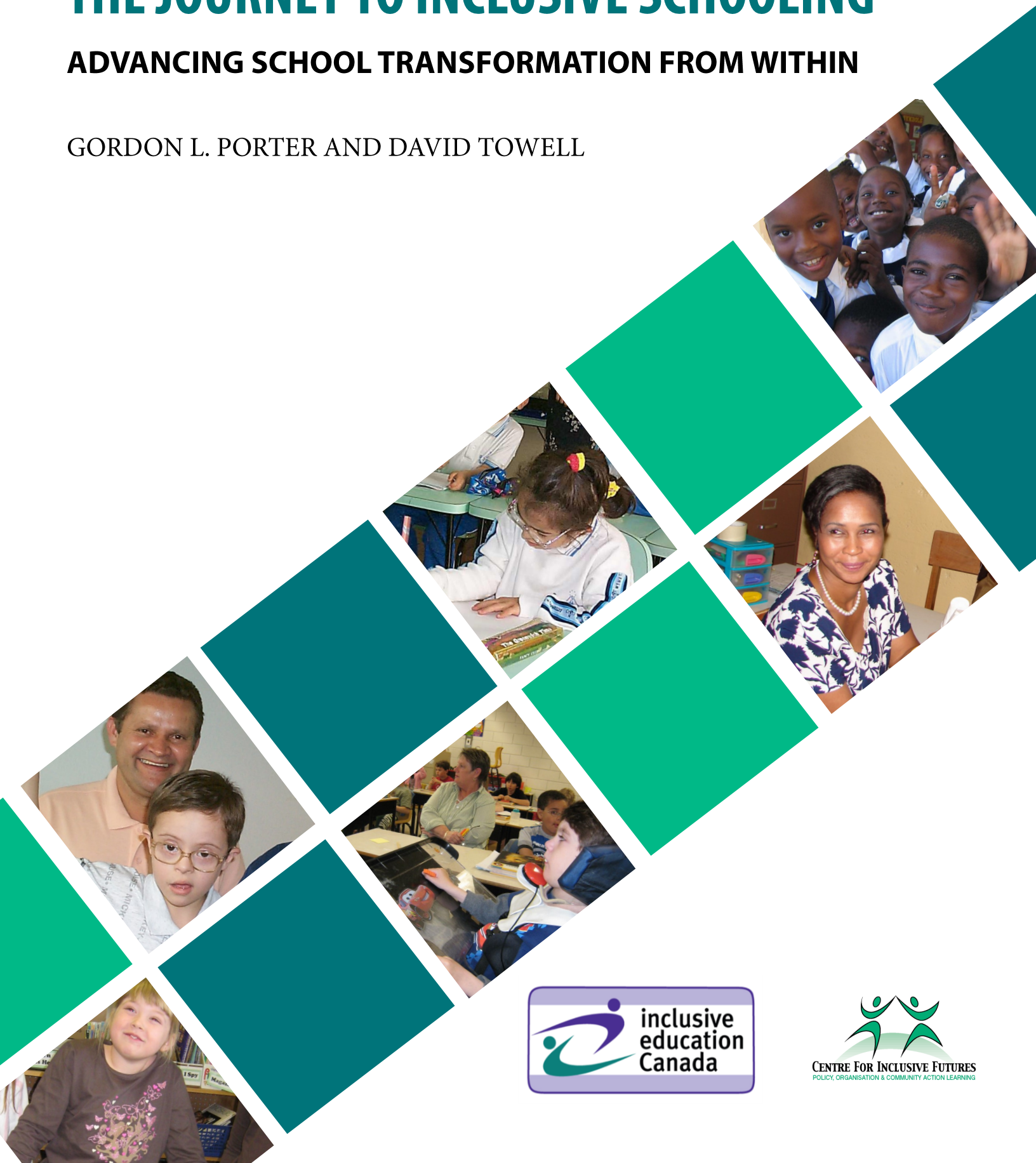


THE JOURNEY TO INCLUSIVE SCHOOLING

ADVANCING SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION FROM WITHIN

GORDON L. PORTER AND DAVID TOWELL



INTRODUCTION

In his book, *Creative Schools*¹, the distinguished British educationalist, Sir Ken Robinson, invites us to consider afresh the fundamental question: 'What is education for?' His answer is that the aim of education is 'to enable students to understand the world around them and the talents within them so that they can become fulfilled individuals and active, compassionate citizens.'

If our schools are to achieve this goal, we must promote schooling with 1) a broad and flexible curriculum, 2) creative and personalised approaches to learning, and 3) a culture which celebrates the full range of diversity among children and youth.

These three features of schooling are even more important if we are to be successful in what a UNESCO publication calls *Reaching Out to All Learners*². A school that 'reaches out' will fully include students who are typically marginalized and excluded, including those with disabilities, those who live in poverty, and children from minority groups at risk of disadvantage and discrimination. This is **inclusive schooling** which we simply define as delivering education through common learning environments where all children and youth learn with their peers in community schools.

The fourth goal in the *United Nations 2030 Goals for Sustainable Development*³ calls on us to - Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning for all. Many governments, national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local community initiatives are focused on advancing this goal. To achieve it, fundamental changes in schooling practices are required. While political and policy officials can establish positive conditions for reform, these efforts can only flourish and succeed if each **school** finds a way to transform itself to accommodate the needs of a diverse student population.

This guide is addressed to those who may hold a variety of roles and accept the challenge of providing leadership for school transformation to make our schools inclusive.

In a companion guide, *Advancing Inclusive Education - Keys to transformational change in public education systems*⁴, we note that although there has been widespread interest in inclusive education over the last

thirty years or more, relatively few jurisdictions have achieved what we can genuinely speak of as a truly inclusive system of education. Using the impressive record of the Canadian province of New Brunswick as a case study, we sought to identify the keys to the transformational processes required to achieve systemic change.

In this new guide, we have invited leaders in schools that we know have made substantial progress to achieving inclusive schooling to offer us short case studies highlighting critical elements in their journey to inclusion. In order to complement the earlier guide, we looked first to New Brunswick. Schools there typically are organized in three levels, primary, middle and high school, and we have provided a case study from each level. We have also looked for insights in two innovative schools in the London Borough of Newham, United Kingdom, which has a long history in working toward inclusion. We have included three case studies from South America, one each from Bolivia, Colombia and Peru. These schools are exploring ways to become inclusive using similar processes, but in rather different economic and social contexts. We greatly appreciate the willingness of the authors of these case studies to join us in this endeavour.

New Brunswick is a largely rural province of Canada and the three schools described here are in a small town and two small cities. The other schools are in national capital cities with larger and denser populations and more complex environments.

