed for the child's development and difference
- Full partner in her community of mutual aid, support, and interdependence
- Success and self-determination

PEERS

- Creation of attachment ties, positive relationships
- Acceptance of differences, reciprocity, affirmation
- Success; self-determination

HOME SETTING: THE PARENTS

- Creation of attachment ties and ties of support
- Growth in the life of the couple and in family life through actualization and personal enrichment
- Full partners in their educational community, collaboration, coordinated efforts, mutual support
- Support, access to services, enhancement of parental role, mastery of relevant knowledge

THE EDUCATIONAL COMMUNITY: DAYCARE - KINDERGARDEN

- Welcome for all children in the community; participation by all children
- Shared values: democracy and inclusion
- Educational practices that foster partnership, collaboration, cooperation, support
- Use of pedagogical practices that feature differentiation, cooperative learning and project-based learning
- Mutual affirmation; children's success

EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS: CHILDCARE SERVICES AND THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

- Shared values: democracy and inclusion
- Integrated structuring of regular and specialized services
- Use of practices that feature partnership, collaboration, cooperation, and support to parents and staff
- Promotion of innovative projects for development as an educational community
- Targeting of a high level of service quality: affirmation and success for their members

⁵ Friend & Bursuck, (1999); Stainback & Stainback (1996)

As a value shared by a majority of citizens, inclusion means educating all pupils within the regular system of childcare and classroom teaching designated by the expression “educational community”⁶. Inclusion aims at full participation by differently challenged children and pupils in the activities of the educational community that neighbourhood children and pupils of the same age group belong to. Inclusion implies, among other things, that differently challenged children benefit from appropriate educational measures and curricula and the support necessary to stimulate their development and meet needs specific to their conditions.

Educational inclusion goes beyond a static concept of the organization and management of parallel services that emerged from the movements for social-role valorisation, integration, and mainstreaming. As a relational dynamic, educational inclusion aims at everyone’s becoming involved in the community’s activities, in a context of mutual aid and support. The dynamic of inclusion creates a synergy around children and pupils with special needs that fosters their development, their learning, their independence, and their self-determination⁷ within their life setting, while providing services to meet their specific needs.

For differently challenged children, inclusion is: (a) a perspective for creating attachment ties and positive relationships with their parents and the people in their life setting; (b) holistic development in a perspective of independence and self-determination; (c) involvement in the activities of their life settings, along with their peers; (d) access to measures and services that support them in their difference; (e) being full partners in their community, in a dynamic of mutual aid, support, and interdependence; and (f) being affirmed so that they can experience success in their efforts at development, learning, and inclusion.

⁶ Stainback & Stainback (1990); Lusthaus & Forest (1989).

⁷ Boudreault, Kalubi, Bouchard, & Beaupré (1998).



For differently challenged children's peers, inclusion mainly allows for: (a) being full partners in their community of mutual aid, support, and interdependence; (b) learning to know about differences and to accept them by showing increased tolerance and developing reciprocal, mutually affirming relationships; and, last, (c) experiencing success and feeling affirmed.

For a family member, as an individual, spouse, and parent, inclusion mainly means: (a) forging ties of affection and support with family members; (b) self-actualization and enrichment in the life of the couple and in family life with the children; (c) personal enrichment by providing support to family members and by mastering parenting knowledge; (d) carrying out innovative, stimulating educational projects; and, last (e) being a full partner in one's educational community, collaborating, coordinating one's efforts with those of other adults, and providing support.

Daycare and kindergarten-type educational settings can contribute to inclusion if their members (a) welcome all children from the surrounding community; (b) subscribe to shared values such as democracy and inclusion; (c) engage in educational practices characterized by partnership, collaboration, cooperation, and support;⁸ (d) carry out innovative and stimulating educational projects; (e) base their pedagogical practice on differentiation, cooperative learning, project-based learning, individualization and adaptation, and open-mindedness; and (f) reward success.

Educational systems and services play a central role in the development of inclusive practices. Among other things, they: (a) develop curricula and services for all the children of their surrounding communities; (b) promote the shared values of democracy and inclusion; (c) integrate the structuring of regular and specialized services; (d) develop educational practices that feature partnership, collaboration, cooperation, and support to parents and staff in their community; (e) promote innovative projects; and, last, (f) aim at a high level of service quality, thus fostering their members' success and feeling of affirmation. These systems have an indirect impact on the successful achievement of inclusion by individuals in their community.

⁸ Support is provided in interpersonal relations, and also through appropriate physical layout and structural organization of the various support services given in implementing inclusion.





