

**EDUCATION FOR ALL IN THE CARIBBEAN: ASSESSMENT 2000  
MONOGRAPH SERIES**

**Series Editor: Lynda Quamina-Aiyejina**

**The Regular Classroom as Battleground for Inclusive Special Needs  
Education  
An Assessment Of Options Of Special Needs Education In The Commonwealth  
Caribbean**

**Sijtze Bergsma**

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## FOREWORD

*Education for All in the Caribbean: Assessment 2000* is a remarkable output, which is the culmination of intensive collaborative efforts between the countries of the Caribbean sub-region, the Regional Advisory Technical Group and the EFA Forum Secretariat, and relevant agencies and institutions.

The Country Reports, Monograph Series, and Case Studies highlight and pinpoint, in an extremely effective manner, some of the issues and concerns that drive education policy and action in the Caribbean. At the same time, the documentation presents a balanced and informed overview of the rich and varied educational and cultural experience of the sub-region; a knowledge which is critical to the understanding of the unfolding social and economic developments.

UNESCO is pleased to have been associated with this endeavour, particularly through our regional office in Kingston, Jamaica which, as co-ordinator of the Regional Advisory Group for the Caribbean Sub-region, was integrally involved in every aspect of the exercise. We look forward to continued collaboration with the Caribbean on activities of a mutually rewarding nature as the consequences and implications of the EFA Assessment become manifest.

Colin Power  
Deputy Director-General for Education  
UNESCO

## SERIES INTRODUCTION

At Jomtien in 1990, member states of the United Nations adopted the *Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs* and created the International Consultative Forum on Education for All (EFA Forum). One decade later, the EFA Forum embarked on an assessment of this initiative, intended to assist member states in examining their education provisions to inform the formulation of policy. Once the Caribbean EFA Regional Advisory Group had embarked seriously on the assessment, it was quickly realised that it would be difficult to capture, in any one place, an assessment of all that had transpired in education in the Caribbean during the period 1990-1999. Moreover, the technical guidelines constrained assessors to specifics within quantitative and qualitative frames. However, because it was felt that education in the Caribbean is too dynamic to be circumscribed, the idea of a more wide-ranging monograph series was conceived.

Researchers, education practitioners, and other stakeholders in education were invited to contribute to the series. Our expectations were that the response would be quite moderate, given the short time-frame within which we had to work. Instead, we were overwhelmed by the response, both in terms of the number of enthusiastic contributors and the range of topics represented.

Caribbean governments and peoples have invested in the *hardware* for education--buildings, furniture, equipment; in the *software*, in terms of parent support and counselling services; and they have attended to *inputs* like books and other teaching/learning resources. They have wrestled with ways to evaluate, having gone through rounds of different national examinations, and modifications of ways to assess both primary and secondary education.

But, as the efforts to complete the country reports show, it has been more difficult to assess the impacts, if we take the eventual aim of education as improving the quality of life--we have had mixed successes. That the sub-region has maintained relative peace despite its violent past and contemporary upheavals may be cited as a measure of success; that the environment is threatened in several ways may be one of the indicators of how chequered the success has been.

Writers in the monograph/case study series have been able to document, in descriptive and analytic modes, some of the attempts, and to capture several of the impacts. That this series of monographs on Education for All in the Caribbean has been written, edited, and published in nine months (from first call for papers to issue of the published titles) is itself an indication of the impact of education, in terms of human capability and capacity.

It reflects, too, the interest in education of a number of stakeholders without whom the series would not have been possible. Firstly, the work of the writers is acknowledged. All worked willingly, hard, well, and, in most cases, without material reward. The sterling contribution of the editor, who identified writers and stayed with them to the end of the process, is also recognised, as is the work of the printer, who came through on time despite the severe time constraints. The financial contribution of the following agencies also made the EFA assessment process and the publication of the monograph/case study series possible: Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), Commonwealth of Learning (COL), Department for International Development (DFID), International Labour Organization (ILO), Sub-Regional Headquarters for the Caribbean of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), The University of the West Indies, Cave Hill; the World Bank, and the UN country teams based in Barbados, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago.

We invite you to peruse individual titles or the entire series as, together, we assess Caribbean progress in education to date, and determine strategies to correct imbalances and sustain positive impacts, as we move towards and through the first decade of the new millennium.

Claudia Harvey

UNESCO Representative and Coordinator, Regional Technical Advisory Group (RTAG)  
EFA in the Caribbean: Assessment 2000

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

EFA	Education for All
GSAT	Grade Six Achievement Test
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OECS	Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States
UNESCO	United Nation Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UWI	The University of the West Indies
WCEFA	World Conference on Education for All
WHO	World Health Organization

## ABSTRACT

“Education for all,” or inclusive education, appears to be, on the one hand, a new educational philosophy aimed at creating an educational environment conducive to all special learning needs of students in primary education but, on the other hand, in its implementation, it is also an innovative educational strategy with many consequences and implications for the existing education structure at all educational levels. This monograph explores the possibilities of the implementation of inclusive special needs education as educational philosophy and innovative strategy in the Commonwealth Caribbean. This exploration is based on prevalence data of special needs students in the primary and special education system; data on service delivery to special needs students; and the availability of teachers both for special education and for a support delivery system. On the basis of these data, it looks at the different implications for the primary and special education systems. If inclusive special needs education for all children is to be implemented, it appears that a paradigm shift in primary education from mostly curriculum-oriented education to a more pupil-oriented education is necessary and, in special education, from a pupil-oriented education to a more support- and resource-oriented education.

The exploration leads to the conclusion that implementation of inclusive special needs education would be feasible if there was a support and resource system in place for the primary education system. The most feasible model for full implementation of inclusive special needs education is the use of the principle of placing special needs children in the least restrictive environment within the framework of a continuum of educational services; the existing special education system should be part of this continuum of educational services. Some of these services already exist in Commonwealth Caribbean countries. In order to develop and implement such a non-segregated, inclusive special needs education system, a comprehensive approach and strategy, with a great deal of ingenuity and persistence on the part of all those involved, is necessary, especially the “active agents” in this process, namely, the management of the schools, the teachers, and parents who should be part of the decision-making process.

## INTRODUCTION

Most of the countries in the Commonwealth Caribbean have adopted the educational philosophy of Education for All (EFA), which was articulated at the “World Conference on Education for All” (WCEFA) held in Jomtien, Thailand, 5-9 March, 1990. These countries “recognize that the greatest hope for the future lies in the full development of the potential of its children” (Trinidad and Tobago. National Task Force on Education, 1994, Sec. 3.30.1). They accept the principle of development for *all*, including children with special needs. Education should enable the special needs child to overcome or minimize the effects of the disability and develop to the fullest potential. At the same time, education should prepare all others in the society to accept and relate positively with the disabled. These countries also recognize that most of the children with special needs are not to be found in the special education system but in the regular mainstream school system, and that this regular school system lacks adequate provisions and support services.

