

Between Rights and Remediation: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Inclusive Education Policy in Ontario and Alberta

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ABSTRACT:

This study uses Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (CDA) to investigate how Ontario and Alberta policy texts construct inclusive education. Using provincial documents on equity, special education, and accessibility, it examines the portrayal of students with disabilities, dominant inclusion discourses, and where responsibility for inclusion lies. The analysis indicates that Ontario views inclusion primarily through the lens of rights, accountability, and institutional duty while Alberta sees it via belonging, flexibility, and shared responsibility. In both corpora, the student with disability is positioned as entitled to support, but remedial and managerial assumptions remain visible. Ontario's texts show a stronger usage of legal language as well as being more monitoring and achievement-oriented in their governance compared to Alberta's. Alberta's policy is more in line with values-based, learner-centred speech and less explicit legal accountability. A specific study argues that inclusive education does not seem to be a fixed cohesive notion or concept. This paper contributes to disability and education research by offering a comparative study that shows how the language of policy constructs inclusion in ways that might enable, limit or redirect practice.

Keywords: inclusive education; critical discourse analysis; disability policy; Ontario; Alberta.

1. Introduction

While inclusive education was once viewed as a marginal reform, in many education systems, it is now positioned as a central policy imperative. However, as Migliarini & Elder (2023); Tracy-Bronson & Theoharis (2026); Hardy and Woodcock (2015) note, the meanings of 'inclusion' and 'disability' in these policies remain

hotly contested. Inclusion is now increasingly being articulated as a human right in key international and national frameworks. This suggests that all learners should be able to fully participate in social and educational life, including students with disabilities. At the same time, policy texts in the South and North recycle primarily deficit-based and managerial discourses. As a

result, older special education logics appear to be reinscribed in the process. Contemporary reviews maintain that investigation relating to inclusive education must not only ask what empirical and consequential outcomes but also the conceptual and evaluative bases that structure what counts as “inclusive” provision in the first place (Norwich, 2022).

Critical discourse analysis and inclusive education

Critical discourse analysis is often used to show how educational policies construct learner identities, legitimize certain interventions, and help to naturalize unequal power relations (Dawes, 2023). The Cyprus policy text of Liasidou (2008) is an example of a progressive text which sustains power asymmetries and marginalizes the child with special educational needs through the sophisticated hybridization of human rights language with deficit and bureaucratic discourses. Shume (2023) demonstrates in more recent work how CDA has been extended to disability-related texts. The conceptualization of disability in both policy and curricular documents ranges from a medical deficit to a more critical social relational understanding. Overall, this research shows that CDA is a strong lens through which to study how inclusive education policies symbolically include or exclude disabled learners.

The Canadian policy context

In Canada, while the aim of inclusive education is often articulated at a systems level, policy and practice remain disconnected. Canada does not have a federal law that guarantees a right to inclusive education. Instead, the provinces and territories are responsible for it, resulting in a patchwork of policies, definitions and funding mechanisms for students with disabilities (Towle, 2015). A recent report from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives argues that most provincial special education policies are over a decade old and “out of step” with current understandings of inclusion. It indicates that there is considerable variation between provinces with regard to how inclusion is defined, operationalized and resourced (Towle, 2024). The differences in structures provide ripe area for comparative policy analysis, yet there is limited

work that systematically examines the discursive construction of disability and inclusion across the Canadian provinces.

At the same time, international scholarship has begun to express worry that such policy, special education and inclusion, may become caricatures of themselves, and that the commitment to appropriate education and support will be undermined by narrow interpretations of inclusion (Cormier, 2022). Kauffman and his colleagues state: “full inclusion” in policy discourses must not be confused with placement spatially. To ensure this placement is adequate support and a continuum of placement options is needed. Otherwise, a situation may arise where placement occurs, but learners do not learn. It learns social arrangement but not academic learning characterization. The Canadian analyses confirm these concerns, indicating that the rhetoric of inclusive education serves as a façade for deficit framings, resource limitation and uncertainty regarding specialized provision (Towle, 2015; Laura & Jennifer, 2020). Consequently, examining how provincial policy narrativizes disability, inclusion, and responsibility can indicate whether contemporary discourses advance or obstruct more genuinely inclusive and disability affirming practice.