FROM DIFFERENCE TO LIKENESS: GETTING TO KNOW AND APPRECIATE A WHOLE NEW WORLD

The Principles That Govern Our Reflection and Our Actions

In a sense, to speak of difference among children is to face the challenge of describing every single child. Every young child is essentially different, not to say “impaired”, viewed from the perspective of a setting designed for the adult world⁹. After all, that’s just why a child has so much to learn. Children surely see themselves as different. In seeking to grasp their reality, knowledge of child development and of what distinguishes the child provides valuable information with which to guide our actions. Educational practices are based on a variety of theories: humanist, cognitive, systemic, ecological¹⁰. The literature of these approaches has led us to identify six principles about children and their development.

Every Child is Different

In general, children develop along a predictable path; the different stages of cognitive and moral development are examples of this. Nevertheless, every child is distinctive in such things as pace of development, learning history, and personal characteristics – physical, psychological, and sociocultural traits, and sometimes traits associated with physical and functional differences. What is positive about this differentness is that every child is distinctive and a unique individual.

A Holistic, Integrated Development Process

A child experiences simultaneous development in various dimensions: sensorimotor, cognitive (intellectual and linguistic), social, affective, and adaptive. These dimensions are interlinked; it is hard to examine each one separately. The child is always calling upon more than one dimension at a time. When one such dimension is activated, it taps into others, such that the different dimensions interact constantly. It is this feature that produces a holistic development process. The various individual dimensions of development cannot be ignored. In the educational setting, adults cannot neglect this process of the child’s holistic, integrated development.

⁹ Stonemam (1993).

¹⁰Stonemam (1993).

Similar but Differentiated Needs

When we speak of differently challenged children, the concept of “need” is central. The word can have different meanings in different contexts. A child will learn more easily when his life setting meets the fundamental needs for nourishment, shelter, protection, and growth. Generally speaking, regardless of the differences among children, their fundamental needs are similar. Some children, however, are distinguished by having similar but somewhat differentiated needs, associated with specific functional traits linked to their impairment. In supporting a child’s development and learning, particular needs of this kind must be taken into consideration.

Learning Through Play

Children learn by interacting with other people and with objects by acting, manipulating, exploring, experimenting, observing, and listening. Every child’s learning history is peculiar to her and consists of that child’s cumulative experiences. These experiences are part of a fundamentally individual process in which the child is the main actor.

The playful nature of the child’s interactions elicits the will to act, the perseverance to succeed, the search for meaning, and the expression of emotions. Whether using the natural materials that lie at hand or specially manufactured ones, children play when they interact, repeat their actions, persevere in their activities, and express their thoughts and their emotions. Play can be spontaneous or structured. Activities count as “play” when they are positive. Their chief feature is pleasure. For an activity to count as play implies an element of consent or spontaneity, an element of voluntariness. For the child, play is a powerful tool in interaction, expression of emotion, recollections, anticipation, understanding, discovery, learning, and mastery of the world. Learning through play is an essential source of stimulus for the child.

Placing Children at the Centre of Their Own Development

To understand the development of differently challenged children and the way their environment contributes to their learning and inclusion, we must consider interactions between children and their various life-settings¹¹ as well as service systems¹². In this perspective, the child is right at the heart of educational

¹¹Life settings consist of everything that goes to make up the setting where the child develops.

¹²Service systems consist of the way services are organized by such things as policies, regulations, programs, and resources.





concerns. He is the main actor, the one who takes the initiative in his own development and learning. The child and the various players in the service system – parents, professionals, managers, program planners and policy makers – interact with each other. To some extent, these interactions influence the development of the child and his family. Around this child-family core, educational services for children are structured as a network.

A Quality Environment

A child's chances of developing harmoniously are increased by high-quality, enriched settings. The richness of a setting can be gauged by, among other things, the diversity of individuals who go to make up the human environment and the diversity of situations experienced. The more receptive a setting is to people who differ physically, personally, culturally, and functionally (including individuals with impairments), the more such a setting offers richness of interaction. Encounters with varied physical environments are also an index of the richness of a setting.

Relations with individuals who are different foster a spirit of tolerance and mutual aid, among other things. A quality environment can be identified mainly through the quality of relationships among individuals: shared trust, mutual aid, and respect. Harmonious relationships among the adults – parents, childcare workers –, attentive listening, empathy, collaboration, coordinated efforts, partnership, and mutual aid all make an essential contribution to the development of a high-quality child-adult dynamic.

Who Are These Differently Challenged Children?