Intensive discussions have taken place in the last decade in all countries in the Caribbean region, at all levels, with regard to EFA, integration, mainstreaming, inclusive education, or special needs education. Economic developments and new thinking about the nature of disability and special educational needs, initiated and stimulated by two world conferences, the WCEFA and the “World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality,” held in Salamanca, Spain, 7-10 June 1994, have contributed greatly to these discussions:

- Grenada - *Education Policy Document*, 1992: “Government will continue with its commitment to children who have special needs” and “Children with special needs will be integrated as far as possible in ordinary classes.”
- Trinidad and Tobago - *Education Policy Paper (1993–2003)*: “Mainstreaming of children with special needs except for severe cases” and “For some special needs students the mainstream schools contribute more to the destruction of their self-esteem and to their feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness than to literacy and numeracy.”
- Jamaica - *Five Year Development Plan 1990-1995*: “Ensure equal opportunity for all children in Grades 1-9 to receive high quality education following a common curriculum” and “Improve access to special education at the primary and secondary levels.”

In addition to this, countries are forced to rethink their educational policies in light of the rapid development of information and communication technology (ICT) and its impact on education in general, and special needs education in particular. Hence, what is emerging in Commonwealth Caribbean countries is a much clearer focus on an educational reform agenda: the provision of high quality education for all students, including the students with special needs. In most Commonwealth Caribbean countries, consensus exists with regard to the pressing need to accord priority to education, especially against the background of the uncertainties with regard to the economic future of the countries on the one hand, and the rapid economic, technological, social, and political global changes on the other.

No single model of service delivery is best for all students, including the students with special needs. This monograph explores a comprehensive, integral system of a continuum of educational services that is affordable as well as effective and efficient, in the context of the existing educational systems in the Commonwealth Caribbean.

## CHAPTER 1

### Prevalence of Children with Special Needs in the Commonwealth Caribbean

Some countries in the Commonwealth Caribbean have carried out surveys in order to obtain data on the prevalence of children with special needs. Accurate prevalence figures are difficult to obtain because, for the most part, these figures are variable and dependent upon trends in classification, definition, and the provision of services. General estimates of the World Health Organization (WHO) suggest that about 10% of each population has special needs. The results of the surveys conducted show some diversity:

- In Jamaica, a survey conducted by the government indicated a prevalence of 8.27% of children with special needs, while one by M. J. Thornburn (1993) showed a prevalence of 9.4%.
- In Trinidad and Tobago, a survey estimated a prevalence of disability of 16.1%.
- In Dominica, a survey of exceptional children in school revealed that 39% of children had learning problems (Fontaine, 1994).

The use of the terms “special needs,” “disability,” and “learning problems” respectively shows the difficulties in reliability of these figures.

#### 1.1. Prevalence of Children with Special Needs

On the basis of WHO’s estimate of 10% and the enrolment figures for each country, it is possible to get some global idea of the situation of special needs in Commonwealth Caribbean countries. The enrolment figures which are used in Table 1 are the enrolment figures for primary schools. The secondary school enrolment figures were not used because relevant records on the presence of children with special needs in secondary schools were not available (Hall & Figueroa, 1998). Column 2 shows the figure corresponding to 10% of primary school enrolment, while Columns 3 and 4 show the number of children with mild/moderate and profound special needs respectively.

In the existing educational system, most of the children with mild and moderate special needs are to be found in the regular primary school system, while most of the children with profound special needs are to be found in the parallel, separate special education system. It is widely accepted that approximately 1% of the children enrolled in the primary school system have a severe or profound special need, to the extent that primary schools find it extremely difficult to cope with such students. In a negative sense, these children are a burden to general primary class teachers, vulnerable to failure in school and, often, to ridicule from classmates.

From the data in Table 1 (Column 3), it can be stated that in the entire Commonwealth Caribbean, approximately 75,000 children with special needs are enrolled in the primary school system and should be served by the system. However, it is not known how many of these children are actually attending school and benefiting from the system. The *Education Policy Paper 1993-1995* of the Trinidad and Tobago Ministry of Education (1994) states:

Research further reveals that 13.1% of the special needs children are attending no school at all; 5.8% were at pre-school; 5.1% were attending special schools and 6.7% other facilities; while 67.2% were in primary and secondary schools in which there are no special education provision for them. (3.30.6)

However, the approximately 75,000 children who are at risk can be found in the regular mainstream school-system: “For some special needs students the mainstream schools contribute more to the destruction of their self-esteem and to their feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness than to literacy

and numeracy” (3.30.7). The other 8,000 plus children (Column 3) with profound special needs should be found in the special education schools in the respective countries.

**Table 1. Commonwealth Caribbean – Prevalence of Children with Special Needs**

	<b>Enrolment Primary (5-11 yrs.)</b>	<b>Special Needs</b>	<b>Mild/Moderate</b>	<b>Profound</b>
Antigua & Barbuda*	10,965	1,096	986	110
The Bahamas	35,691	3,569	3,212	357
Barbados	31,100	3,110	2,799	311
Belize	41,586	4,159	3,743	415
British Virgin Islands*	2,595	260	234	26
Dominica*	14,920	1,492	1,343	149
Grenada*	22,423	2,242	2,018	224
Guyana	118,215	11,822	10,640	1,182
Jamaica**	319,821	31,982	28,784	3,198
Montserrat*	1,548	155	139	16
St. Kitts & Nevis*	6,912	691	622	69
St. Lucia*	32,290	3,229	2,906	323
St. Vincent & the Grenadines*	24,134	2,413	2,172	241
Trinidad & Tobago	179,497	17,950	16,155	1,795
<b>Total</b>	<b>841,697</b>	<b>84,170</b>	<b>75,753</b>	<b>8,417</b>

\* Enrolment 1992/1993; *Source*: OECS Education Indicators.

\*\* Enrolment 1997/1998; *Source*: Economic and Social Survey Jamaica 1998.

Enrolment 1992/1993; *Source*: Needs assessment special education 1995.

The actual educational situation in the respective countries is not as rigid as it appears on the basis of the available data. Some mainstream schools admit severe special needs children due to a variety of plausible reasons, and some special education schools have some mild and/or moderate special needs children within their system.

## **1.2. Children Served in Special Education**

Traditionally, disabled, handicapped, or special needs children received their education in a separate system; this was considered as an expression of the “care” for students with special needs. Table 2 shows the number of children served in the separate special education system in the year 1994-1995 in Commonwealth Caribbean countries. The second column of Table 2 also shows the number of children to be served according to Column 4 of Table 1. Although there will be some

differences between the enrolment for the years 1992-1993 and 1994-1995, the global picture will not be significantly different.

**Table 2. Commonwealth Caribbean – Number of Children with Special Needs Served in Special Education Schools.**

	<b>Total Served</b>	<b>To be Served</b>	<b>Percentage Served</b>
Antigua & Barbuda	62	110	56
The Bahamas	n.a.	356	
Barbados	193	311	62
Belize	n.a.	415	
British Virgin Islands	9	26	34
Dominica	47	149	31
Grenada	155	224	69
Guyana	393	1,182	33
Jamaica*	2,226	3,198	70
Montserrat	11	15	73
St. Kitts & Nevis	78	69	113
St. Lucia	141	323	43
St. Vincent & the Grenadines	132	241	54
Trinidad & Tobago	n.a.	1,794	
<b>Total</b>		<b>8,471</b>	<b>58</b>

*Source:* Needs assessment special education 1995.

\*Source: Economic and Social Survey Jamaica 1998. (2,226 students are served in public schools, 2,318 in private institutions)

n.a.: not available.

Table 2 shows that four countries serve between 30-50%, six countries serve between 50-75%, and one country serves more than 75% of the special needs children to be served in the separate, parallel special education school system. The average percentage of children served on the basis of the available data is 58%. One country is serving more children in the special education system than need to be served. This might mean that more mild to moderate children are included in that system, when only the more severe special needs students should be included.