There are also major differences between the economic resources available in these five diverse countries. This results in distinctive features in factors including - typical class size; teacher to student ratios; training of teachers; learning materials; communication aids; availability of support services; and more.

Within individual countries, there are similar disparities between conditions in public and private schools. There are also significant differences in the extent of ethnic and linguistic diversity in different places.

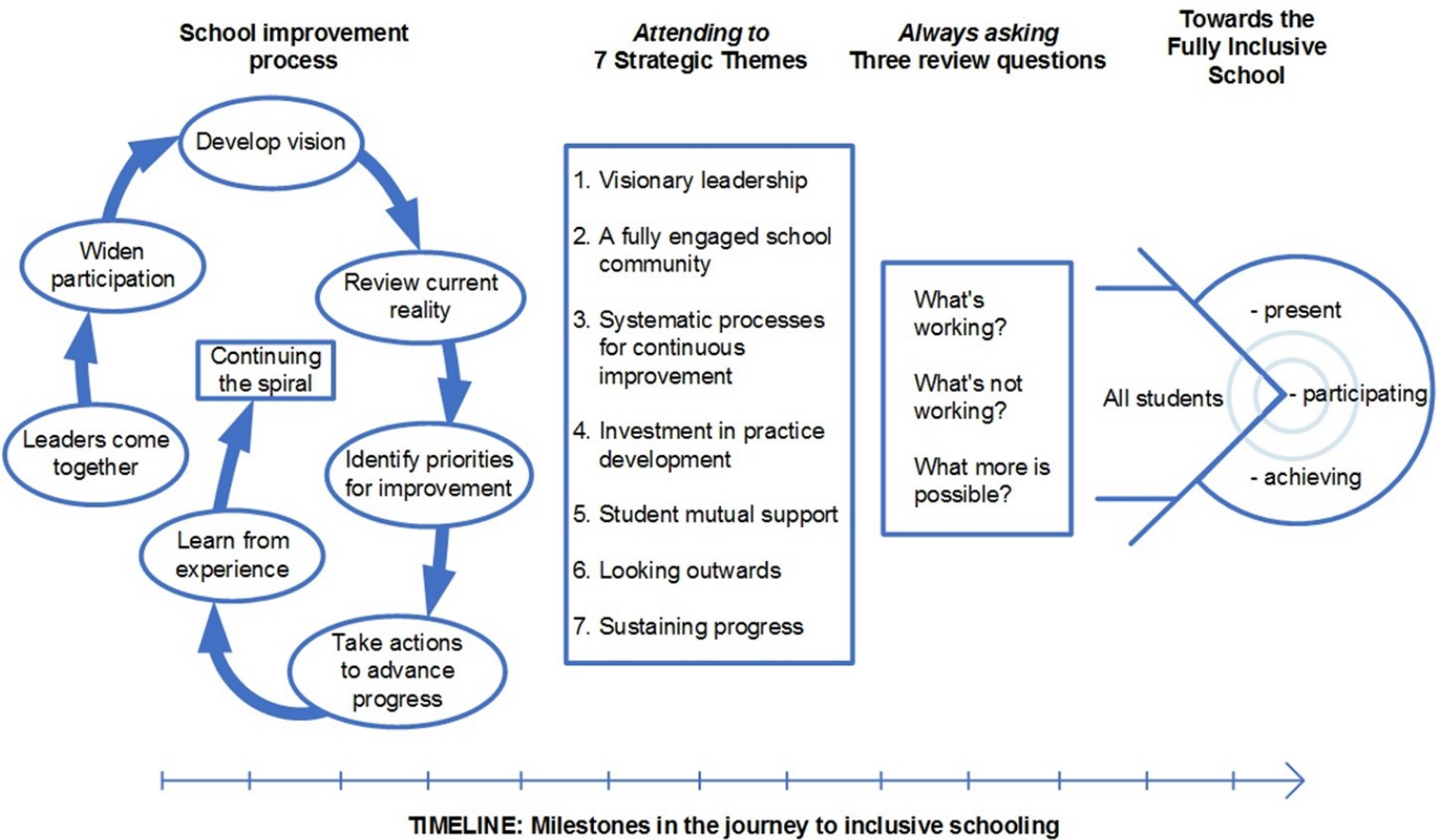
In our cases, the two London schools serve the most diverse populations. However, while acknowledging unique characteristics, we assert that these case studies demonstrate that the values underpinning efforts to advance inclusion and the processes involved in achieving school transformation have a great deal in common and can provide positive models for other schools.

We include all seven case studies in **Part Two** to this guide. We have drawn from these and other experiences to offer a framework for school transformation. This framework is illustrated with examples of the change strategies used and quotations from the leaders of the eight schools.

We hope this framework and the examples provided will be useful to leaders plotting the path to inclusion in other schools and a vehicle for exchanging experience across schools as these journeys proceed.

This transformation starts from an educational philosophy and set of values that embrace difference and value the uniqueness each student brings to their schooling. Such leadership involves working with others to create and refine a school improvement strategy that through sustained effort engages the key elements required for success. The **Figure** (below) provides an overview of these processes. The text which follows offers a succinct guide to each element.

FIGURE A MODEL FOR SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION



VISIONARY LEADERSHIP

Schools are complex organisations, typically involving hundreds of people every day engaged in a wide range of activities. Teachers and students, other staff members and parents all play a role. This dynamic environment demands leaders who can ensure that resources and instructional practices are focused on delivering their educational purpose, student learning.

To create and sustain an 'inclusive school' leaders need to simultaneously articulate a coherent vision of quality inclusive schooling and build support for this vision among a wide range of stakeholders. They need to promote a culture that encourages learning from experience and critical reflection on school and classroom practices. Indeed, schools need leadership to inspire and orchestrate all the improvement and transformation processes summarised in the model presented in the **Figure**.

In the Introduction, we followed Sir Ken Robinson in identifying the aims of education as being to enable students to "... become fulfilled individuals and active compassionate citizens." In a world of great diversity, inclusive schooling seeks as a matter of human rights to ensure that every young person has the opportunity to gain a high-quality education alongside their peers in local schools.

In this conception, differences among students become assets from which they can all learn, not deficits which make their inclusion problematic. An inclusive school ensures that every student is present, participating and achieving.



CASE EXAMPLES AND INSIGHTS

Leadership is a key to the change process in all our case studies. Indeed, in the three New Brunswick stories (Schools A, B and C), it was the arrival of a new school principal that offered both the opportunity and the stimulus to review how the school was working and start to think about doing better. But leadership could also come from outside and from within the school. In the London Borough of Newham (Schools D), it was the education authority itself which set out to reform local schools. In the story from La Paz (School F), a class teacher, Mrs Guevera - with support from her Director - was the key role model in changing classroom culture and practice to ensure the full inclusion of a student with acquired hearing loss.