Why Ontario and Alberta?

A particularly strong pairing for such analysis is Ontario and Alberta. Ontario has adopted a comprehensive equity and inclusive education agenda that encompasses a provincial Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy and a human rights-oriented policy guidance on accessibility of education for students with disabilities (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2018). Unlike Alberta, which has had consistent reviews and reforms since 2008, research on special and inclusive education reform in Scotland is limited. In Alberta, the policy text has rebranded disability as “diversity”. The policy text was accompanied by a government funded professional development plan. It ensured sustainable change towards making schools more inclusive. However, tensions still remain in regard to funding, placement and the limits of inclusion (Towle) There is a mixture of progressive and deficit-based language in the story about Alberta’s reforms. They offer a muddle of intent

between global inclusion agendas and local political priorities. Examining the provinces of Ontario and Alberta thus offers a unique opportunity to assess how two prominent provinces within a common national-international framework discursively construct disability and inclusion.

Study purpose

Given this context, the current research uses CDA to examine key Ontario and Alberta inclusive education policies, client-side construction of students and disability, the discourses of inclusion mobilized and the responsibility for delivering inclusive education allocated to students, families, schools and governments. The study specifically investigates three specific questions.

1. In what ways are students with disabilities and their educational needs discursively constructed in Alberta and Ontario policy texts in relation to inclusive education?
2. What dominant and competing discourses of inclusion rights based, remedial/medical, managerial/accountability, and economic/skills are identifiable in each provincial corpus?
3. How do the two corpora differ in terms of attributing responsibility and agency for the fulfillment of inclusive education?

The objectives of the study are to contextualize provincial policy texts within the wider debates of disability, inclusive education and special education reform and also to shed light on how policy discourse can enable and constrain more authentically inclusive and disability affirming practices in Canadian Schools.

Theoretical Underpinnings: Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis

The principal analytical lens of the present study will be critical discourse analysis and one of the most common analytical frameworks that are used in educational policy research is Fairclough's three-dimensional model (Jones, 2025). According to the model, a more neutral view of representation emerges. First, it facilitates the

possibility of ideological assumptions being produced, contested, and reproduced through language. Our code will receive and send documents for containers. As products or producers of social arrangements, our policy documents will either produce or reproduce them (according to Jones, 2025). The latest uses of CDA to educational policy suggest that the model still have relevance: Pluquailec & O'Connor (2023) undertook a Fairclough-informed discourse analysis on the UK SEND Green Paper to show how the particular use of lexicons around 'need', the collective voice and claims to 'newness' were used to legitimize retraction whilst maintaining a surface rhetoric of reform. Their work shows that careful attention to modality, lexico-grammatical patterning and intertextuality reveals how policy texts simultaneously acknowledge and deny the structural aspects of disability. In a similar vein, Hilton & Lambert (2025) used CDA to show that the Australian Government's responses to the Royal Commission on Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability repeat what they call 'inclusive rhetoric, exclusive reality' whereby a rights-based discourse is deployed that ultimately reinforces existing exclusions rather than challenging them.

Competing Discourses of Disability in Education Policy

A lot of scholarship has looked at how disability is discursively constructed within educational texts. The three broadest discursive clusters identified in the literature are: medicalized/deficit discourses; rights-based/social discourses and managerial/accountability discourses. The medicalized or deficit discourse sees disability as an individual pathology that requires remedying, normalizing or accommodating within an unchanged system. This continues to appear in different policy arenas, despite social-model language becoming widely used (Davies 2025). While the medical model locates disability with the individual, the social model views disability as a result of the interaction between impairment and socially constructed barriers, making inclusion a matter of system, not the individual (Brown & Ostrove, 2022). Scholars have called for moving toward "disability-affirmative, intersectional approach" that foreground power