Some countries have long waiting lists. Sometimes, countries have a home-based stimulation programme either through the special education school or through community-based programmes. Several countries have started to mainstream the blind and visually impaired children in the primary,

secondary, and tertiary school system. With other categories of special needs children, mainstreaming takes place incidentally.

### 1.3. Trained Teachers Available for Special Needs Education

On the basis of the total teacher posts available in the existing special education system in a country, and the number of teachers who have been trained as special education teachers and who are working in the special education system (and not in the regular education system), it is possible for each country to determine the general need for trained teachers in the area of special needs education in such a segregated system. Table 3 tries to give an overview of the need for qualified special needs education teachers as well as some indication of the need for resource or support teachers in the primary school system. Jamaica, in its *Five Year Development Plan 1990-1995* (1991), determines this figure by adding one support teacher for every 480 pupils. Based on the enrolment figures in Table 1, the number of resource and/or support teachers per country can be determined.

**Table 3. Commonwealth Caribbean – Quantitative Needs for Trained Special Needs Teachers**

	<b>Trained Sp. Ed. Teachers</b>	<b>Total Teaching Posts</b>	<b>Need for Spec. Ed. Teachers</b>	<b>Need for Support Prim. Ed. Teachers</b>
Antigua & Barbuda	5	14	9	22
The Bahamas	n.a.	n.a.		74
Barbados	17	28	11	64
Belize	n.a.	n.a.		86
British Virgin Islands	n.a.	n.a.		5
Dominica	4	8	4	31
Grenada	15	20	5	46
Guyana	15	37	22	246
Jamaica*	142	234	92	666
Montserrat	2	3	1	3
St. Kitts & Nevis	8	11	3	14
St. Lucia	17	36	19	67
St. Vincent & the Grenadines	11	20	9	50
Trinidad & Tobago	41	113	72	373
<b>Total</b>			<b>247</b>	<b>1,747</b>

*Source:* Needs assessment special education 1995.

\**Source:* Economic and Social Survey Jamaica 1998.

n.a.: not available.

Although the figures cannot be used in an absolute sense, they make it very clear that there is a great need for trained special needs education teachers at all levels of the system. If a country's policy is that profound special needs children should receive education in a special education setting, then more than 200 teachers are needed. If all the schools in the Commonwealth Caribbean are to implement a support system with, for example, itinerant and resource services based on 1 support teacher to 480 students, then at least 1,700 teachers are necessary for this purpose.

With the existing output of teacher education programmes in the Commonwealth Caribbean, and in light of the quantitative need for these teachers, different modalities should be explored in order to achieve the number of trained special needs and support teachers necessary for the possible implementation of educational services to special needs children. In terms of the qualitative need for these special needs programmes, it is clear that a reform in teacher education programmes is necessary, especially with regard to serving the mild to moderate special needs students in the regular mainstream system, many of whom now leave the primary mainstream system with insufficient or no literacy and numeracy skills.

## CHAPTER 2

### Special Needs Education

In the Caribbean region, special schools have for decades been the only educational institutions where children with special needs were able to receive adequate training and education. In these schools, expertise was made available for the development and education of children with a diversity of handicapping conditions. Disability was regarded as an individual physical, sensorial, cognitive, or multiple handicapping condition that could be remedied, rehabilitated, or even cured. On the basis of this axiom, a parallel, separate system for special education was developed, enlarged, and refined in the individual countries. A wide range of students with special needs was able to receive special care and education in these schools. Therefore, this separate, parallel special education system, with its concentrated knowledge, expertise, and facilities used to be seen as an expression of the most optimal care for students with special needs. New prevailing views worldwide on education are that students with special educational needs should be educated together with their peers in regular educational settings.

#### **2.1. Terminology: Integration; Mainstreaming; Inclusive Education or Special Needs Education; the Least Restrictive Environment**

The last decades have seen the creation a new terminology with regard to the education of children with disabilities or handicapping conditions, or who are at risk:

##### **Integration and mainstreaming**

*Integration* is a term that is often associated with the concept of *mainstreaming*. These terms reflect the attempts to place students with special needs in the mainstream of regular education. Integration is often considered as re-integration after a period of segregation, or as a way and means to avoid segregation. Re-integration has often resulted in attempts to adapt an existing mainstream curriculum to meet the students' special needs, but which in the end provides a watered-down variant of a regular school curriculum. Mainstreaming is considered by Hallahan and Kaufman (1997) as the practice of placing students with disabilities in classes and schools with their non-disabled peers. These placements can be for all or part of the day and for all or a few subjects. However, it is assumed that special education retains the main and primary responsibility for students with disabilities. Mainstreaming is considered by Turnbull, Turnbull, Shank, and Leal (1999) as the educational arrangement of placing handicapped students in regular classes with their non-handicapped peers to the maximum extent appropriate.

Experience with mainstreaming, for the most part, has shown that it has been ineffective because:

- in order to be mainstreamed, students mostly have to earn their way into the regular classroom;
- many students are required to meet the same standards as their non-disabled peers;
- most students are expected to learn in the mainstream environment without additional support services;
- the general educators, although receptive, are not prepared enough to deal with the more complex learning problems. For many educators and parents mainstreaming provides too little and, often, too late.

##### **Inclusive education or special needs education**

*Inclusive education* is an education system that includes a large diversity of students, and diversifies education to such an extent that it can meet the individual learning needs of all students. It

means that all the students, including the ones who are disabled or at risk, receive all their instruction in a general education setting and, if necessary, support services come to the student; the student does not go to the support service. For example, special education services come to the student through a support, a resource, or a master teacher; students are no longer referred to a segregated system. Hallahan and Kaufman (1997) suggest that general education, not special education, should assume primary responsibility for students with disabilities. Therefore, full inclusion could mean the total elimination of special education.

Partial inclusion means that students receive most of their instruction in general education settings, but may be “pulled-out” to another instructional setting when it is deemed appropriate to their individual needs. In other words, inclusive education is the provision of appropriate, high quality education for all students in regular schools, including the special needs students. *Special needs education* is a synonym for inclusive education, an education system that seeks to provide quality basic education for every child and adult based on each individual learning need.

### **The least restrictive environment**

The principle of the *least restrictive environment* describes a process by which students with disabilities are to be placed in educational settings that are consistent with their individual educational needs (Hardiman, Drew, & Egan, 1996). They continue: “the intent of the least restrictive environment is to educate students with disabilities with their non-disabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate.” This leaves the possibility open for more restrictive, segregated settings like, for example, special education. At the same time, it promotes full inclusion, when and where possible.

Based on the existing educational development and culture, the educational infrastructure, and the limited human and financial resources, it seems that full inclusive education in the Commonwealth Caribbean situation is not (yet) a feasible option. However, within this context, the principle of the least restrictive environment seems to have more potential and perspective (see also Chapter 4). Implementing the principle of the least restrictive environment has an innovative and qualitative impact on regular education and, at the same time, it mobilizes the knowledge, expertise, experience, and skills with regards to special needs children to such an extent that these children, as well as the regular system, will obtain maximum benefit from it. The principle of the least restrictive environment does not exclude special education, but includes it in the continuum of educational services. In the Commonwealth Caribbean, special education, at this particular moment, is one of the main resources of knowledge, expertise, and skills with regard to special needs children and, therefore, it is most important to: (a) be able to teach the most profound and severe special needs children, and (b) make a support service for regular education possible.