Moreover, in each of these examples, leadership started from values. In Newham, the elected members of the education authority pursued an active human rights agenda in deciding no longer to segregate disabled students from their peers although the full implementation of this policy was phased over 10 years. In Lima, the leadership of Colegio De La Inmaculada (School G) tell us that openness to inclusion was a 'commitment of the heart'. At Forest Hills School (School A), Tanya Whitney tells us of her discomfort at the gap between her own professed values and the existence of a segregated classroom in her new school's basement. Tanya writes:

"To move the school forward we first focused on building a 'whole school' consensus around our "purpose" in education... the words we used to articulate the mission... evolved over time: 'We build...INCLUSION; We build...CAPACITY; We build...LEARNING COMMUNITIES'."

UNESCO's Reaching Out to All Learners offers 16 indicators which define in more detail what this vision means at the level of the whole school and at the level of the classroom: See - **SCHEMA**

SCHEMA ADVANCING KEY ASPECTS OF THE VISION

	What's working?	What's not working?	What more is possible?	Proposed Action
Indicators: Whole school <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Everyone is made to feel welcome. Students are equally valued. There are high expectations for all students. Staff and students treat one another with respect. There is partnership between staff and families. The school is accessible to all students. Senior staff support teachers in making sure that all students participate and learn. The school monitors the presence, participation and achievement of all students. 				
Indicators: Classroom <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching is planned with all students in mind. Lessons encourage the participation of all students. Students are actively involved in their own learning. Students are encouraged to support one another's learning. Support is provided when students experience difficulties. Classroom discipline is based on mutual respect and healthy living. Students feel that they have somebody to speak to when they are worried or upset. Assessment contributes to the achievement of all students. 				

Visionary leadership can - and should - come from many sources with school principals and others with designated leadership roles playing a vital role. As the principal works to promote inclusion as well as school improvement, engaging a multi-stakeholder team, or network of teams will be critical. Classroom teachers, support staff, parents, families and students have significant roles to play and need to be drawn into the process.

Effective leadership by school leaders working with a ‘school team’ is especially important if schools are to be truly inclusive and meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. Whatever the source of the stimulus to transformation, the journey to inclusion will need to gain a clear mandate from the school principal and the school governance structure in order to ensure that it is fully embedded in all the important ways in which the school works. This is especially the case in relation to the school’s improvement planning process. Through teamwork, school leaders can champion inclusion and support a wide variety of innovations that help realise the vision in both school and classroom practice. Successful inclusive schooling requires whole school transformation.

A FULLY ENGAGED SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Schools are highly dependent on principals and teachers to move inclusion forward. However, they are not the only participants who need to be engaged. Each school is part of a wider community that includes a variety of stakeholders who can play a role in supporting transformative change. This includes other staff members, like those who serve in clerical and maintenance functions, as well as students, parents and members of civil society who share an interest in education. This wide network of individuals and groups can help ensure that the practices being implemented work successfully for everyone. They can share perspectives and the adults can reflect on what made schooling work well for them. Focusing on what helps or hinders inclusion and participation can lead to positive targets for moving forward.

Effective education requires that students are active participants in the classroom and in wider school improvement. The change process needs to raise everyone's awareness of the benefits of inclusion and the need to combat discrimination and support equity and opportunity.

Parent associations can play an important part in promoting mutual aid and strengthening the confidence that inclusive schooling is worth fighting for. Parents need to be involved with teachers in developing and delivering each child's educational programme. The processes of change envisaged in the **Figure** (page 3) can foster actions where all these stakeholders can contribute to on-going school improvement.



CASE EXAMPLES AND INSIGHTS

Our stories all underline the importance of building wide support for the new inclusive vision throughout the school community, including students and families. Programa Mundo Inclusivo in La Paz (School F) is an NGO with wide experience of working with public schools. One of their staff, Carlos Caballero writes:

“(In our experience), schools typically lack a good understanding of inclusive education and the practices required for its successful implementation. Accordingly, an important first stage in the process of change is to involve all members of the educational community (teachers, students, staff, parents and others) in raising inclusion awareness. What follows this is an investment in training teaching staff in classroom management strategies and curricular adaptation, with support for implementing these changes in classroom practice.”

In similar vein, Denise Haché-Mallet includes in the sub-title of her story of Ecole Marie-Ester (School C) the key observation that it is essential to engage people before initiating change ... and continue that engagement so as to learn from experience together as change proceeds.

Tanya Whitney (School A) tells us that in welcoming students from the segregated classroom, the most critical engagement was with the parents and families of the students in this class, making sure they understood the support plan for their child and involving them as the students made the transition to typical classrooms.

Gary Gallant, writing about another new Brunswick school, (School B) shares his school's effort to engage with the 'First Nation Community' that provided a significant proportion of the school's population, drawing on community resources to support the school.

SYSTEMATIC PROCESSES FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Visionary leadership and stakeholder engagement are the critical first steps in launching the process of continuous school improvement represented by the spiral in the **Figure**.

The transformation journey starts when leaders come together to initiate or strengthen efforts to achieve purposeful change, taking account of national/state laws and policies. It continues as they involve other staff, students and families in building a shared vision of inclusive schooling. Then comes the task of reviewing current performance against this vision by answering three questions – 1) 'What's working?' 2) 'What's not working?', and 3) 'What more is possible?' An expanding number of stakeholders - from the school and the community - explore ways school life might be improved to enhance student wellbeing and learning.

The first question, 'What's working?', encourages attention to building on strengths. Priorities are identified and changes, small and large, are implemented to advance the journey to inclusion. Milestones are established to monitor progress as resources to support the work are identified and used.

The second question, 'What's not working?' encourages the school community to think afresh about ways of closing gaps between vision and current performance.

Transforming the culture of a school demands teamwork and processes that mandate individuals and groups to develop and nurture success in a variety of ways. School principals will need to distribute opportunities for leadership among stakeholders while maintaining a focused and stable environment.

One of the most challenging factors for schools is finding the 'space' – the time and opportunity - for participants to reflect on their own experiences and contribute to improvement. These actions can transform the school into a 'learning community' where the culture encourages innovation and improvement that grows organically through reflection and dialogue. Specifically, school staff are encouraged to honestly question usual practices and to be creative in developing their own improvement strategies.

By asking the third question, 'What more is possible?' the process continues. In most schools these efforts take 3 - 5 years to do well and, of course, this work is never fully completed. There is always more to learn, new challenges to face, and new approaches to be tested.



CASE EXAMPLES AND INSIGHTS

All our stories point to the need for a continuing, systematic and often lengthy series of actions that produce important milestones along the way to inclusion and school improvement.