The expression “differently challenged child” refers to children who have specific educational needs, such as those whose sociocultural or linguistic background is different, so-called at-risk children, and children with an identified impairment. Impairments can be of various kinds: organic, physical, sensory, psychopathological, neurological, intellectual, linguistic, and so on. Viewed by some as enrichment and by others as a sign of quality educational settings, individual differences can take the form of physical, psychological, sociocultural, and functional traits.



In sum, then, what differentiates these children may be:

- physical features or psychological traits (the latter are linked to personality);
- sociocultural traits;
- traits linked to differences in the child that are of an organic or functional nature or that relate to a handicap.

Differences of an organic nature are manifested in various ways that can be classified by categories of impairment:

- organic and motor impairments;
- sensory impairments: auditory or visual;
- intellectual impairments and developmental delay;
- psychopathological impairment, such as pervasive developmental disorders;
- language and speech impairments.

These impairments entail functional limitations that prevent the child from accomplishing certain actions or harm her development. Indirectly, they influence the child's adaptation and learning.

For these reasons, such children need support. Support is temporary, or limited, when short-term interventions prove sufficient to enable the child to function in his settings. Deprived of these measures, the child is at risk of experiencing developmental or adaptive difficulties or a handicap. Support is considered to be significant when the intervention needed must take place regularly in various spheres of life and must take the form of long-term support in the child's life settings. Finally, support is considered to be intensive if it takes the form of interventions in various life settings and is permanent. Intensive support requires a larger number of people to ensure the child functions in his setting. The figure below illustrates the three dimensions of a model of support.

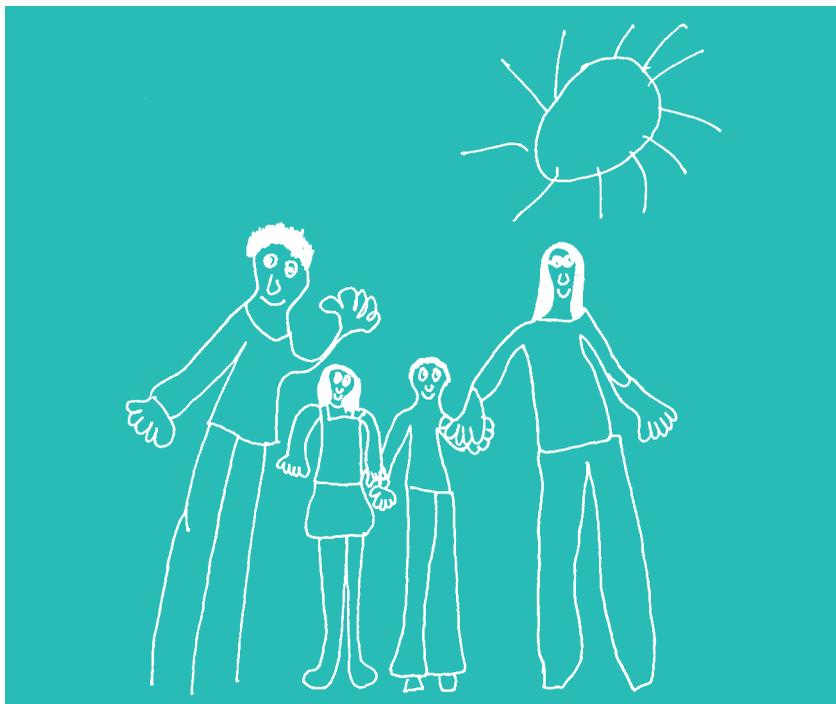


Figure: Examples of Impairments and Limitations and Accompanying Levels of Support and Adaptive Measures

Impairment

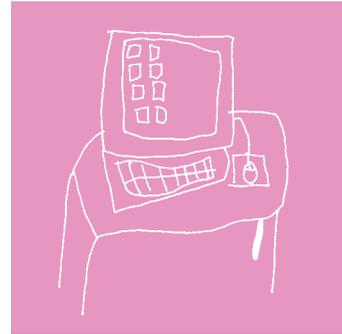
- Cerebral palsy
 - pathological reflexes
 - hypertonia
 - motor incoordination
 - paralysis or muscle weakness

Limitations / Disabilities

- limited mobility in walking and running
- limitations in voluntary movements: grasping and letting go of objects
- rigidity in the arms and clenched, tense hands, preventing the child from carrying out tasks such as eating
- difficulty carrying out activities relating to gross and fine motor ability, such as handling small objects or using a pencil
- language and speech problems such as speech impediments and control over speech-related muscles
- limitations in activities of daily living: eating; dressing; moving about (use of a wheelchair or orthopedic aids such as crutches or a walker)

Support / Adaptive Measures

- Physical environment:
 - organization of facilities;
 - aids for mobility, seated position, standing position, and so on;
 - communication aids;
 - aids for fine-motor manipulation when carrying out activities.
- Professional support
- Adaptive educational measures:
 - the development and learning goals and objectives for the age group are adapted to the child's level;
 - regular activities are structured to promote the child's involvement and development of competencies;
 - variations in regular activities: specially adapted strategies/techniques for motor skills and communication;
 - alignment of routines when rehabilitation activities require one-on-one adult-child intervention.