## **2.2. Prerequisites for Special Needs Education**

Realizing inclusive or special needs education depends on many factors outside and inside the school. The following conditions can be identified as some of the main facilitating factors for special needs education:

### **Society**

Inclusive or special needs education should be part of an encompassing development in society, in which the concept of disability and the position of people with disabilities and/or special needs are changing. In this perspective, persons with special needs should be seen as citizens who have rights within the society as a whole, and no longer should they be seen primarily in terms of their need for special care and treatment; the last to be treated for reasons of efficiency and convenience in special settings. Regardless of special need (handicap or disability), everybody should be treated as an integral member of society. The special services necessary should be provided within the framework of the social, educational, health, and other services available to all members of society. Without a solid inclusion-oriented society, inclusive schools are impossible. Inclusion in education should be considered as one of the many aspects of inclusion in society.

## **Government policy**

A major task for the government is to create adequate conditions for the implementation of inclusive or special needs education. Without sufficient government involvement, and without the government playing a leading role in promoting legislation, giving financial support, and developing policies, inclusive education will only receive lip-service. A clear, comprehensive, and conclusive policy statement may act as a catalyst to all stakeholders in education: policymakers, principals, teachers, parents, unions, non-government organizations, referring agencies, and other professionals.

## **Educational reform**

Schools and, therefore, principals, teachers, and parents are the active agents in the process of developing and implementing plans for inclusive or special needs education. Inclusive education depends heavily on how schools organize their education and what teachers do in their classrooms. If the uniqueness of every child is the central focus of the school system, then finding manageable ways to meet those specific, individual needs is the main responsibility of the regular classroom teacher. Inclusion is not just an issue of placement of a special needs student in the regular classroom setting, it means both innovation and changes in regular schools as well as in special education schools.

Inclusion, education for all, means a curriculum for all. This does not mean that all the students do the same work, at the same time, in the same way, or at the same pace. It means matching the right instruction and the right activities with the special needs of the children. This means, too, that the role of the teacher will be different; the emphasis in their delivery of education will be more on the differences between the students. Consequently, a flexible, heterogeneous grouping with multilevel instruction should be the key factors in this new approach for the teachers.

Although the emphasis in the educational reform will be on regular education, special education also needs to change. Consequently, the role of the special education teacher and other professionals working in the special education schools will change (see Section 3.2.3). The focus of the inclusive, special needs approach is:

- to support the regular mainstream school system, that is, the management, the regular classroom teacher and others involved in the teaching process. It should be part of a total school-wide reform resulting in some fundamental changes of policy, philosophy, structure, organization, curriculum, the instructional process, and the management of resources of the regular school. A decisive factor in making schools more inclusive is an attitude change on the part of the school management and the teachers. The main message in this attitude change should be that a regular teacher feels a moral and social commitment, and is competent and equipped enough to provide education to students with special needs, making maximum use of the resources that are made available. In order to achieve this attitude change, pre-service and inservice training should be provided, not only for teachers working in the programme but also for principals and other personnel involved.
- to make a paradigm shift in service models for students with special needs, from the traditional “diagnostic/prescriptive assessment - referral – placement model” to a support service delivery model with a central focus on:
  - the teacher and the classroom and not on the student; the teacher is the spider in the web with regard to curriculum, lesson planning, instructional strategies, utilizing technology, and monitoring programmes;
  - the teaching and learning factors and not on the assessment of a student;
  - attempts by the teacher to resolve the learning difficulties and problems without, or with, resource and support services;
  - the strategies for teachers and not on prescriptive, individual student programmes; heterogeneous grouping and multilevel instruction are key elements in the strategy development of the teachers;

- an adaptive and supportive classroom environment and not on excluding students; the more students are considered to be outsiders, the more difficult it is to realize inclusive education.

It should empower the teachers in the regular schools to take responsibility for the educational progress of all students in the class, and not an exclusive group for the purpose of the Common Entrance Examination or the Grade Six Achievement Test. Teachers' attitudes and expectations have a significant impact on a student's self-esteem, self-concept and, therefore, school-success.

### **Teacher education reform**

A "new-look" teacher education, in which awareness and sensitivity to special needs are an integral and mandatory part of all teacher training, is a key factor for teacher education reform. Such teacher education reform is indispensable if teachers are to learn to identify and cater to the special learning needs of all children, both disabled as well as non-disabled. Therefore, every teacher should be required to master a core curriculum of expertise and skills related to special needs education; learning how to deal with the differences between children in the classroom and with multilevel instruction. Inservice training should be based on continuous, school-based, teacher development programmes involving the whole school, rather than one-shot training courses, which have proved largely ineffective.

## CHAPTER 3

### A Continuum of Educational Services and the Least Restrictive Environment

#### 3.1. The Existing Education Structure

The traditional educational structure in Western as well as Caribbean countries consists of primary, secondary, and tertiary education, and separate and apart, the special education system catering for students between the ages of 4-20 years. In addition, the special education schools have traditionally been categorized as follows:

- schools for the blind and visually impaired
- schools for the deaf and hearing impaired
- schools for the mentally handicapped
- schools for the physically handicapped
- schools for combinations of these disabilities and the multiple handicapped.

Schools for children with learning difficulties and/or emotional disturbances do not exist, although different countries have associations and institutions which deal with this category of children. Several countries have high percentages of children with literacy problems. Very often, these literacy problems are treated as a reading problem while, at the same time, there can be many underlying causes other than just a reading problem. Too often, an adequate diagnosis is lacking, hence the strategy for a right approach is inadequate.

#### 3.2. A Framework of a Continuum of Educational Services

As stated earlier, in most Commonwealth Caribbean countries there is consensus about the priority to be accorded to education. This consensus exists against the background of the uncertainties with regard to the economic future of the countries, and the rapid economic, social, and political global changes. New economic and technological developments demand an acceleration in the country's human capital development in order to ensure compatibility. New moral- and social-based philosophies demand innovation in the educational structure in order to implement EFA in general and special needs education in particular.

No single model of service delivery is best for all students with special needs in any country. In several countries, different models have been developed for special needs education. However, a number of comparative studies show that some practices may work in one country but may not work as well in another country in a different context. Therefore, copying a model from a Western or African country to the Caribbean may not produce any benefit.

Evaluation studies on the effects of special needs education show a wide range of outcomes, from promising to not promising at all. Studies show that it is not a matter of money spent, classroom size, or time spent that correlates strongly with student performance, but the effective use of teaching methods and instruction applied in a specific learning context. Therefore, special needs education is very much dependent on the teachers' skills in applying the most effective teaching instruction to match the special needs of the students.

##### 3.2.1. An organizational structure for special needs education

In order to make inclusive and special needs education work in the Caribbean context, one has to look at the existing structures in both regular primary (and secondary) education and special education. If the central focus of a school system is to meet the unique needs of each child, then the school should

be totally pupil oriented instead of curriculum oriented. In addition to this, existing know-how, expertise, skills, and experience should be made available to give more support to the regular classroom teacher, in order to meet the individual needs of all children, including the special needs children. Ultimately, the educational needs of all children should be met in the primary (or secondary) school system, with a strong support system for these schools. This may be utopia; the existing daily practice in schools is different.