Tanya Whitney (School A) tells us that it took more than a year to complete the initial step of building wide support for a fresh statement of school mission. Gary Gallant (School B), describes the importance of detailed investigation to ensure a good understanding of why his school was under-performing before engaging the school community in developing ways of doing better. Denise Haché-Mallet (School C) describes a four-step approach to achieving change (planning, organisational development, action and review) which became part of a continuing spiral of improvement. In Lima, Katherine Britto (School G) reports that school leaders took great care to get to know 'Felix', their first student with Down's Syndrome, as they prepared for his admission. In Bogotá (School E) this has been a 27 year journey of pedagogical innovation.

Moreover, all these stories point to the importance of building teams to facilitate the change process both to guide the direction of school improvement and to ensure practical supports for classroom teachers and their students.

As Tanya Whitney describes the latter:

"We needed to create structures that would lead to improvement, and particularly more inclusive practices. We established a 'Student Services Team' that became knowledgeable about best practices and equipped to address school-wide systemic issues ensuring support for teachers and students. Our team met frequently and engaged other staff members in activities to build their capacities. We worked on 'universal design for learning', strengthening in-class supports for students, and building pro-active approaches to deal with student behaviour. The focus in all these areas was on building capacity and making it possible for teachers to collaborate with their peers and others to meet classroom challenges."



INVESTMENT IN PRACTICE DEVELOPMENT

Embracing diversity and valuing each student's uniqueness are the starting points of moving toward inclusion. However, values and good intentions are not enough. Transformation requires movement from adopting values to implementing practices to support inclusion. These practices need to impact at three levels, a) the school as a whole, b) the classroom and instruction, and, c) the individual student. While each level can be pursued in isolation, improvement in one area will empower innovation and progress in the others. In the end, they are interdependent. The **Schema** (page 5) identifies sixteen indicators of actions that can be taken at the school and classroom level. School-level practice begins with a shared vision of inclusion as a key pillar of the school's educational mission. Establishing a culture that both welcomes and accommodates diversity among students provides the context for developing and delivering a flexible curriculum as well as effective instructional strategies. Schools also need to promote positive approaches to diversity as they address the physical, material and attitudinal barriers that often restrict accessibility and participation. Above all, schools that are successful with inclusion ensure that teachers are well supported in both an effective and timely manner. By supporting teachers, we support students and enhance their success.

At the classroom level, effective teachers give careful consideration to the way they manage lessons, the way they use additional teaching assistance and the adjustments they make to reflect individual differences among students. They set and assess achievable goals and use strategies like 'universal design for learning', differentiated instruction and cooperative learning groups. They strengthen peer engagement and seek to diminish unproductive competition.

At the individual student level, the focus is on accommodating instructional strategies to the needs of the specific child. Every student will need accommodation on occasion: some only a little, others more frequently, and a few, quite often. These individual adjustments permit teachers to personalize classroom learning and make inclusion a reality for individual children.

The essential investment is in developing the capacity of teachers and others in the school community to think inclusively and adapt their practices to increased student diversity in the classroom and the school.

An inclusive school must have a strong commitment to continuous professional learning for teachers and other staff members. Sometimes they will need training provided by external specialists or experts. However, it is even more critical that they have adequate opportunities to work with their peers and develop a way to learn from their common experiences. Together they can become what are sometimes called 'reflective practitioners'. *Teachers Helping Teachers: Problem-solving Teams*⁵ is just one well-tried method for doing this.

Each school will also benefit from an 'inclusion support team', preferably made up of individuals who already work in the school. This might include the principal, a support teacher, a school counsellor and one or more classroom teachers who are particularly knowledgeable and skilled with inclusive practices. The internal team can be supported by outside experts, for example from a local university teacher education faculty, an educational psychologist, occupational or speech/language therapist. In some cases, someone with experience working with families (for example, an active parent leader) might help reduce fears about inclusion and strengthen parental support for inclusion.

Other kinds of investment are also typically required: to make buildings accessible; to fund sufficient teachers and other school staff; to ensure the needed input of specialists/experts; to provide assistive technologies and varied learning materials; and more. The economic base for these investments varies considerably between public and private schools and between countries at different levels of economic development. Nonetheless, despite these differences it is clear that progress everywhere depends on distributing available funds fairly. By doing so, we can ensure that all students benefit from their participation in the common learning environment in an inclusive school.

CASE EXAMPLES AND INSIGHTS

Our stories suggest that many kinds of investment are required to remove the barriers to universal accessibility but there is agreement across cases that the key investment is in strengthening inclusive pedagogies and ensuring ongoing support to teachers in developing their classroom practice.

Pedagogical innovation is a particular focus of the Lyceum VAL story (School E). As the school director summarises this:

“In the Lyceum our core strategy for all students is one of self-directed learning, which allows each student to advance at their own pace and according to their abilities. The teacher is a tutor who guides and motivates learning more than a transmitter of knowledge. For students with SEN this is complemented with different supports according to their needs - for example, we use curricular adjustments, adaptations and / or curricular flexibility, small support groups and individual teaching - all of which is documented now in the Individual Plan of Reasonable Adjustments (PIAR) in accordance with recent national legislation (Decree 1421 of 2017).”

On the latter, ensuring ongoing support to teachers, this can be quite straightforward: Colegio De La Inmaculada (School G) introduced a period before classes start each day for teachers to meet for reflection on classroom challenges. In the New Brunswick stories, part of this support comes from accessing professional development opportunities locally and regionally and in the case of Devon Middle School (School B) establishing a partnership with another school to share inclusive practices.

All these stories emphasise too the importance not just of continuing support to teachers within the school but also of institutionalising such support through new structures like the appointment of a complex needs coordinator in Eastlea School (Schools D) and the creation of school-based support teams in both Forest Hills and Devon Schools (Schools A and B).

Gary Gallant describes this latter investment as follows:

“One of our most important steps forward was to formalise our 'school-based support team'. The team was made up of the school administrators (principal and vice-principal), along with the three education support teachers and our school guidance counsellor (inviting others as necessary). The focus of the team was to support classroom teachers to plan and provide effective instruction for every student. It was a pro-active approach based on identifying and responding to the needs of teachers as much as to the learning needs of the student. Teachers were helped to use instructional strategies that accommodated students in core classroom activities making the provision of 'specialized' instruction less of a priority. Teachers learnt to make their classrooms more effective for all students and thus more 'inclusive'.”

STUDENT MUTUAL SUPPORT

School communities are primarily made up of students: children and youth engaged in what for most will be the single most important period of their lives. Schools take the child from the safe but narrow confines of the family to the more risky but engaging world of the school. While the degree of human and material resources available in each school may vary, the potential impact of students themselves does not.