and structural inequality not individual deficit. One additional discourse managerial or accountability oriented; tends to make sense of inclusive education in terms of efficiency, measurement and cost-effectiveness a discourse closely associated with neoliberal education reforms (Pham et al., 2024). As documented by Pham et al. (2024), special and inclusive education policy documents in Nepal illustrate neoliberal restructuring that subordinates disability rights to logics of economic productivity, a finding comparable work in other national contexts. Policy texts regularly hybridize competing discourses in ways that create ambiguity about who is responsible, what level of agency is appropriate from students, and what “appropriate” provision of resources actually means (Pluquailec & O’Connor, 2023; Hilton & Lambert, 2025).

CDA Applied to Inclusive Education Policy Documents

CDA has been used successfully in a number of national contexts on inclusive education policy texts, which have revealed contradictions between the intention of policy wording and its discursive effects. In their discussion, Hilton & Lambert (2025) have examined the Australian disability policy documents where there is a constant usage of participatory and rights-based language but at the same time, disabled people are also portrayed as passive subjects of state generosity. A comparative analysis of inclusive education policies in the Czech Republic and Slovakia showed the use of rhetoric of social inclusion in legislative texts and national strategies, while embedding a wide range of exclusionary categorical and normative assumptions. Overall, CDA illustrates the policy incoherence across similar national contexts (Miškolci et al, 20256). The CDA-based analytical approach called ‘What’s the Problem Represented to Be?’ has been applied to an interrogation of Australian inclusive education policy. Such an application shows how certain constructions of ‘the problem’ disability simultaneously open up and close off certain policy solutions (Bourke et al., 2025). This type of research shows the necessity for similar CDA-informed analysis in the Canadian context, wherein the interprovincial heterogeneity of

policy, and the longstanding debates around the scope and meaning of inclusion, provide a rich opportunity to examine whose interests the policy language serves.

Inclusive Education and Responsibility: Students, Families, Schools, and the State

The dynamics of power and agency related to policy discourse on inclusive education are critical in shaping inclusion in as far as possible local contexts. (Lindsay, 2019) Research reveals that policy language often individualizes blame, holding families and students most responsible for arranging appropriate provision, while the state’s role is represented as passive, contingent or facilitative (Pluquailec & O’Connor, 2023; Miškolci et al., 2026). In recent years, there has been renewed research interest in parent involvement in special education. Estrapala et al. (2025) reviewed the fit between existing parent-involvement frameworks and the real-life experiences of families of children with disabilities. Their analysis finds that policy rhetoric around “partnership” and “collaboration” often glosses over the unequal power dynamics in which families are required to advocate unremittingly in the face of institutional resistance rather than being able to participate in a truly equal way. Research in a Canadian provincial context has shown that families of students with disabilities frequently experience the school as adversarial rather than collaborative. There is language in the policy about partnership, but administrative and resource constraints prevent this from being realized (Towle, 2024). Teacher responsibility represents another axis through which responsibility is discursively configured: According to Algraigay (2023), accountability-oriented standards and testing regimes constrain the professional autonomy of special education teachers, give rise to ethical dilemmas between inclusivity values and managerial performance demands. We suggest that an analysis of how Ontario and Alberta policy texts construct responsibility and agency will not only shed light on provincial policy differences but also reveal deep-seated structural assumptions about whose responsibility it is to achieve inclusion.