Based on the moral and social arguments; the data in Tables 1, 2, and 3; and given the limitations of financial and personnel resources (see Sections 1.2 and 1.3), a model could be developed of a comprehensive, flexible, un-segregated, integral structure of a continuum of educational services. Special education is part of that integral structure of services. Given the aforementioned limitations, the most profound and severe special needs children (see Column 4 of Table 1) could continue to visit the special education schools, but should not be excluded from the same continuum of educational services and, therefore, not excluded from placement in other possible educational services.

Within this framework, the leading principle should be the principle of placing students in the *least restrictive environment*, that is, the best and most effective placement for an individual student with special needs in a continuum of educational alternatives. Of course, always within the perspective of being able to attain integration goals. All children are enrolled in the regular primary (or secondary) school system. In order to facilitate the special needs children, whether slow learners; children with reading difficulties; or children with other mild cognitive, sensorial, or physical disabilities, the regular primary (and secondary) school system needs the services of support facilities. This prevents referral to special education. In such a structure, it would only be possible for a child to be referred to a special education setting if all the educational support services were not expected to work adequately.

The length of time spent in such a special education setting is undetermined; a placement no longer has a permanent character. At any time after extensive assessment, a student can be placed in a different setting of the educational services, however, always in the least restrictive environment. A non-segregated, flexible, organizational structure of special needs education with a continuum of educational services--a menu of educational services--could have the following options:

1. regular class, with no support service
2. regular class, in-class support service for teacher and/or pupil, itinerant service
3. regular class, pull-out support, resource room service
4. regular class, part-time special class service
5. special self-contained class, part-time regular class
6. special self-contained class, full-time
7. special school part-time, part-time regular school
8. special school full-time.

#### Regular class, with no support service

The special needs student is taught in a regular classroom; the teacher handles the special needs student without support service.

#### Regular class, in-class support service for teacher and/or pupil, itinerant service

The special needs student is taught in a regular classroom; support is provided inside the classroom by an itinerant teacher.

#### Regular class, pull-out support, resource room service

The special needs student is taught in a regular classroom; support is provided outside the classroom by a resource teacher on a temporary basis.

#### Regular class, part-time special class service

The special needs student is taught in a regular classroom; support is provided outside the classroom by a resource or special education teacher on a temporary or permanent basis. The student receives part-time special class service for a diagnosed problem, for example, reading.

#### Special self-contained class, part-time regular class

The special needs student is placed permanently in the special self-contained class, for example, for reading, writing, and mathematics; however, for all the other subjects the student participates in the regular class.

#### Special self-contained class, full-time

The special needs student is placed permanently, and on a full-time basis, in a self-contained class; a classroom being part of the infrastructure of the regular school.

#### Special school part-time, part-time regular school

The special needs student is placed, on a part-time basis, in a special school, for example, for his reading, writing, or mathematics problems; however, for all the other subjects the student participates in the regular school. This option might occur when a regular school is unable to create a special class. Another possibility is when a student receives very specialized assistance at a special school, for example, a hearing-impaired child who receives special language development skills.

#### Special school full-time

The special needs student is taught full-time at a special school. These schools often provide very highly specialized programmes to meet the needs of these students. The schools are equipped with highly concentrated expertise, skills, and facilities. The disadvantages are the costs per student; often, the travelling distance; and the lack of opportunity to be with other students who do not have special needs for at least some part of the day.

These variants in educational services form the continuum of educational services with, on one side of the continuum, the regular classroom not needing support service and, on the other side, the full-time special school and, in between, a range of flexible educational intervention possibilities responding to, and matching with, the special needs of the children. The main criterion for placement in this structure is the special need of each individual child. Based on extensive diagnostic information, a child is placed in the *least restrictive environment*.

This menu of educational services is a flexible structure and can be adapted to any situation. One school situation leads more to a combination of (1) + (2), while another school situation asks for a combination of (1) + (5). However, a variety of combinations are possible. This depends on, among other things:

- the geographical situation; schools situated in urban areas have more combination possibilities than schools in the rural areas
- the infrastructure of a school and availability of physical space
- the availability of trained staff for itinerant services, resource room services, and special self-contained classes services
- the distance of special school facilities from primary schools
- the individual special needs of students of individual schools.

A similar individual need of two students at different schools can lead to different educational services. A child with a reading problem can be treated through itinerant services at one school;

through resource room services at another school; or through special self-contained class service part-time at yet another school.

### **3.2.2. Primary education and special needs education**

Inclusive or special needs education means a new school agenda, educational innovation and, therefore, changes in the primary school system.(also in the secondary school system), from more curriculum-oriented education to more pupil-oriented education; an education that is based on the differences between students and which expects that teachers will embrace and work with these differences. Schools have to be made more comprehensive in order to cater for a wider variety of students. The attitude of the principal, teachers, and parents plays a decisive role in making schools inclusive and, therefore, catering for special needs children.

In order for inclusive, special needs education to operate optimally, the following provisions must be met:

- adequate support and services for the teacher and the student
- well-designed individualized education programmes
- professional development for all teachers, both general and special education teachers
- time for teachers to plan, meet, create, and evaluate students together
- reduced class size based on the severity of the student needs
- collaboration among parents, teachers, and administrators
- sufficient funding.

This means that a programme of reform and re-education is needed:

- To reform the regular curricula in primary (and secondary) education in order to meet all the needs of special needs students; to make meaningful participation possible by all students, regardless of their individual characteristics; a common curriculum for all students which responds to a variety of learning situations and provides for multilevel instruction; a learning programme at various levels, accommodating different learning styles; programmes for individual and group work.
- To focus strongly on the management of the school. Their attitude is crucial, especially with regard to creating and promoting a supportive climate conducive to teaching and learning; and monitoring and evaluation of new special needs policies. It is important that the management of schools is made accountable for provisions for students with special needs.
- To focus strongly on:
  - the role, responsiveness, and interactiveness of the teacher
  - the ability of the teacher to differentiate and adapt instruction to student differences, and work with flexible multi-level instruction for mixed ability groups
  - the ability of the teacher to deliver student-centred instruction with different expectations
  - the ability of the teacher to work on the basis of problem-based learning
  - the utilization of classroom management with flexible and heterogeneous groupings
  - the educational process and the teaching methodology.
- To enable the teaching staff to consult, cooperate, and plan; and to develop and maintain appropriate attitudes and skills.
- To organize a support structure with strong support services. General teachers will have to learn to work with and recognize the value of other specialists in the field, that is, special education teachers, support teachers, and other professionals, as well as build partnerships with parents and mobilize community support.
- To promote the idea that special education should become an integral part of ordinary teaching, through in-class support and close collaboration between primary (and secondary ) schools and

special education schools, in order to assist regular classroom teachers to develop strategies and activities for special needs children in the regular classroom.

### 3.2.3. Special education and special needs education

If inclusive or special needs education is to be implemented, it will have consequences for the existing system of special education schools; their management, teachers, and other professional staff. The “classical” type of special education in the Commonwealth Caribbean is mainly focused on the moderate to profound special needs child, and works mostly on a pupil-oriented basis with this target group. This pupil-oriented education will, in the first place, become more concentrated; concentrated on the profound special needs child, while excluding the moderate and the mild special need child who will be served in the regular school system. This group can still be found in the special education school system in several countries of the Commonwealth Caribbean.