Those who want to go further, increase their knowledge, and follow from one discovery to another can consult specialized sites on the Web. Surfing the Web, you'll soon find authoritative sites dealing with various types of impairment or subjects related to early childhood. Several of these are listed at the end of this guide.



SOME PRODUCTIVE STRATEGIES

How should we deal with differences?

Faced with a differently challenged child, most children's reactions vary from curiosity to know more on one occasion to fear, rejection, and contempt on another. Similar reactions can be observed in the differently challenged child herself. As adults, what should we think and do?

In an educational setting, initial reactions from children who encounter and live with differently challenged peers will include aggression. These reactions will vary according to age, cultural background, and sex. Such initial responses are natural. They become problematic when they persist and, among other effects, harm the differently challenged child's development. When initial reactions come to be structured as a system of interactions and result in the marginalizing of differently challenged children or their exclusion from the community, they have become problematic. How should we react? What should we say? What should we do?

Below are some strategies that positively influence children's or inexperienced students' attitudes and perceptions about differently challenged children.

Direct Experience

During free-play learning activities, cooperative activity among peers, and transition times such as mealtime and recess, direct contact between differently challenged children and those who are not allows for experiences likely to foster positive attitudes towards differently challenged children. These natural opportunities for interaction between children can only occur in an inclusive educational setting, where all children are enrolled without distinction and where they all participate fully in group and class activities. In such a setting, it is possible to plan various interpersonal strategies.

Spontaneous Interaction: This strategy consists of allowing the children to come together spontaneously during free-play activity. Free play and learning situations allow children to experience new things with differently challenged children. Adults are often surprised by children displaying spontaneous, natural responses that assign no importance to differences. The adult should endorse positive interactions verbally. It's important to note that the children must have a setting that offers respect and a sense of security. In this kind of spontaneous interaction, repeated aggressive behaviour by children plays a negative role. If such situations arise, adults must be vigilant and structure the educational setting so that these disagreeable experiences are avoided.

Structured social-interaction play: Structured play periods are planned play activities that promote social interaction among the children. They are organized activities that form part of the group's or class's regular routine, last 15 minutes, and take place in play spaces where the equipment promotes cooperative interaction – for instance the block area, the doll area, or the dress-up area. Activities of this kind call on the child to engage in a large number of social interactions. The emphasis of this structured play is on the pleasure of playing together, as a group. The role of adults is limited to planning out the setting and free-play time and encouraging participants to play, without promoting or suggesting specific interactions. Cooperative activities of this kind foster the development of skills in mutual aid, tolerant and respectful attitudes, and a problem-solving approach in both differently challenged children and children who are not.

Indirect Experience

Indirect experience includes such things as viewing movies that present prosocial behaviour, hearing stories, and taking part in structured information activities followed by discussion periods.

Movies: Young children learn by observing and interacting with people who act as models.¹³ The strategy based on movies consists of repeatedly showing films, usually during a three-week period, in which children adopt prosocial behaviours towards differently challenged children, for example by having conversations with them, sharing with them, and making friends. After a movie has been shown, the children are put into play situations where they can pattern themselves on the behaviours they've been shown. This strategy works well as a way to introduce difference and talk about positive social interactions.

¹³ASCD Improving Student Achievement Research Panel, 1995

Story reading: When made a part of daily routine, reading stories that handle specific themes is a powerful means of raising awareness of difference. For intensive exposure, three 15-minute storytimes can be allowed per week. The content of the stories varies: they may be about the activities of children who have an impairment; stress positive social interactions such as sharing, being a friend, playing, and resolving conflicts between children; present analogies; or tell the story of children who offer a model of inclusion. To influence children's attitudes, numerous stories must be available. Story reading takes place in four stages:

1. **Setting the stage:** The child or group is asked a question that will elicit ideas with informational content. The children verbalize their recall of personal experiences in response to the question.
2. **Reading the story:** The adult reads the story with an appropriate use of voice and gesture. When children ask spontaneous questions during the reading, the reader uses the opportunity to stop, give the children the floor for a moment, and perhaps ask a comprehension question. This must not last too long, so the children don't lose the thread of the story.
3. **Discussion and reflection:** Following the reading, a guided question period allows for questions on all sides, enabling all to share their ideas, voice their questions, and comment on the topic. During this period, important topics are handled: the content of the story, the subject of difference, the use of aids, the importance of the similarities between children with impairments and children without them. Discussion should close with a focus on those aspects of the story that suggest positive interactions among children.
4. **Integration:** Following storytime, the childcare worker may set aside time for individual activities involving rereading stories or drawing pictures.