Interprovincial Variation and Policy Coherence in Canada

Canada lacks federal special education legislation, so the province of the educational system determines the nature, scope and language of the inclusive education provision. This has produced significant variation in policy discourse and practice. Provinces differ significantly, as comparative analyses have shown not just in funding mechanisms and service delivery structures, but also in their definitions of “disability,” “special education,” and “inclusion” as used in official documents and legislation. Some provinces retain highly categorical and medicalized definitions while others adopt broader, diversity-oriented language (Towle, 2024). Research has pointed out that provincial human rights codes and ministerial policies coexist in important but contradictory ways. For educators and families, they can create some uncertainty about entitlements (Laura & Jennifer, 2020; Towle, 2024). One example of an evolving tool for advocacy and accountability comes from Ontario. The Ontario Human Rights Commission’s policy on accessible education frames disability as a human right and imposes substantive obligations on school boards. In Ontario, this presence of human rights and obligations generates a different discursive space than those provinces where inclusive education is framed as a matter of appropriate programming and placement rather than of enforceable rights. Alberta has sought to simplify access to complex and expensive services but has undergone numerous reform cycles and has been the subject of public debate about whether or not these reforms offer enough support to students with complex needs (Towle, 2024). These documented differences provide a strong empirical rationale for applying CDA to examine how the two provinces linguistically construct disability, inclusion, and responsibility in their core policy texts, and for considering what these discursive choices may mean for students, families, and educators in each province.

Research Gap

Compared to the international case, the local case on comparative discourse analysis of provincial policy texts in Canada is surprisingly limited despite the growing body of CDA literature

applied to inclusive education policy. A number of studies have either examined the national or cross-national level, leaving provincial contexts aside, or have focused on a single provincial context, thus overlooking the interprovincial dimension of policy discourse (Towle, 2024; Laura & Jennifer, 2020). In addition, though Ontario and Alberta are substantially different in their disability and inclusion policies, researchers have largely analysed these differences through a legal and administrative lens (Kauffman et al., 2020; Towle, 2024). However, there has not been a systematic examination of the language, ideological assumptions and discursive strategies in these policies themselves. So far, no research has used Fairclough’s three-dimensional CDA framework to compare the ways these two powerful provinces construct students with disabilities, mobilize conflicting discourses of inclusion, and allocate responsibility to key parties in official policy documents. The study presents the first discourse-analytical comparison of Ontario and Alberta inclusive education policy (IEP) and provides empirical evidence that researchers can utilize in theoretical terms. It highlights how provincial policy language shapes the conditions of possibility for inclusive/disability-affirming schooling in Canada.

2. Methodology

Research Design

The work employed a qualitative and document-based design that is rooted in CDA. Document analysis is useful when you want to explore how meaning, identity and ideology are constructed and reproduced in written texts; in contexts where official documents act as sites of power that govern social practice and institutional arrangements (Morgan, 2022). The research doesn’t involve human participants; all data are from publicly available policy texts. Thus, there was no requirement for participant ethical clearance, but the researchers still need very rigorous attention to the ethical responsibilities of interpretation, transparency and scholarship. A comparative design is utilized in order to analyse how Ontario and Alberta construct through discourse disability, inclusion, and responsibility. The comparative logic is not intended to suggest that one province is better

than the other but to show the range of discursive possibilities that exist within shared national and human-rights frameworks.

Analytical Framework

The framework for the study is Fairclough's (2010) three-dimensional model of CDA. The model regards any communicative event to be simultaneously a text (the linguistic object); a discursive practice (the processes of text production and consumption, including intertextuality); and a social practice (the ideological and institutional contexts that shape and are shaped by discourse). Analysing the Text The lexis refers to the vocabulary used in the text. Modality refers to the degree of necessity and obligation. It helps us understand the power relations in the text. Transitivity deals with the color of the verb. Agency deals with naming and description. The analysis at the level of discursive practice investigates the ways in which the policy texts draw upon, combine, and recontextualize other texts and discourses which include international frameworks such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and domestic human-rights legislation. In particular, the analysis focuses on how the aforementioned texts and discourses are drawn upon to legitimize constructions of inclusion and disability. At the level of social practice, the findings refer to the broader ideological formations and structural conditions that are imputed to it, in particular, the competing discourses of rights, remediation, managerial accountability that have been documented in the literature on special and inclusive education. In recent CDA studies into educational policy and disability policy, this three-dimensional procedure has been successfully employed, supporting its appropriateness for the present comparative study.