Students learn much more than what their teachers teach them! They learn from each other in the classroom, in the school common areas and on the playground. This learning may not always be the 'official' curriculum, but it does engage their language skills, behaviour, motivation and more. School leaders can promote the benefits of peer relationships and engagement to enhance the impact of more formal instruction.

Students are essential partners with staff in building an inclusive culture and supporting one another's learning. At the level of the school, students can be encouraged to take on leadership roles and become inclusion champions. In the playground and the sports field these champions can help to ensure mutual support and cohesion in the school community. At the level of the classroom, students can be active contributors to collaborative and cooperative learning. They can build networks of peer relationships and in this way create conditions where everyone is both participating and learning. At both the school and classroom levels, students can be encouraged to provide feedback to teachers on what works well and what doesn't and thus contribute to school improvement.

CASE EXAMPLES AND INSIGHTS

The story from Santo Tomas Public School in La Paz (School F) makes clear that the positive welcome given to Andres Alacona, a student with a progressive hearing impairment, was given particular expression through the enthusiasm of his class-mates - and in due course students throughout the school - in all learning sign language, along with their teacher, Mrs.Guevara.

Linda Jordan's account of progress in the London schools (Schools D) makes this point more generally:

"Initially there was some concerns among staff at Eastlea and among the staff from the (closing) special school who would be transferring to Eastlea. However as one teacher said to me recently, 'It was the children who showed us this was the right thing to do - they were welcoming and happy to include the new children'. In fact, with such a diverse school already, the children did not see the inclusion of disabled children as an issue. With over 70 languages spoken, all continents represented, and many people living in poverty and other challenging circumstances, including disabled children was seen as something to celebrate and an opportunity to emphasise our common humanity and the spirit of cooperation...."



LOOKING OUTWARDS

So far, our focus has been on the school as an institutional community and the effective use of internal factors to deliver better education for all students. However, every school is embedded in a larger community with multiple networks of individuals and organizations playing a role. Schools need to be looking outwards to these wider systems and networks to learn from them, get support from them, and in turn, influence them to play an active role in creating an inclusive community of which the school is a part.

Schools, both public and private, are part of both local, regional and national education systems. They are shaped by external educational policies and thus will benefit from engaging with other schools to share and find ways to optimize actions that will support inclusion and school improvement.

In addition, schools and teachers are enmeshed in institutional and professional networks including teacher unions, specialist's groups, non-governmental organizations focused on children and education, as well as university and research agencies. These and other networks can be useful vehicles for sharing learning across school boundaries and with the community.

Ensuring that the school is tightly linked to the local community where students, their families and staff, live and work allows the community to be a resource to the school and the school in turn a resource for the community. Indeed, inclusive schools can play a powerful role in helping the community to see and appreciate the benefits of supporting and accommodating diversity.

CASE EXAMPLES AND INSIGHTS

New Brunswick is a province where there is governmental policy support for advancing school inclusion. In all three of the stories (Schools A, B and C) an important part of the school improvement process involved negotiation with local education authorities both to strengthen the policy mandate for change and seek extra investment, for example in support teachers. Likewise, all three of these schools benefitted from access to wider professional learning opportunities for staff.

Linda Jordan (Schools D) describes the community diversity which characterises the London Borough of Newham.

"Engagement with these communities, especially parents, was an essential element in building support for school transformation."

Linda is a parent of a disabled daughter who attended local schools as a child, as well as someone who through election to the local authority was herself able to exercise policy leadership in the Borough. By agreeing among themselves that they would all demand inclusive education for their children, Linda and many other parents were the main pressure group demanding these radical changes.



SUSTAINING PROGRESS

Two ideas are central to the school improvement process: first, that at all levels the school is a learning community, drawing on a wide range of perspectives to get better at what it does; second, that this investment in learning from experience is always being encouraged through asking the three review questions, 1) 'What's working?; 2) What's not working?; and, 3) What more is possible?'.

Beyond this, the school needs to put in place appropriate systems and measures to monitor the presence, participation and achievement of all students. They do this through listening and getting feedback from students, families and teachers; and also by carefully tracking progress toward inclusive practice through a range of assessment mechanisms.

The need to keep working on transforming school culture and practices to ensure that inclusion is successful will probably never be fully completed. New challenges, new students and new staff members will demand on-going effort. However, school leaders can make progress by finding ways to bring enough of the elements described here together to make fully inclusive schooling possible, and then with perseverance, make it sustainable, continuing to ask: 'What more is possible?'

The Committee of the United Nations which monitors implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities issued a *General Comment (2016)* on international progress in relation to Article 24: The Right to Inclusive Education⁶. The Committee concluded that even in countries which took Article 24 seriously and not just rhetorically, progress has typically been disappointingly slow and inconsistent.

Put simply, many initiatives that have been introduced in the name of advancing inclusive education have not truly transformed school and classroom practice in the ways that are needed. These efforts have typically been influenced by traditional 'special education' practices and a student deficit model.

They have focused on a small number of students identified as 'different' or 'deficient', and while they may be helping individual students, they are not challenging the entrenched and exclusionary practices of most education systems which continue to do 'business as usual'.

To do better, we need to focus on those changes that are most likely to prove transformative: promoting the paradigm shift required to make the school work better for everyone. In summary, our analysis suggests these seven points as critical in moving schools toward a genuine inclusive culture:

- School improvement targets better education for all students and welcomes the full range of diversity.
- Teachers take responsibility for all students and every member of the school team (principals, teachers, specialists, parents and fellow students) is engaged in making inclusion happen.
- School improvement is understood to be a continuing spiral of a) envisioning a better future, b) creating innovation, and c) learning by reflecting cooperatively on experience.
- Investments are targeted at supporting class teachers and thereby enabling all students to experience success in the common learning environment.
- Students themselves are an inclusive school's main asset to successful transformation.
- Schools need to engage with and learn from their policy, professional and local community environments.
- Advancing inclusive education involves bringing all these factors together and thereby transforming the school as a whole.



CASE EXAMPLES AND INSIGHTS

Our seven case studies stretch from London to La Paz but despite this diversity of contexts and resources, there is strong agreement that the journey to inclusive schooling needs to be vision-driven, systemic in scope and engage the whole school community. Each in their own way emphasizes the need to 'sustain progress' through well planned actions.

The stories also share a strong emphasis on targeting support for class teachers. They describe how teachers must take responsibility for the learning of their students while the school has to ensure teachers get every support possible to be successful.

In two of the case studies (School A and Schools D), a key step in transformation involved the closure of 'special school' facilities and the shift of students and resources into the mainstream. Even in these examples however, this big step was understood exactly as that: a platform on which to build continuing efforts to advance inclusion for all students.