Involvement by the Home

Parents prompt and influence the attitudes of children without handicaps towards children who have them. Parents can do storytimes on this topic with their own children and discuss the same themes with them as the education professionals do. Parents can base their approach during reading and the discussion and reflection periods on the same procedures as the professionals. Discussions between parents and childcare workers or teachers are a good way to harmonize their approach to this type of action.

A Multi-strategy Approach

The research literature provides several models for raising preschool children's awareness of difference. Some authorities tried using multiple strategies along with programs designed to raise preschool children's awareness of difference and promote children's positive attitudes towards differently challenged individuals.¹⁴ They conducted their test over ten-week activity periods. The program they designed incorporated the presentation of differences and impairments and the characteristics of different and impaired children. Storytime deal with the themes of difference and positive relationships. A guided question period followed the story reading. The final component of the program consisted of situations entailing interaction with the differently challenged child: free play and cooperative activities.

The strategies highlighted were direct contact with differently challenged children, storytime, and discussion/reflection time. Of the three groups of children on whom the approach was tested, those who had a high degree of contact with differently challenged children significantly changed in attitude towards them. The groups who had little or no such contact showed changes in attitude that were not significant. They were rapid changes but the positive attitudes observed immediately following awareness-raising activities were not sustained.

A final point: the awareness-raising process must involve the child's other family members, parents, and workers in the educational setting.

¹⁴Favazza, & Odom (1997); Favazza (1999).



CHOOSING AN EDUCATIONAL SERVICE: HOW TO MAKE A DIFFERENT CHOICE

Often, to reach their objective, parents must do some preparation before looking for an educational service such as a daycare or kindergarten. There is no single right method. Faced with new situations, some people take things one day at a time and don't experience much doubt. Nevertheless, making choices about a child's education or placement in daycare entails decisions that are sometimes difficult, and it entails taking action. When the child has a difference that involves special needs, parents have a particular obligation to make these choices in a strategic fashion.

Even though there are many valid approaches to making an informed choice of preschool, certain broad principles must be respected. These can be found in the appendix to this guide. In consulting them, parents will be able to identify the resources available in the community, get a sense of what they are like, and act efficiently in choosing the service that best satisfies their expectations.

Here are the main stages in choosing a preschool. The appendix contains questions that will make each stage even clearer and contribute to your own process of reflection.

- Identify family members and other resources that can provide illuminating information.
- Think through the questions you will ask the people you approach.
- Draw up a list of questions before contacting childcare services.
- Contact those services you've identified.
- Make an informed choice.

DEVELOPING A SUPPORT NETWORK

What and Why

Support networks meet people's needs to share views about their experiences, to ascribe meaning to the difficulties they encounter, and even to find solutions for these difficulties. As well, the contagious effect of mutual emotional support should not be overlooked. The main effects of support networks are (a) making use of each person's competencies; (b) creating partnership dynamics – which consist of interaction, discussion, and collaboration/cooperation¹⁵ – and, above all; (c) taking ownership of knowledge¹⁶. These social relationships and cooperative experiences promote personal growth both emotionally and cognitively.

How

Developing a support network means:

- forging ties with significant others whom you share interests with;
- trusting;
- engaging in discussion about your experiences as a parent without expecting to solve specific problems;
- sharing your successes and your difficulties;
- thinking things through together, giving each other support, and, if desired, helping each other with certain tasks;
- making coordinated effort possible through discussion of your actions, in order to resolve difficulties or reach an objective;
- collaborating¹⁷ to carry out goals and actions agreed to by all;
- if difficulties arise during the course of the work, maintaining contact, engaging in discussion, and supporting each other;
- affirming each other's successes through discussion and mutual aid;
- equipping yourselves with a system for communicating and interacting with the outside world;
- setting up partnership conditions with the other people who work with the child;
- getting involved in the child's education, because, among other reasons, this will yield emotional support.