Corpus Construction and Document Selection

The corpus includes policy texts from Ontario and Alberta. Using criterion-based purposive sampling to select the documents maximizes the relevance and analytical richness of evidence (Campbell et al., 2020; Ahmed & Wilkins, 2025). In qualitative inquiry, this sampling strategy is often used, and it ensures that selected

documents address the constructs of the research question. The four criteria used to guide inclusion were: (1) the document had been produced by or under the authority of the provincial ministry of education, a provincial human-rights body, or an equivalent government-mandated agency; (2) it explicitly addressed the education of students with disabilities or the implementation of inclusive education or special education; (3) it was publicly accessible at the time of data collection (mid-2019); and (4) it was current meaning it represented the active policy position of the province during the process of 2010-2025, a timeframe that includes the most powerful rounds of the inclusive education reform in both provinces. We excluded documents that were merely administrative (e.g., budgeting summaries without any content policy-wise) or any other inclusion that was not with students with disabilities (e.g., strategies for cultural diversity that do not have any content on disability).

The resultant corpus consists of eight to twelve documents shared between the two provinces equally. The Ontario corpus includes the Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, the Ministry of Education program-planning guidance on human rights and inclusive education, and the Ontario Human Rights Commission's Policy on Accessible Education for Students with Disabilities. The Alberta corpus of materials encompasses Alberta Education's inclusive education policy and standards, the Setting the Direction Framework, and associated Alberta Education guidance documents that articulate inclusion and support for students with complex needs.

Analytical Procedure

The analysis had three total stages for Fairclough's three dimensions. At Stage 1, each document was read holistically in order to become acquainted with content, structure and genre, and an initial set of analytical memos were written for each text. In Stage 2, the process of systematic close reading was conducted at the textual level, meaning adultification theory was incrementally coded at the textual level according to passages explicitly referencing adultification. Coding was based on a coding framework that was constructed from the research questions: labelling and categorization of students (RQ1),

presence of identified inclusion discourses (RQ2), and allocation of agency and responsibility (RQ3). The codes were developed from the data in an inductive way, and with reference to the theoretical framework in a deductive way and were applied consistently across all documents. In this stage also, coded segments were interpreted in relation to their intertextual context. As well as their social and ideological dimensions draw on the wider literature narrated in the preceding section.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was dealt with in four ways consistent with qualitative and discourse-analytic standards. Maintaining a trail of analytical memos aided credibility and through drawing on more than one text in depth. A stable and theoretically grounded codebook were used at both provincial corpora to ensure dependability. The confirmability of the study was supported by an intercoder check. A second researcher applied the codebook to a 20% sample of coded excerpts independently. Then, Cohen's kappa was computed to assess the agreement of both researchers. A kappa value of .80 or above was set as the cut-off point for acceptable reliability (Van Enschoet et al., 2024). Transferability emerges from the corpus and analytical procedure description which brings out the aspect of how relevant the findings may be to equivalent provincial or national policy settings.

3. Results

Summary of findings

Overall, the corpus illustrates that Ontario and Alberta characterized inclusive education as a positive, necessary policy commitment, but constructed that commitment differently. Situating inclusion through a strengthened rights, accountability and governance logic Ontario; while framing through values, belonging and shared responsibility Alberta. In both Ontario and Alberta, students with disabilities are defined as learners requiring support. There is however a difference in legal-administrative categorization in Ontario and use of more universal learner-centred language in Alberta.

Construction of students with disabilities

In the Ontario corpus, we construct students with disabilities as entitled and need institutional management. *Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation* document states that equity and inclusive education “aim to understand, identify, address, and eliminate the biases, barriers, and power dynamics” that limit students’ learning and contribution. In this way, disability is linked to structural barriers rather than defined simply by individual deficit [*Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation*, pp. 7–9]. To a similar degree, the *Special Education in Ontario, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Resource Guide* also maintains the terminology of “exceptional students,” “identification,” “placement,” and “Individual Education Plans,” which maintains a formal special-education categorization of disability [*Special Education in Ontario, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Resource Guide*, pp. 18–29].