The new additional role for special education will be to become a *support structure* and *resource centre* for the new inclusive, special needs-oriented primary (and secondary) schools, making its expertise, experience, and skills available for teachers, parents, and other professionals in the primary (and secondary) schools. This means that there will be no more walls between the primary (and secondary) schools and special education schools, but strong collaboration between the two types of schools. This would enable several types of special education children to attend regular education schools, for example, although several blind or visually-impaired children are already attending primary and secondary (and tertiary) schools, the numbers could be increased. In addition, a regular school with a support system could also accommodate more children with handicapping conditions. The new role of special education would consist of the following tasks:

- to provide special education for the group of severe special needs children, that is, the 1% group in Table 1
- to provide support services to the regular primary and secondary school settings
  - itinerant services
  - resource services
  - diagnostic and therapeutic services
  - counselling services
  - job preparing and job placement services
- to provide short-term diagnostic, prescriptive, educational, and therapeutic assistance for individual students or small groups of students; mainly aimed at *prevention* and short-term placement in the special school or special class. This target group could be in the 4-9 years age group and this short-term assistance should be:
  - as soon as possible
  - as short as possible
  - as light as possible
  - as flexible as possible
  - as close to home or school as possible
- to develop materials and methods
- to develop and disseminate information for parents, teachers, and other professionals in the education field.

Within this context of special needs education, special education in the Commonwealth Caribbean should rethink its traditional role and categorization of schools based on the classification of students. Why the need for segregation into different categories of handicapping conditions when there are more similarities between these categories than differences? For example, severely physically disabled children might need the same education as severely mentally disabled children. Placing these students in the same school could be more efficient both educationally and financially. In the same way that

walls between regular and special education should disappear (external integration), so too should walls between the categorical systems within special education (internal integration), making closer collaboration between the different categories of special education possible.

## CHAPTER 4

### The Inclusive Approach: A Short Case Study of the Situation in Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago

In the early 1990s, the international movement, EFA or inclusive education, started to spread its wings to the Caribbean. This movement promotes the inclusive approach rather than the traditional, separate, and parallel approach of regular and special education or, in other words, it makes special education, special education institutions, and special education facilities part of regular mainstream education. The inclusive education approach forces regular mainstream schools and their management and teachers to change with regards to the philosophy of education, the organization, the physical environment, the curriculum, and the methods of teaching. The type of children in the classrooms changes as well as professional attitudes and relations within the schools.

Looking at the different criteria for the implementation of inclusive education, one can conclude, in general, that since the early 1990s, most countries in the Caribbean have adopted the philosophy of EFA in their respective education policy papers. However, the next question is, what has been done in terms of:

- policies and programmes
- strategies
- the organization
- the physical environment
- the curriculum
- the methods of teaching
- classroom management
- professional attitudes and communication.

#### 4.1. The *Green Paper* of Jamaica and the *White Paper* of Trinidad and Tobago

In Jamaica, the Ministry of Education and Culture developed a *Green Paper* (Jamaica. Ministry of Education, 1999) for the Year 2000, reflecting the Ministry's information and communication technology (ICT) policy. In Trinidad and Tobago, the Ministry of Education developed a *White Paper* (Trinidad and Tobago. National Task Force on Education, 1994). Although Jamaica's *Green Paper* does not yet have policy status like Trinidad and Tobago's *White Paper*, it gives strong indications of the directions and intentions of the Ministry. The following is a short case study of these policy papers, which looks specifically at the different criteria for implementation of inclusive education.

##### **Policies and programmes**

The *Green Paper* (Jamaica)

- “Each of our children can learn and all our children must” (p. 2).
- “... and to provide lifelong learning opportunities to all Jamaicans, anytime and anywhere” (p. 2).
- “The state has the responsibility of providing access to primary education for all its citizens who are between the ages of 6 and 12 years” (p. 3).

The *White Paper* (Trinidad and Tobago)

- “Every child has an inherent right to an education which will enhance the development of maximum capability regardless of gender, ethnic, economic, social or religious background” (p. xvii).
- “This faith fuels expectations for the provision of a sound basic education for *all* in our national community” (1.1.1). However, the same paper states in 1.2.1: “The levels of provision mentioned above are not organized to cater for pupils with Special Needs nor adequately for Early Childhood Care and Education.”

## **Strategies**

### *The Green Paper* (Jamaica)

- “To devise and support initiatives striving towards literacy for all in order to extend personal opportunities and contribute to national development” (p. 6).
- “To secure teaching and learning opportunities that will optimise access, equity and relevance throughout the educational system” (p. 6).

According to the *Green Paper*, considerations underlying present policies are:

- “Special needs children are provided for either in special schools or in regular schools. Mainstreaming where possible is preferred and offers advantages to both the general school population and the special needs child” (p. 7).
- “Each child can learn and every child must” (p. 7).
- “The school will plan its entire programme to meet the needs of the students, and should not exclude challenging students as the solution to educational problems” (p. 7).

### *The White Paper* (Trinidad and Tobago)

- “To provide for those with special needs an appropriate educational climate and curriculum, as well as the requisite support service” (3.30.2).
- “To provide information and support for the immediate family of those with special needs” (3.20.2).
- “To develop and implement public educational programmes targetting the larger society” (3.30.2).
- “Early detection and intervention are necessary long before school age. It is imperative that policies be put in place to make this early detection and intervention possible” (3.30.10).
- “It is also essential that the health care system work in close collaboration with the schools” (3.30.11).

## **The organization**

### *The Green Paper* (Jamaica)

- “To support student achievement and improve institutional performance in order to ensure that national targets are met.”
- “To optimise the effectiveness and efficiency of staff in all aspects of the service in order to ensure continuous improvement in performance.”
- “To enhance student learning by the greater use of information and communication technology as preparation for life and global communities.”
- “The school will plan its entire programme to meet the needs of students, and should not exclude challenging students as solution to educational problems” (pp. 6-7).

### *The White Paper* (Trinidad and Tobago)

- “In the regular schools there are no special provisions, no support services, for those with special needs” (3.30.5).
- “There are some clear indications that adequate provision has not been made in our schools, for children with Special Needs” (3.30.3).
- “It is essential that the needs of these pupils be recognised and steps be taken to meet these needs. There is urgent need for diagnostic testing in the schools so that difficulties can be identified and effective remediation put in place” (3.30.8).
- “Regional Diagnostic Centres are essential in order to respond to the need for specialist help in the local communities”(3.30.12). The Regional Diagnostic Prescriptive Centres should be concerned not only with the schools in the educational district but also with the education of the general public. It should undertake education programmes for the families of children with special needs so that they can better respond to their special children. It should also educate the wider community, attempting to remove the prejudices and barriers which so many have with regard to special needs children and adults” (3.30.13).
- “The Vice Principal or senior teacher of each school should assume responsibility for the pupils with special needs and each school should have a team of special education teachers who are able to identify and service the pupils with special needs. The Vice Principal or senior teacher should be trained for this leadership role” (3.30.14).
- “The Vice Principal or senior teacher is to be involved in the formulation of Individual Education Plans (IEP) by the Regional Centre for the pupils of his/her school. These Regional Centres will also assume responsibility for assisting the classroom and special education teachers with the implementation and the monitoring of these individual plans” (3.30.15).
- “The Ministry takes for granted that pupils with special needs are *mainstreamed*. According to the Ministry research shows that mainstreaming, whether intentional or not, has already taken place. The Ministry recommends the mainstreaming of children with special needs, *except in severe cases*” (emphasis added). The Ministry recommends also that “all schools be required to articulate their plans to meet the needs of their special pupils” and states that “the existing special schools be retained for the most severe of special needs children and to be used as Education Resource Centres that would include research and development (3.30.17).
- “Parents of special needs children should visit their neighbourhood school for enrollment. The Vice-Principal or senior teacher with the assistance of his school’s teacher-diagnostician would determine if and how the school would provide for the child. If this is not possible the vice-principal would provide the MDT with a profile of the student. The MDT would be expected to examine the case, dialogue with the family, further evaluate the child and facilitate an appropriate placement within a three month period. The child whose needs can be met in the neighbourhood school would attend classes in the Mainstream, part time Resource Room or Self Contained Classroom. The child needing more specialised facilities would attend the appropriate cluster school closest to home. Educating children without taking them out of the home has long term benefits for the overall well-being of the child, the family and the community. The child needing more specialised help than provided at the specialised cluster school must be sent to the Special Day School” (3.33.0).