¹⁵Cooperation is a way of pooling individual efforts in order to achieve a group goal or objective (Slaven, 1990).

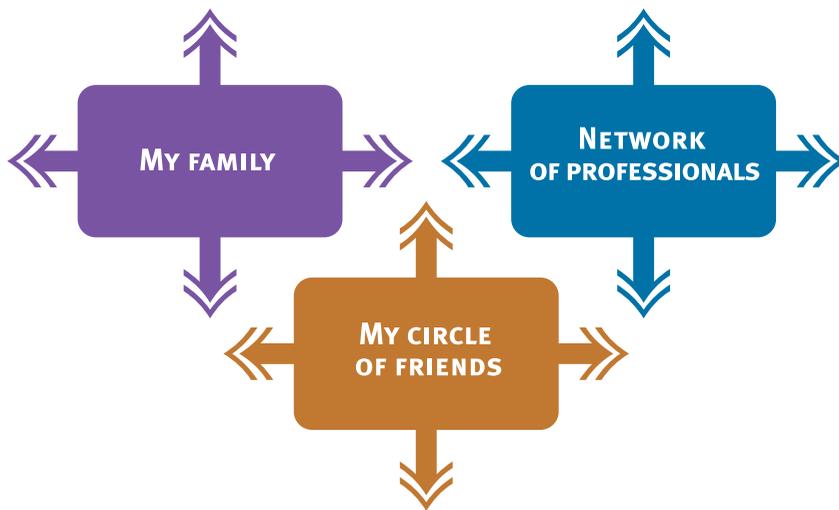
¹⁶Bouchard, Pelchat & Bouchard (1996); Bouchard, Talbot, Pelchat & Boudreault (1996).

¹⁷Collaborating refers to any actions or efforts towards fulfilling tasks and responsibilities in a spirit of sharing and mutual support.

Enriching Your Support Network

- A parent can map out the profile of his or her existing network. Use the diagram below to draw a picture of your own network: write in the people who contribute to your child's education
- Identify networking interests. (Work from a need of your own as a parent.) Here are some examples of activities that will help you enrich your network:
 - parents' leisure activities: unstructured discussions as part of community leisure activities;
 - encounters during meetings for parents of children with a diagnosed impairment, organized by service-providing organizations and community health centres;
 - involvement in parent-child activities at the daycare centre or the school.

A PICTURE OF MY SUPPORT NETWORK



- Set aside time for forming new contacts.
- Set up occasions for discussion, reflection, and adult activities.
- Establish a communication network: make your own list of people in the network.
- Provide volunteer support for the activities of other adults.
- Talk about your own successes, your wishes, and your difficulties as a parent.
- Promote and maintain ties through positive, constructive communication with significant others.
- Stay the course: stay committed to your relationships by expressing positive attitudes.

As a parent, you have access to a multitude of resources, not only in your immediate family, but also in your community. You can make connections and forge alliances with people who are available to support you in your role and your efforts to educate your child.

The strategy just described is intended mainly for parents, but it can serve as the source of ideas for professionals in their practice.

Promoting the development of an educational community

An educational community¹⁸ enables individuals to make optimum use of their expertise and their own ways of contributing to a shared, coordinated effort to carry out an educational project or reach shared goals. As educational communities, childcare services and schools aim to mobilize all their members, both those within the organization and those in the surrounding setting, by banking on exchange and the quality of relationships in fulfilling their missions as educational institutions. This way of conceiving an educational community constitutes a powerful resource for those who want to promote inclusion.

How to Develop an Educational Community

An educational community develops when those involved with it realize that they form a mini-society. It develops when a strong consensus exists around a certain number of explicit values¹⁹. It develops when people have shared interests or share a concern in their lives. It develops when the people involved believe that what they are doing is good and true and when they strive to communicate, collaborate, and cooperate. A common vision is not something that is imposed: it emerges from individuals' visions that are revealed to others and can then come together as a common vision. In this view, if the people in a community have the time to discuss their educational practices with each other and a space to do it in, they will be able to develop their own vision, which will become part of an educational project. Out of these reflections can emerge a plan for educational services or the theme for a group project. The conditions that enable individuals to develop an educational community are these:

- undertaking a joint process;
- identifying a problem to solve or a value that those involved want to promote and make public;
- working within the perspective of an educational project;
- adopting a cooperative management approach;
- fostering shared authority and working in a collaborative team with a partnership dynamic.

¹⁸Quebec: Conseil supérieur de l'éducation (1998, p. 5-15).

¹⁹Quebec: Conseil supérieur de l'éducation (1998, p. 25).