Per the Ontario Human Rights Commission policy, a further push towards a rights frame. Students with disabilities have a right to equal treatment in education. Educational institutions should “considered, assessed and accommodated on an individual basis” [*Policy on accessible education for students with disabilities*, pp. 7–9]. Nonetheless, the student here continues to be situated within a formal accommodation process requiring disclosure, documentation, and institutional adjudication [*Policy on accessible education for students with disabilities*, pp. 70–76]. In Fairclough's terms, the student is constructed both as a subject with rights and as something to be administered by policy.

In Alberta, construction is less legalistic and more universalist. As per *Inclusive Education in Alberta*, “inclusion is a way of thinking and acting” and “it is not just about learners with special needs” [*Inclusive Education in Alberta*, p. 1]. The text claims that “every learner” has unique need and insists that flexible and responsive environments should be created to meet those needs [*Inclusive Education in Alberta*, pp. 1–3]. This discussion lowers the prominence of deficit labelling and situates disability within a wider continuum of learner diversity. However, Alberta continues to differentiate among learners through universal, targeted, and individualized supports, so the text

does not fully erase special needs categorization but recontextualizes it within a broader inclusive framework [*Inclusive Education in Alberta*, p. 2].

Inclusion discourses in the corpus

Four discourses of inclusion can be identified across the texts, but they are not evenly distributed. The interpretation of rights is the strongest in Ontario. The origins of inclusion in Ontario's schools are situated in human rights, barrier removal, and public accountability, according to the province's Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools policy document. The Policy on accessible education for students with disabilities also evokes the Ontario Human Rights Code, the duty to accommodate, and the obligation to prevent discrimination (*Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools*, pp. 8–9; *Ontario Ministry of Education, Policy on accessible education for students with disabilities*, pp. 10–12). Like Ontario, Alberta also uses inclusive language though the references to rights are indirect and buried within a wider values-based vocabulary of acceptance and belonging [*Inclusive Education in Alberta*, pp. 1, 5].

The remedial/medical discourse exists in Ontario. The processes surrounding assessment, identification, and placement terminology as presented in *Special Education in Ontario, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Resource Guide* has assumed that there is a need for a specialized process so proper support could be made available [*Special Education in Ontario, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Resource Guide*, pp. 24–29]. The policy on Accessible education for students with disabilities of the OHRC also refers to the *medical/healthcare information*, “*non-evident disabilities*” and individual accommodation plan (pp. 21–29, pp. 75–76). Alberta addresses this narrative directly, stating that inclusion is not only for those with special needs, and then speaking of supports for “*every learner*.” The overarching rationale still retains a differentiation logic, though (i.e., universal, targeted, and individualized provision) [*Inclusive Education in Alberta*, pp. 1–3].

The discourse of managerial/accountability is especially strong in Ontario. The Ontario strategy incorporates “*accountability and transparency*” as a major goal with a key requirement that boards

choose “*clear measures of success*” and report publicly on progress. [*Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools*, pp. 8–9; pp. 32–33]. The Ministry's responsibilities regarding governance, funding, and the oversight of special education plans and procedures are outlined in the *Special Education in Ontario, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Resource Guide* (pp. 14–16; pp. 24–26). Alberta's mention of planning tools and indicators is also present, but the accountability language is lighter and less compliance oriented. [*Inclusive Education in Alberta*, p. 5]

The two corpora touch on economic/skills discourse but the one from Ontario is more explicit. The policy on accessible education for students *with disabilities* links educational attainment with labor-market participation, independent living and contribution to society (*Policy on accessible education for students with disabilities*, pp. 7–10). As outlined in the document “*Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools*,” inclusion is associated with improved student achievement, reduced achievement gaps, and greater public confidence in the province's education system (pp. 7–9). The phrases “*high expectations*,” “*success*” and “*meaningful and relevant learning experiences*”, which is used in Alberta, do not foreground employability as much [*Inclusive Education in Alberta*, pp. 3, 5].

