University of Manitoba
Faculty of Education’s Twelfth Annual Graduate Student Symposium
Proposal for Presentation:
Challenges and Rewards of Inclusive Instruction
in Adult and Postsecondary Education
S. Diane Kenney, BA, MEd (candidate)

Background and Importance
The number of students with special needs is increasing every year and they are, through the use of differentiated instruction and institutional supports in public school, moving into the adult and post-secondary educational institutions. The legal and social responsibility to provide meaningful education to all students is only part of the equation. Inclusion requires a shift in attitudes and the commitment to move from a system of knowledge transfer to one of knowledge application. Incorporating inclusive methods of instruction can be accomplished on an individual level, but requires institutional support and the use of technology in order to accomplish widespread transformation. The rewards of this shift are experienced by all participants in the process and enrich everyone. There are challenges, but with training, creativity and support, individuals and institutions can provide the education that all students deserve to experience.

Purpose
The objective of this research was to discover if the teaching strategies that have been so successful for exceptional students in secondary schools are being adopted in the adult and post-secondary arenas, and if not, why? Because postsecondary institutions are places where innovation and improvement are born, it is logical that truly inclusive practices be applied, not just in one area of expertise, but throughout the institution. Instead, the research of Johnson, Stodden, Emanuel, Luecking, & Mack (2002) “[indicated] that institutions of higher education fail to effectively implement evidence-based practices in teaching and serving students with disabilities” (Katsiynnis, Zhang, Landmark, & Reber, 2009, p. 36). One college graduate and self-advocate with disabilities wrote:

I am struck by the fact that, in the body of work that describes students with disabilities in postsecondary education, there is a substantial focus and reliance on accommodating the disability, the things that are “wrong” with the student, but little or nothing on how
college faculty can adjust the way they teach to better reach the increasingly diverse student body. (Behling & Hart, 2008, p. 109)

Canada has been a leader in the field of special education and rights for students with disabilities and special needs, but at the post-secondary level the overriding commonality has been to provide accommodations through the establishment or expansion of the Student Services office. It is through Student Services that students receive the assistance they need, whether a scribe, a reader, or assistive technologies. The responsibility of the instructors to implement inclusive instructional methods is not mandatory.

Methods

The methodology for this paper was literary research. Books and journal articles based on the keywords accommodations, differentiated instruction, postsecondary education, disabilities, and Canada were searched and reviewed. The parameters of the search were that the information had to be current (published within the last five years), and that the books and articles were written and reviewed by scholars and their peers.

Findings

The findings suggest that in Canada, post-secondary institutions rely heavily on institutional accommodations rather than implementing inclusive instructional methods. Where this type of instruction is happening, it is taking place at the individual level rather than on a broad basis, and because of this ad hoc approach, students who are very capable of contributing and succeeding in adult and post-secondary education are missing opportunities for learning that are a Constitutional right. A paradigm shift from an accommodation model to an inclusion model is necessary and achievable. As this shift is made, institutions, educators and learners will create an environment of transformative learning where the reward is a process that is collaborative, enriching, and on-going for all participants.
References


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