El Colegio De La Inmaculada in Lima (School G) summarises the system-wide lessons from its 10 years of experience as:

- 'Listen carefully to families and learn as much as possible about (each) child'
- 'Sustain widespread (family) support for welcoming increasing diversity'
- 'Other students are a vital factor in successful inclusion'
- 'Focus on developing the capacity of classroom teachers to welcome new students'
- 'Continuing success requires continuing professional development'.

Looking across these cases, there is also agreement that it is important to seek and use multiple sources of feedback on progress towards desired outcomes for students, recognising both the academic and social objectives of education. Often there are national measures of the former, like the SABER tests in Colombia (School E). In Canada, New Brunswick schools are able to make comparative assessments of progress using a country wide survey of student perceptions, as Gary Gallant reports (School B). More generally, these schools all invest in learning honestly from experience, including the perspectives of students, parents and teachers.

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David Towell is the brother of a profoundly disabled woman, Patricia, whose life informed his national leadership role in advancing inclusion in the United Kingdom. David has also worked internationally on approaches to delivering social change through partnerships between public agencies and civil society.

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SEVEN CASE STUDIES OF THE JOURNEY TO INCLUSIVE SCHOOLING

CANADA

- A) FOREST HILLS SCHOOL, SAINT JOHN, NEW BRUNSWICK - BY TANYA WHITNEY
- B) DEVON MIDDLE SCHOOL, FREDERICTON, NEW BRUNSWICK - BY GARY GALLANT
- C) ÉCOLE MARIE-ESTHER, SHIPPAGAN, NEW BRUNSWICK - BY DENISE HACHÉ-MALLET

UNITED KINGDOM

- D) CLEVES PRIMARY SCHOOL & EASTLEA SECONDARY SCHOOL, LONDON BOROUGH OF NEWHAM - BY LINDA JORDAN

SOUTH AMERICA

- E) LICEO VAL, BOGOTÁ, COLOMBIA - BY LUZ ESPERANZA MORALES SARMIENTO
- F) SANTO TOMAS PUBLIC SCHOOL, LA PAZ, BOLIVIA - BY CARLOS MIGUEL CABALLERO BARAHONA
- G) COLEGIO DE LA INMACULADA, LIMA, PERÚ - BY KATHERINE BRITTO

A FOREST HILLS SCHOOL, SAINT JOHN, NEW BRUNSWICK



Forest Hills School: A Journey to Inclusion

by Tanya Whitney

Tanya Whitney has held several leadership positions in New Brunswick schools. In this case, she shares her experience as a new principal in a quite large school in an urban area. Tanya's vision of what inclusive schooling involved was not consistent with what she found as she assumed leadership of the school. She describes the process she followed to change the culture of the school and lead the staff, parents and students on the path to inclusion.

Forest Hills School is a large Kindergarten to Grade 8 school with 850 students in Saint John, New Brunswick. In 2006, the Saint John area school district was not particularly known for being a champion of inclusion, as some segregating practices still existed in schools, despite direction from the ministry to do otherwise.

The school building itself was a very large structure and besides the myriad of wings and rooms for the typical classrooms, there was a basement area that was the site of a district managed, self-contained classroom. It provided full day schooling for approximately 16 elementary and middle school age students.

The majority of these students were from outside the Forest Hills School catchment zone and would normally have been expected to attend other community schools. This approach followed a long-standing practice in the district of transporting students with significant disabilities to stand-alone classes even through provincial legislation prohibited this.

As a new principal I found both the school and the community a complex combination that took some time to understand. With two full time vice-principals, the opportunity to develop teamwork and collaboration was clear from the outset. As we assessed the actual climate of the school, it was evident that it was staffed with teachers who cared greatly about their students.

There were dedicated resource and guidance teachers in the building who helped individual teachers often in individualized ways. Despite this, the school had low standard achievement results, disruptive behaviour in classrooms, and what seemed like a landslide of detentions and suspensions.

And then there was the school's most problematic challenge ... the district-run self-contained classroom located in the school basement. Even the location of the program proved concerning because of the physical separation from the school population. The students in this program were separately bussed to our school from across the city; they had their own entrance in to the building, and the program was staffed by the district.

These students, with a few exceptions, were not in their community school and none of them had any exposure to our "regular" classrooms. Each of them had been diagnosed as having one or more of a variety of intellectual, developmental, and/or modal disabilities including hearing impairment. The staff who worked with them were dedicated professionals who worked diligently to provide an effective program for these students. Nevertheless, what the students missed was the opportunity to spend as much time as possible in their community school in mixed classrooms with their peers.



However, our province as a whole had developed significant expertise around inclusive education. A network of resources and supports found throughout the province proved very beneficial. Our school leadership team was inspired to move forward and become more inclusive. We were able to attend professional learning sessions that increased our knowledge about how to support change academically, socially, emotionally and physically.

To move the school forward we first focused on building a 'whole school' consensus around our "purpose" in education.

It was clear that the in-depth conversations with teachers and educational assistants were needed to co-create and articulate a mission and vision. This took us the first full year and stretched into the second year.

This set the stage for us to have a unified path forward that all agreed on. Staff members were involved in this from the ground up. Building on the belief that most if not all teachers approach their craft with care and positive intention, the words we used to articulate the mission of Forest Hills School evolved over time:

'We build...INCLUSION; We build...CAPACITY; We build...LEARNING COMMUNITIES'.

These words became a touch stone for future action and provided clarity when we encountered competing interests. They also provided a clear message to our school community about what was most important to us.

We needed to create structures that would lead to improvement, and particularly more inclusive practices. We established a Student Services Team that became knowledgeable about best practices and equipped to address school-wide systemic issues ensuring support for teachers and students. Our team met frequently and engaged other staff members in activities to build their capacity. We worked on universal design for learning, strengthening in-class supports for students, and building proactive approaches to deal with student behaviour. The focus in all of these areas was on building capacity and making it possible for teachers to collaborate with their peers and others to meet classroom challenges.

We accessed learning through professional conferences and events sponsored by the New Brunswick Association for Community Living. We also participated in province wide training events and partnered with another school in a project to share inclusive practices.

As our staff skills increased, and as we served our diverse student population within our school community effectively, the self-contained classroom in the basement became more of an irritant. It went against the long-standing inclusive education direction of the province. It posed a conflict to my sensibility as a principal as well as to other members of the school leadership team. It also began to affront our teachers who were unsettled by the contradiction between the special class and the way we were serving students in the rest of the school.