Responsibility and agency

Ontario's layered governance structure divides responsibility, but institutions are still the main actors. Ontario guidelines indicate that boards are to develop and monitor policies, and schools are to report annually, and to align school improvement planning with the provincial strategy [*Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools*, pp. 32–33]. According to OHRC policy, the education provider must inform students about accommodations, play an active role in finding solutions, communicate with them on a continuing basis, include students in school life, and implement the accommodation in a timely manner [*Policy on accessible education for students with disabilities*, pp. 70–76]. The students are not passive, but their role is chiefly to assist in the process of accommodation rather than to lead the accommodation order (*Policy on accessible education for students with disabilities*, pp. 74–76).

Alberta spreads accountability much more evenly throughout the system. The statement *Inclusive Education in Alberta* emphasizes the need for “accepting responsibility for all children and students”. It is the government, school leaders, teachers, families and community partners who share the responsibility for building capacity and collaborating for success [*Inclusive Education in Alberta*, pp. 1, 3, 5]. Agency is therefore collective and relational, not hierarchical. The policy maintains an authoritative message to a school authority, particularly regarding funding and access to meaningful learning experiences. However, this is defined in a more collaborative register [*Inclusive Education in Alberta*, pp. 2, 5].

4. Discussion

Ontario as a rights-governance discourse

The best way to understand the Ontario corpus is as a rights-governance discourse in which inclusion is legitimated through law, accountability and system monitoring. From a Faircloughian perspective, this is significant because the texts do not just describe inclusive education, they construct it as an institutional requirement which must be performed through policy, reporting and measuring progress [*Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools*, pp. 8–9; pp. 32–33; *Policy on accessible education for students with disabilities*, pp. 98–105]. The emphasis of barriers, duties and public reporting indicates that Ontario regards inclusion as a governance issue and not only a pedagogical issue.

This study is in accordance with the literature because Ontario’s texts feature social justice claims and formal monitoring and compliance mechanisms. The corpus is more explicit than many earlier policy texts on institutional accountability. For instance, in its OHRC document, it states that education providers must not be oblivious to discrimination but must proactively take steps to prevent and remedy it [*Policy on accessible education for students with disabilities*, pp. 9, 98–105]. Ontario’s discourse, as a result of that robust legal framing, has a clearer rights-based character than Alberta’s.

Alberta as a values-and-belonging discourse

Through the expression of values, belonging, and shared responsibility, Alberta’s corpus constructs

inclusion. According to *Inclusive Education in Alberta*, inclusion is an “attitude and approach” representing universal acceptance and belonging (*Inclusive Education in Alberta*, p. 1). It further states that all education partners—govt, leaders, teachers, families, and community members work together to eliminate barriers and support success [*Inclusive Education in Alberta*, p. 3]. According to Fairclough, the text normalizes inclusion as either the commonsensical arrangement of the system or as a commitment to morality shared across the system.

This paper is consistent with previous research that describes Alberta’s inclusive policy language as positive in tone but aspirational in orientation. Nevertheless, the current analysis also points to a weakness. Because the text uses overwhelmingly positive, consensus language, it is less forthright about discrimination, access to justice, and institutional failure than the Ontario corpus [*Inclusive Education in Alberta*, pp. 1–5]. Though it lessens the intensity of the discourse, it does not lessen its effectiveness. This is a useful finding for a Q1 journal article because it shows that inclusive education can be discursively legitimate without necessarily being rights-enforcing.