### **The physical environment**

#### *The Green Paper* (Jamaica)

- “The quality of the content of the education offered to our young citizens, its delivery and the environment in which it is provided will be of the highest possible standard which the country can afford” (p. 3).

#### *The White Paper* (Trinidad and Tobago)

- “upgrading the learning environment through maintenance, refurbishment and rehabilitation of physical plant ...” (3.8.4).

- “The extension of the age limit to 13+ will mean an increase in numbers in the primary schools as more pupils stay on at the primary school to a later age until ‘ready’ for the transition to secondary level” (3.15.0).
- “Within the contained environment of the primary school, with its fixed classroom and permanent class teachers, the special needs of these ‘slow learners’ can perhaps best be met. It is essential that there be teachers specially trained to meet these needs” (3.15.1).
- “What is essential throughout the system, is that each child be given the opportunity to attain his/her highest level of development and of attainment – whatever that level is” (3.15.2).

### **The curriculum**

The *Green Paper* (Jamaica) makes no statement with regard to curriculum, however, it formulates some minimum targets:

- “55% of all students who were enrolled in Primary Grade 1 in September 1997 to demonstrate full mastery in literacy at the grade 6 level in August 2002.”
- “35% of the same group to demonstrate near mastery or full mastery by the year 2004.”
- “Continuous assessment of students at the primary level is designed to facilitate student learning, and is not designed to divide students along pass/fail lines.”
- “Automatic promotion of students in the primary schools is not allowed beyond the grade 4 level. Remediation in reading must take place to ensure that students in grade 5 and 6 are reading at an appropriate level” (pp. 6-7)

The *White Paper* (Trinidad and Tobago)

- “An efficient and effective learning system at the primary level must promote acceptable levels of learning achievement for all students, including those who are educationally at risk” (3.8.3).
- “The natural consequence of promotion on the basis of attainment is that some pupils will need more than one year in any given class and will reach Standard V after the age of thirteen (13). ‘These children are equally eligible for secondary education and the regulations concerning the upper age limit for students writing the Common Entrance Examination must be appropriately amended to accommodate this group of students’” (3.13.0).
- “Just as there are some pupils who will not be ‘ready’ for secondary education before age 13+, so there will be those specially gifted pupils who will be ‘ready’ to move on to secondary education before they attain the required age of 11” (3.14.0). “We support the proposal that exceptionally gifted pupils be allowed to write the Common Entrance Examination before the prescribed age....” (3.14.1).

### **The methods of teaching**

Neither the *Green Paper* of Jamaica nor the *White Paper* of Trinidad and Tobago contain statements with regard to methods of teaching.

### **Classroom management**

Neither the *Green Paper* of Jamaica nor the *White Paper* of Trinidad and Tobago contain statements with regard to classroom management.

### **Professional attitudes and communication**

The *Green Paper* (Jamaica)

- “To devise and implement systems of accountability and performance management in order to improve performance and win public confidence and trust” (p. 6).

- “To optimise the effectiveness and efficiency of staff in all aspects of the service in order to ensure continuous improvement in performance” (p. 6)

The *White Paper* (Trinidad and Tobago)

- “For this system to work well, teachers must be adequately trained in special education. A short ‘crash’ programme is not enough and can be counter-productive” (3.30.16).
- “... put in place for teachers a programme of training in special education which will include training in diagnosis and which will prepare teachers for effective performance in specialist resource rooms. This programme should also include the development of strategies and skills for working with the parents and families of those with special needs” (3.30.16)

## 4.2. Discussion

Analysis of both the *Green Paper* of Jamaica and the *White Paper* of Trinidad and Tobago shows that the Ministries of Education devote most of their attention to the macro levels of policy development and implementation in education such as development of policies and programmes, strategies, the organization, and the physical environment. They appear to have fewer ideas with respect to policy development and implementation when it comes to the school system and the micro level (the students) such as the curriculum, the methods of teaching, classroom management, and professional attitudes and communication. This is where the battle for inclusive special needs education starts. Here principals, teachers, pupils, and parents and guardians get lost, and the “at-risk” children start to lose their battle with the mainstream. The school and the school system are not as strong as they should be in the areas of weakness of these “at-risk” children. Both the *Green Paper* and the *White Paper* admit that:

- “In the regular schools there are no special provisions, no support services, for those with special needs” (*White Paper*, 3.30.5).
- “The Ministry recommends the mainstreaming of children with special needs, *except in severe cases*” (*White Paper*, 3.30.17; emphasis added)
- “Special needs children are provided for either in special schools or in regular schools. Mainstreaming where possible is preferred and offers advantages to both the general school population and the special needs child” (*Green Paper*, p. 7).

This is where the traditional, separate, and parallel system of primary and special education continues to function both in Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago. Mainstreaming, that is, attempting to place or re-place students with special needs in the mainstream of the regular school system (both primary and secondary school) is the only feasible option. Mainstreaming is certainly not synonymous with inclusive education. At this time, inclusive special needs education appears to be impossible to achieve in both Caribbean countries.

The Caribbean needs to find other ways and means to come closer to the aims and objectives of inclusive education. One real option is the least restrictive environment. The *White Paper* describes these possibilities in Trinidad and Tobago in clear terms:

The child whose needs can be met in the neighbourhood school would attend classes in the mainstream, part time resource room or self contained classroom. The child needing more specialised facilities would attend the appropriate cluster school closest to home. Educating children without taking them out of the home has long term benefits for the overall well-being of the child, the family and the community. The child needing more specialised help than provided at the specialised cluster school must be sent to the special day school. (3.33.0)

For this to be realized, considerably more attention has to be paid to curriculum development, the methods of teaching, classroom management, professional attitudes of teachers, and communication between the professionals in the school system.

### **4.3. Special Needs Education and Teacher Training**

#### **4.3.1. Pre-service training**

In 1976, Mico Teacher Training College in Kingston, Jamaica started its Special Education Programme, which was extended to all the English-speaking Caribbean countries in 1978. Presently, Mico College is the only teacher training college in the English-speaking Caribbean that offers accredited programmes in Special Education at both diploma and degree levels. It offers training in four different programmes at the diploma level and three at the degree level in collaboration with The University of the West Indies (UWI).

Global changes driven by ICT demand the development of human resources in order to adequately respond to new changes. New developments such as positions on human rights, for example, integration and inclusive thinking, changing views, methodologies, techniques and philosophies regarding teaching and learning, advances in technology, and so forth, have gradually caused the field of special education to be transformed into special needs education. Therefore, the traditional classical teacher training programme with specializations in (a) Mental Retardation and Physical Disabilities; (b) Learning Disabilities; (c) Blindness and Visual Impairment; and (d) Deaf and Hearing Impairment cannot be used anymore as a model for teacher training.