Some Methods

To achieve this, you have to keep in view certain methods and practices that need to be established to develop a dynamic educational community.

- **Plan:** Have a plan of an educational project that is to be developed in the course of the year. Good models for such projects are pedagogical approaches and models that integrate the values of inclusion and diversity. These include cooperative learning²⁰, mastery teaching²¹ and the collaborative approach²².
- **Inform:** Provide information and explanations about your project to parents and colleagues.
- **Promote:** Display the values you want to develop in your group of children or pupils.
- **Collaborate:** Link up with colleagues who share your interests; if possible, carry out joint activities with them.
- **Seek out help:** Offer parents, volunteers, and colleagues the chance to participate in projects in common.
- **Enrich yourself:** Participate in training and self-training activities that will enhance your educational practices.

Create a partnership dynamic²³

It is clearly understood by parents, childcare workers, teachers, specialists, and school administrators that the success of an inclusive approach requires an investment of adequate resources and support. In ideal circumstances, what is aimed for is integration of specialized services into regular childcare and educational facilities, so that there can be ongoing interaction between them. The traditional way of organizing services tended to favour separate systems. This way of structuring services produces undesirable effects. Different methods of operation must be envisaged to mitigate these effects. And the changes implied make it necessary to forge new relationships among individuals. Partnership and collaboration are essential elements in the success of an inclusive approach.

²⁰Abrami, Chambers, Poulsen, De Simone, D'Apollonia & Howden (1996).

²¹Hendrick Keefe (1996).

²²Saint-Laurent, Giasson, Simard, Dionne & Royer (1995).

²³Partnership refers to the integration into one's practice of decision making by consensus among partners. Working with a partnership approach implies recognition of each individual's expertise and a relationship of equality among those involved (based on Bouchard, Pelchat, & Boudreault, 1996, p. 23).



The word “partnership” is often used by professionals in the field of education to refer to efforts to draw the different groups involved in children’s education closer together. It’s a concept that has even more significance for those who work with children who have an impairment, a disability, or a handicap.

How

When viewed as an interpersonal system with which to guide management and decision making, partnership is developed by establishing new sorts of relationships among individuals, settings, and service systems. A partnership dynamic can be said to exist when:

- the competencies and expertise of all participants are respected;
- everyone involved is encouraged to participate and everyone’s participation has an effect;
- the spirit of cooperation reigns;
- management of the services allows for information sharing and aims for the making of choices as regards orientation, objectives, and needs;
- consensus-based decision making is the rule;
- the partners in the effort perceive power as a source of motivation for action;
- individuals feel responsible for their commitments and are willing to account for their actions.

Partnership does not represent actual reality for parents and professionals, but rather a process to be developed.

Owning knowledge

Among other things, the dynamic of collaboration, cooperation, and partnership contributes to eliciting the ownership of knowledge – know-how and good judgement – by individuals, and especially by parents. Owning knowledge goes father than acquiring it. It can be viewed as one of the positive products of a partnership dynamic between parents and professionals.



What Does It Mean to Own Knowledge?

Life experiences provide everyone with specific competencies that enable them to adapt, develop their independence, and run their own lives. Ownership of knowledge refers to the development of competencies associated with fulfillment of one's social role and the growth of self-confidence, among other things. Ownership of knowledge enables the individual to get actively involved in the community and to acquire know-how and good judgement. For example, the findings of research conducted on ownership of parenting knowledge shows that parents who are involved in their children's educational programs²⁴ develop parental competencies and self-confidence. Practical experience enables them to become "specialists" on their child. The idea of ownership of knowledge implies that parents are the bearers of parental competencies. It endorses the principle of acknowledgement of parents' learning potential.

Some Strategies

The idea of ownership of knowledge rests on the premise that individuals learn from interacting with each other and from the experiences they have with others. People can also learn by benefiting from the expertise and knowledge of others. In a context of the sharing of experiences between parents and childcare workers, parents and teachers, or parents and education and health-care professionals, ownership of knowledge refers to these factors:

- Developing self-knowledge by reflecting upon oneself and by reflecting on the universe.
- Developing interpersonal knowledge through exchange.
- Taking ownership of new knowledge obtained from one's partners in the educational process, by receiving information orally and in writing and observing other parents as models during parent-daycare or parent-school educational activities or during educational activities presented by professionals.
- Taking ownership of knowledge when conducting educational activities with the child by observing, making assessments with existing tools or tools supplied by professionals, and planning and carrying out actions specially suited to the child.
- Taking ownership of knowledge through one's relationship with one's network and the child's educational community, or by participating in various educational activities offered within the community. These could be offered by parents' groups, training groups for parents and so on.