Disability between support and categorisation

Another finding is that neither corpus entirely escapes older special education logics. Ontario relies on terminology of identifications, placements and assessments, while asserting equity and inclusion [*Special Education in Ontario, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Resource Guide*, pp. 24–29]. The OHRC policy seeks to shift away from deficit thinking by emphasizing dignity, individualization and full participation. However, the accommodation model, as noted below in this [*Policy on accessible education for students with disabilities*, pp. 41–76], remains dependent on formal disclosure, and arguably documentation as well. Alberta does this by not using strong diagnostic language, but by support is differentiated by intensity of needs [*Inclusive Education in Alberta*, pp. 1–2].

This literature review demonstrates that residual categorization takes different forms in Ontario and Alberta: Ontario preserves a stronger administrative special-education structure;

whereas Alberta embeds differentiation within a broader universalist discourse. The implication of this is that inclusion has no discursive uniformity and is re-authored through provincial policy traditions and governance styles.

Allocation of agency and responsibility

The texts show a very clear difference in agency. Ontario attributes responsibility mainly to institutions including boards, schools and education providers, and regards accountability as an essential characteristic of inclusion [*Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools*, pp. 32–33; *Policy on accessible education for students with disabilities*, pp. 70–76]. Alberta assigns responsibility more widely and more evenly across the education community [*Inclusive Education in Alberta*, pp. 3, 5]. According to Fairclough, he would likely be able to read this as a difference in the social relations encoded by the texts; Ontario being more top-down and regulatory, Alberta being more collaborative and relational.

Ontario's discourse defines responsibilities more sharply, but they may also result in a compliance-based inclusion model. Alberta's language might foster collective ownership and lessen stigma; nonetheless, it might also dilute duty and obscure institutional failure. Inclusion itself is understood in different ways internationally; there are both tendencies in the literature. The present comparison shows that the two provinces exhibit different solutions to the same policy problem. The results are, in that sense, broadly consistent with previous research, but also add a Canadian interprovincial comparison which earlier studies have not sufficiently developed.

Final interpretive claim

According to the findings, inclusive education in Ontario is monitored as a rights regime while in Alberta it is seen as a shared ethic of belonging and responsiveness (*Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools*, pp. 7-9, 32-33; *Inclusive Education in Alberta*, pp. 1-5; *Policy on accessible education for students with disabilities*, pp. 70-76). Both corpora express support for students with disabilities but differ on their definition of the route to inclusion, who has the responsibility to achieve it and what counts as success. Because inclusive education is not a policy idea nor a practice, but rather a contested discursive formation with an evolving

notion, and it encompasses the legal, pedagogical, and administrative priorities of the stakeholders.

5. Conclusion

Although Ontario and Alberta both constructively frame inclusive education as a policy commitment, they do so in different ways. Ontario understands inclusion in terms of rights and accountability, formal institutional responsibility, while Alberta understands it in terms of belonging, flexibility and shared educational values. Within both two corpora, the term and construct students with disabilities are used as signifying learners with the right to help. Nevertheless, older special-education and remedial assumptions remain visible in both instances.

Instead, various policy logics discursively negotiate it; for example, legal obligation in Ontario and relational collaboration in Alberta. The comparison stated above shows that policy language matters, because it shapes who is seen as responsible, what counts as support, and how disability is understood.

Recommendations

Policymakers should lessen the terminology that engages disability with deficit, categorization or placement. This will help with the betterment. Policies must also clarify responsibility to avoid accountability being lost or overly diffused. Inclusion should not just be about a principle but should also be about a clear and enforceable commitment with duties and follow-up.

The requirement is for the school authorities to take the policy language of the relevant department and translate it into the clear practice through the school plans, monitoring and review processes. Support can help teachers and leaders to recognize how a poor implementation of inclusive language can still reproduce exclusion.

This research should be extended to implements documents in later and other province for future research. It would also be useful to compare policy discourse with classroom practice, interviews, or school-board documents to evaluate whether the same patterns exist on the ground. A comparison over time could also show whether inclusive education language is moving further in a rights- or values-based direction.

This conclusion mirrors previous work showing that inclusive education policy often mixes progressive rhetoric with residual deficit assumptions.

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