With all the new trends in the field of special education, it is imperative that the Special Education Teacher Training Programme should keep pace with current knowledge in the field and necessary skills. At the same time, limited resources need to be mobilized and amalgamated to ensure that the programme will be able to keep pace with these developments. On the basis of international, regional, and local developments, Mico College has restructured the Special Education Programme and is now offering the following programmes:

1. At Diploma level:

- Mild Disabilities (learning disabilities, emotional disorders, mental retardation)
- Multiple Disabilities (severe learning disabilities, mental retardation, emotional disorders, physical and multiple disabilities)
- Deafness and Hard of Hearing
- Blindness and Visual Impairment

2. At the B.Ed. level, in collaboration with UWI:

- Multiple Disabilities
- Academic Assessment and Instructional Design
- Administration and Supervision of Programmes in Special Education

Through carefully constructed classroom instruction, related and relevant field experiences, and opportunities for operationalizing theoretical information, student teachers will be equipped to successfully implement rapidly emerging practices, thus providing quality education for students with disabilities in the Caribbean

Due to these changes in the Special Education Programme at Mico College, the College is able to provide students who are trained in the new areas of special needs education, for example, teaching at-risk students in the primary school system. The new programme can provide answers to some weaknesses in the current, regular school system, but it is also responding to the new needs in the system of educational services, that is, resource room teachers, self-contained classrooms, and special schools.

#### **4.3.2. Inservice training**

Based on the figures in Tables 1, 2, and 3, it is very clear that pre-service training of teachers is insufficient in order to be able to teach all the children who are at risk in the regular primary school system. Pre-service training also fails to provide sufficient teachers for the separate special education system. A comprehensive approach, where Ministries of Education closely collaborate with all the teacher training institutions, using different modes of dissemination, including distance education, is the only answer to the immense need for training in both the primary and secondary as well as the special education sector.

## CHAPTER 5

### Implementation of Special Needs Education

The adoption of the philosophy of EFA by most of the Commonwealth Caribbean countries is easier than implementing a policy of education for all and making it work in the schools. Meeting special learning needs in school is, first and foremost, a question of meeting the specific needs of each child. The main question for the different countries is: How can this development of inclusive, special needs education be realized given the existing education culture, the existing infrastructure in education, the limitations in financial and human resources of each country and, if implemented, what is the most efficient and effective model to innovate this existing educational culture?

As stated before, there is no single model of service delivery for all students in each country. Every educational system has its own tradition, its own culture, its own values, its own infrastructure, and cannot only be understood in terms of resources available to schools and teaching staff. Therefore, there is more than one answer to that question. However, if inclusive special needs education is to be successfully implemented, it should be a *balanced* inclusive, special needs programme, taking into consideration the existing education culture, the existing education infrastructure, the sensitivity to cost issues, the limited human resources, and the need for change and innovation. A strategy for the introduction of an inclusive, special needs education programme could be based on two premises:

- inclusive, special needs education should not indiscriminately place all students with special needs in general education classrooms;
- traditional approaches to teaching and learning will not suffice in an inclusive setting.

#### 5.1. Implementation Within the Commonwealth Caribbean Context

The last decade saw a lot of uncertainty about the economic prospects of the respective countries. Several countries experienced economic and financial constraints which resulted in problems for human resource development, and reduced the levels of capital and recurrent expenditure in the budgets of the respective countries (World Bank, 1993). Although access to primary education is almost universal throughout the Caribbean, this does not mean that all the children attend school daily. In addition to this, the education system in the English-speaking Caribbean is very selective; only 9.0% of an age cohort is enrolled in a national or a regional institute for tertiary education (this does not include overseas studies); for Latin American countries this figure is 23.8% (World Bank, 1993). Although enrolment in tertiary institutions in the Caribbean has increased, the figure is still low with a resultant low output.

Despite the adoption by most of these countries of the United Nations' *Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities* (1994), many countries do not have (yet) a national policy on special education. In its draft policy paper, the Jamaican Government indicates that: "The Government shall take into consideration the special requirement of the person with disabilities in the formulation of educational policies and programmes" (p. 7). In this total context, answers should be found to the question of how inclusive, special needs education can be developed and realized.

#### 5.2. The Least Restrictive Environment

Based on the Human Rights Convention, the EFA philosophy, and the rapid development of ICT, many countries are looking for new concepts and models in education. The arguments are financial, moral, social, economic, and technological. It will take a comprehensive approach to implement an educational system capable of "embracing the differences" in the society, in the communities, and in the schools. The implementation of a total inclusive education system does not appear to be, at least for the moment, feasible, mainly due to financial, human resource, and infrastructural limitations. A

practical, step-by-step approach to inclusive education via the path of the least restrictive environment seems to be the most feasible approach. The least restrictive environment implies an environment in which students with disabilities are educated with their non-disabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate. The least restrictive environment:

- requires that students be placed with non-disabled peers as much as possible and included in the mainstream of society;
- mandates the goal of including all students with disabilities into their own school and community;
- focuses on integration but also allows separation when it is in the best educational interest of the student;
- focuses on service delivery systems that are responsive to the needs of each student (Hardiman, Drew, & Egan, 1996).

On the basis of moral, financial, social, and technological arguments, a model of the least restrictive environment seems to be the most feasible for realization within the Caribbean context. This model:

1. creates more possibilities for, and contributes more to, equal access for children with special needs, underscoring the importance of human development for all;
2. focuses on total integration but also allows for separation when it is in the best educational interest of the student;
3. can be based on the existing model of education and educational infrastructure in the Caribbean, although this system requires new investment in that same infrastructure;
4. can be used for innovation of the existing system both for primary (and secondary) and special education (see Chapter 3). It would be able to innovate and strengthen the existing primary system and could tackle many of its problems and weaknesses, for example, the problem of illiteracy;
5. creates possibilities for integrating special education into the regular system. At the same time, it does not exclude separate special education. Table 2 shows that not all children in need of special education are served at this particular time, and as long as the severe and profound special needs children cannot be served in the regular mainstream primary school, extensions of special education facilities are still necessary. However, the different alternative options in service delivery have to be taken into consideration, for example, in this particular context, the self-contained classroom on the primary school premises;
6. creates all sorts of possibilities for new policy development and planning;
7. would create more awareness of inclusive thinking at community and school level;
8. should make special needs an integral part of existing teacher education programmes. However, one cannot avoid the backlog of teachers (pre-service and inservice) needed to be trained for the innovated primary system, the support system, and the special education system. As a start, pooling of trained personnel, resource and/or support teachers, to assist non-special education teachers or non-special needs teachers could provide more benefits to teachers and children in the primary (and secondary) school system. The new teacher education programmes should produce:
  - a new-look primary school teacher, competent to teach special needs children, and to identify special needs children for further assessment at an early stage
  - a new-look special education teacher, competent to teach the severe special needs education children as well as give support service to the primary (and secondary) school system
  - resource and support teachers competent to give support service in either modality of that service.

9. creates possibilities for networking schools into clusters that can be supported by resource and support teachers operating from decentralized development and resource centres.

In this non-segregated and comprehensive approach, intended to embrace the differences between students and to make the different ordinary, principals, teachers, and parents should be part of the decision-making process and decide the degree to which children with special needs are to be included.

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