The fact that the program was district-run and not under the control of the school administration made it a particularly difficult challenge. In fact, the obligation under the education act and provincial directives that school principals must ensure the safety and care of all students was clearly not being met. Increasingly, I faced a critical question: 'How could I turn a blind eye to a program that seemed to run directly contrary to the principles of our province's inclusive education mandate?'

The transition from self-contained classroom to an integrated program to support an inclusive community school took over a year to implement. It began later in the second year with a few heart-to-heart conversations with our district superintendent and director of education focused on our belief that we could do better. We shared our perspective that the students in the program were not receiving the benefits of an inclusive school program. Despite a lack of enthusiasm, the district leaders did agree to allow us to move forward and dismantle the self-contained program.

They supported the changeover by providing an extra resource/support teacher for the first six months of the effort.

Our school-based Student Services Team developed detailed plans for the transition and worked to prepare and support teachers and other staff. However, it is important to note that our most

critical engagement was with the parents and families of the students in the special class. We made sure we worked with them to understand the support plan for their child and to involve them as we slowly introduced the student to a typical classroom. Most important was assisting the parents in understanding how an inclusive school experience could be beneficial to their child, since to that point they had only been segregated. An inclusive class created a perceived risk and vulnerability for them.

They were fearful there would not be support for their child's individual needs. They also wondered how welcoming a general classroom of typical children would be.

Families were given the option of leaving their child in Forest Hills or having them return to their neighbourhood community school. Some stayed, while others left. That meant we had to work out practical issues such as bussing and communication with the student's home school. While we were able to deal with all of these issues, some more complicated than others, they nonetheless took considerable time.

This process took thorough planning and sustained effort by our school leaders and resource/support teachers. It required an open mindset from our classroom teachers and support staff.

It also required full engagement and communication with all the families served by the school, who were open to, yet apprehensive about this change. As the school principal, I needed to manage the change process, communicate effectively, and navigate the concerns and expectations of the school staff, the school community, and the district. Throughout, the fact that we had already established our belief system and shared purpose through our mission statement made a great difference. This initiative provided another opportunity for the staff to continue learning together

Eight months later, when we began a new school year the self-contained classroom no longer existed. The increased confidence and efficacy of

the staff was palpable. Forest Hills School continued to soar and became a district and provincial leader and example of inclusive practice.

During this time, the school received a National Inclusive Schools Award from the Canadian Association for Community Living. The school to this day is a showcase school for inclusion and serving a diverse student population. To speak to longevity, the school received a second National Inclusive Schools Award in 2018.

The current school leaders and teachers continue to focus on strengthening collaborative strategies and methods that better support universal instruction in individual classrooms. Success for every student needs to be sustained by efforts to support teachers, to improve instruction and to work in partnership with parents.

It is encouraging to report that the local school district has become much more aligned with provincial policy and expectations for inclusive education. It is both exciting and rewarding to know that Forest Hills School has been a determined and effective advocate of inclusion.



Staff of Forest Hills School receiving an 'Inclusive Education Award' from the New Brunswick Association for Community Living.



System Change: Toward An Effective Inclusive School

by Gary Gallant

Gary Gallant clearly did great work to 'turn round' Devon Middle School and this short story highlights some key themes in managing transformation: leadership, a process which builds staff commitment, careful attention to a systemic diagnosis, rethinking and redefining the contributions of diversity specialists, teaching assistants and therefore class teachers, and investing in capacity development.

Nearly a decade ago, after more than 20 years as a teacher, I became a school principal for the first time. The Devon Middle School (Grades 6, 7, 8) in Fredericton, New Brunswick first opened in 1949 and serves one of the most challenging areas of the city. The school has a very diverse demographic that includes the Saint Mary's First Nation, assorted economically challenged micro-communities, both urban and rural, along with a middle-class neighborhood. The school was technically inclusive; all students spent most of their time in the regular classroom with peers, but things were not going as well as they might. I found a well-meaning and dedicated staff who were used to a top-down approach as they dealt with issues. The school mantra seemed to be that "things are done this way because they have always been done this way."

It was soon evident that I would need to address issues facing both the school and the community as a whole and make a positive impact on them. Among the glaring indicators certain facts spoke for themselves. Student behaviour and discipline was a severe problem, so much so that we had a reputation as a very tough school. As a result, we did not have a positive school culture and student's academic achievement was suffering. My first task as the school leader was to get a handle on the "why" and the "how" of the school's situation. Then we needed to identify and implement the necessary changes to create a positive school environment.

So, clip board in hand, I began a three-month period of intentional, silent observation searching for possible places to begin to influence change. I didn't have to look far to determine that the school's root problem had to do with effectively serving the wide gamut of students experiencing challenges in learning. This included students traditionally considered to have disabilities as well as many from the First Nation's community and children affected by poverty.

At the time the student population was 325 students aged 12-14 years spread among 15 classrooms. To serve these students and support their teachers, the school district provided us with two education support teachers (ESTs) as well as fifteen teacher assistants (TAs) that they coordinated. The education support teachers, although highly dedicated, were experiencing real challenges and were candid in sharing them:

The ESTs had limited formal training in pedagogy focused on students with special needs (that is traditional special education training).

The school had no identified continuous and systematic approach to determine which students needed to be placed on a formal special educational plan (SEP) that set out the accommodations they



Principal Gary Gallant and Vice-principal Patty Oxford.

might need; the result was that over 100 out of 325 students were on some form of SEP.

The ESTs did not have a consistent or reliable system in place for working with teachers.

For example, classroom teachers often didn't know which support teacher held the file for which student.

Allocating and managing the work of the 15 TAs in the school was a major problem; they were placed in the school to deal with high priority students (medically fragile; multiple-disabilities) but were also used in a reactive manner with a fluctuating group of students with serious behaviour challenges.

The need for frequent scheduling changes for the TAs created confusion and stress between the ESTs, the TAs and classroom teachers. At one point, I observed the two education support teachers take the better part of two weeks to come up with a TA schedule that they hoped would satisfy the needs of the moment. I consciously let this process play out to assess just how systemic and significant this issue was in the school.

While other things I observed concerned me, I concluded these were the critical factors impacting the fabric of the entire school community and that I needed to deal with first. Now that I had identified the 'why' for the dysfunction I began to look at the 'how' of implementing the change that was needed.

First, it was clear that to effect change I would need to develop a sense of teamwork in accepting the challenge. Our leadership team, administrators and support teachers, needed to find ways to collectively make our efforts to strengthen inclusion more effective. The vice-principal and I met with the ESTs a number of times to assure them that we understood and empathized with the challenge they faced. We made a commitment to involve them in all decisions and to stand by them as they worked collaboratively with teachers to develop strategies and solve problems.

They were relieved to hear this and we moved forward with a cautious sense of optimism. Our leadership and EST team also met with our 15 TAs and identified areas of concern with them. We pledged our support as we made changes in the coming months.