The strategy for taking ownership of knowledge is principally intended for parents. Nevertheless, it can serve as the basis for ideas for childcare workers and teachers to implement in their practice.

²⁴The word "program" refers to all activities relating to a child's development, learning processes, or rehabilitation.



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CONCLUSION

An inclusive approach is more likely to bear fruit if it is supported by favourable conditions. Parent-support networks, educational communities that stand for democratic and inclusive values, and partnership-based educational relationships are fundamental conditions. Taking ownership of knowledge is another factor that contributes to the success of an inclusive approach. It can happen in the context of mutual aid and thus also lead to the creation of cooperative, collaborative, and partnership-based contacts with others. What must always be borne in mind is that ideals are never achieved; they are in constant process of being built.





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APPENDIX

Making an Informed Choice of Preschool Service

- Identify family members or other resources that can refer or advise you.
- Family members, if they have had experience with services of this kind
- Neighbours who have children and use these services
- Health-care or education professionals whom you already consult in connection with your child
- Individuals who work in these services
- Such indirect resources as directories and Web sites
- Think through the questions you will ask the people who will advise you.
- “Have you used services such as daycare centres or are you familiar with them? If so,”
- “Can you refer me to a childcare service?”
- “Do you know the names of people who work in this field?”
- “Would you know the details for contacting services or people who work in these settings?”
- Close your conversation with a word of thanks.
- Draw up a list of questions before contacting childcare services.
- “Are you accepting new enrolments?”
- “Do you have a waiting list? If so, how long would my child have to wait before being admitted?”
- “Do you take in children of all ages? If not, at what age can a child enrol?”
- “What are your age groups?”
- “What category does your service belong to?” (private, licensed or accredited by a government agency)
- “Who manages the service?” (a sponsor organization, a board of directors, one individual who heads it all up, a management team, other)
- “How many children are enrolled? How many children are in any one group?”
- “Do you receive any government subsidies or financial support?”
- “How much does it cost per week or per month for a child to attend? Are there any other costs in the course of the year?”
- “Does your childcare service favour a particular educational approach, and if so, what is it?”
- “Do you have any restrictions regarding admission of certain categories of child, for example children with a handicap?”
- “Do you have resources and support for differently challenged children or any specific expectations in connection with them?”
- “Do you have written information about your childcare service or any other information it would be useful for me to have?”
- “What do you tell people when you want to convince them of the quality of your childcare service or persuade them to choose it?”
- Close with a word of thanks and tell the person what your next step will be.
- For example, “I find what you’ve told me very interesting. I’ll talk it over with my partner and get in touch with you if we decide to follow up.”
- Contact the services you’ve identified.

- Favour warm and direct communication. For example, use positive words and phrases during your initial contact and phrase your questions clearly: “Hello, I’m really pleased to be able to speak with you. I’d like to know...”
- Adopt a positive attitude during your contact, holding your questions for later. For example, you can underscore what you find particularly interesting with comments such as, “Oh yes! I’m pleased to hear you say that...”
- Make sure the other person understands your questions clearly. For example, “I’m not sure you fully understood my question. Let me ask it again.” Or, “When I talk about..., is my question clear to you?”
- In circumstances where you are dissatisfied with the answers, don’t press the matter. However, bear your reservations in mind so that you can come back to them later. Make it clear that you would like to come back to the question. For example, “I’m not sure I’ve understood what you just told me. But let me come back to that later.” After that, resume the conversation.
- End your contact by emphasizing some of the interesting points that you noted. Then, if you intend to follow up with further steps in connection with this childcare service, specify what they are. For example, “You told me there won’t be spaces here next year. Would you mind if I got in touch with you again?”
- Make an informed choice.
- Regardless of circumstances, make sure you have choices.

Say you are interested in receiving the service and ask to visit it in person before making a choice.

- Get ready for your visits to childcare service providers.

Visit more than one such service and more than one kind of service. Keep your list of questions in mind.

- If the services you have visited only partly meet your expectations, there are many good reasons to leave the possibility of making use of one of them open nevertheless.
- When applicable, make your choice with your partner, so that both of you feel involved. It will be beneficial for both people to be involved to the extent possible throughout the whole process.
- Given that any parent needs several preschool services to meet parental needs, it’s important for you to think in terms of a network. That is think in terms of more than a childcare service. For example, in situations where you have to work on the weekend, it will be more suitable to make use of a home-based childcare service. On the other hand, for regular weekday use, you can favour attendance at a daycare centre.



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