They were pleased that we demonstrated that we valued their role in the school, and they agreed to work cooperatively as we took our first steps forward. We were now on our way forward.

During the remaining months of the school year we started to implement the changes that needed to be made. Let me share some of the highlights of our journey:

We initiated several consultations with local education authority (district) staff making the case for increased education support teacher (EST) allotment. Our school's enrollment was forecast to increase in the coming years so that factor along with the case we made based on student need led them to approve a third EST for the school.

We identified and accessed professional learning opportunities for our teachers through the programs of our district as well as the Ministry of Education.

We consulted with provincial experts and innovators in inclusionary reform, who, at the time, were beginning to focus on school-level practices. This proved invaluable in charting a way forward. These conversations (oftentimes, ad hoc) were very important for us and helped give us the motivation and confidence to move forward.

As the next school year began, we continued on our path and implemented several new practices. First, we started using a rigorous school-based screening process for placing students on individual plans. We asked – "Who should have an individual plan?"; "Why is it needed?"; "Who does not need an individual plan?" "How can we serve them well without one?". This was a staff wide initiative that required our administrative team and education support teachers to engage with classroom teachers and share in developing new approaches to planning. Using this more focused process, in the first 4 months that school year, we were able to reduce the number of students on individual plans from 100 plus to a more manageable 35. We partnered with parents as we did this and ensured that teachers made the instructional adjustments and accommodations needed by the students no longer on and who didn't really require a fully articulated individual plan.

One of our most important steps was to formalize our 'school-based support team'.

The team was made up of the school administrators, (principal and vice-principal), along with the three education support teachers and our school guidance counsellor. This was the first time the school guidance counsellor was involved in the process and functioned as a member of the 'team. In addition to these 'core' member of the team, teacher assistants and classroom teachers, as well as specialized district-level staff, were involved as needed to deal with specific matters.

The focus of the team was to support classroom teachers to plan and provide effective instruction for every student. It was a pro-active approach based on identifying and responding to the needs of teachers as much as to the learning needs of the student. Teachers were helped to use instructional strategies that accommodated students in core classroom activities making the provision of 'specialized' instruction less of a priority. Teachers learned to make their classrooms more effective for all students and thus more 'inclusive'.

We organized the 'support team' to help teachers plan and deliver effective instruction to all students, including those on individual plans. Instead of meeting sporadically and often in moments of crisis, we began to schedule weekly support team meetings and these became a critical and non-negotiable part of our school week.

We also made a significant change in how our 'education support teachers' engaged with teachers and students. Up until that time support teachers each had a 'student case load' of up to 50 students each. Now that we had 3 support teachers, we assigned them, not to individual students, but to one of our three grade levels. As a result, one support teacher worked with the teachers and students in 6th Grade, one for 7th Grade, and the third one for 8th Grade. This approach not only reduced the 'case load' of our support teachers, it focused their work with a specific set of classroom teachers and helped strengthen relationships with them.

Each EST was also responsible for overseeing the assignment and work of specific teacher assistants assigned to the school. This permitted the EST to consider changing circumstances and needs of students and classroom teachers as the school year progressed and adjust tasks accordingly.

We also decided that the knowledge education support teachers acquired about individual students,

about what works and what doesn't work, could be enhanced by having their yearly assignment move with the cohort of students: from the sixth grade, to the seventh, and to the eighth grade before starting over. This proved to be very positive in building relationships and trust with the most critical stakeholders, parents and families.

As I reflect on the many changes we initiated at Devon Middle School during those two years, I am pleased to note that most are still in use. There have been changes in school personnel, alterations to the structure of the district and updated ministry goals and priorities. It goes without saying that school and classroom practices change and evolve. However, the essence of what we did is still intact and functioning at a high level.

The student service model we put in place has changed the school's culture. It is more collegial and collaborative; it is focused on taking proactive steps; it is focused on supporting teachers to meet the needs of students; and, it is designed to solve problems and make inclusion work better for both students and teachers. In 2018, 75% of students reported that they were intellectually engaged and found learning interesting, enjoyable, and relevant, 10% higher than the Canadian norm.

The model we implemented defines the very fabric of success in reaching and serving students and families. As I began this piece, the data and the story it told were not positive. That has changed. Today, in 2018, Devon Middle School is known as a proven leader in inclusionary practice, behavioural supports and wrap around services for all its learners. Education authorities in our province and district have regularly sent us guests from around the world who seek to make changes similar to those we worked so hard to implement.



Gary with two of his Devon Middle School students.



Towards an Inclusive High School : Engaging People Before Change

by Denise Haché-Mallet

Denise Haché-Mallet is the principal of a small high school in North Eastern New Brunswick. It is a French - speaking area with a strong sense of community. While the school has operated in a province that has inclusion as a feature for several decades, actual practices in individual schools have varied greatly in how they have implemented inclusion. When Denise become the principal, she was inspired to make her school 'truly' inclusive. She shares her story below.

Making our school truly inclusive was my goal from the day I accepted the principal's position. École Marie-Esther is in Shippagan, a small town located in on the Acadian Peninsula in northeastern New Brunswick. The population of this French-speaking community is 3,000 and its economy is largely based on seasonal jobs such as fishing and peat extraction. The school serves approximately 400 students from 14 to 18 years old and has a staff of 60.

As I began my job as principal, I was surprised at how many of our students had absentee and disciplinary problems. It seemed that teachers were not equipped enough to meet the diverse needs of all students. The problem seemed to be connected to the lack of flexibility in instructional practices among teachers. As a new principal I knew this situation warranted my attention and realized there would need to be a singular plan to increase the well-being and academic success of students. My vision was a school transformed into a safe and engaging place where students would feel accepted by their teachers and peers and experience success in their studies.

My vision was shaped by the fact that I was completing my master's degree at the Université de Moncton through evening and weekend classes. Two of my professors specialized in practices to support inclusive education. I became convinced that if teachers were equipped to welcome all students within the school and their class, they would be happier and have a better chance to flourish.

As we learned how to accommodate diversity in the ordinary classroom, I realized that creating an inclusive school culture would help me achieve what I wanted for our school. I still remember one of my professors observing that 'difference has to become the norm.'

I shared my ideas about making inclusion a reality in our school with the two professors. They were just starting an 'action research' project on inclusion in high schools and they invited me to take part. I welcomed the opportunity to participate and thus made a commitment to move forward.

This research project was important because it allowed me to go beyond reading and sharing what I learned with my staff. In the context of the research project, I was not working in isolation. I could exchange and compare my ideas and strategies with the researchers. This gave me a positive feeling about my work and was an important factor in the process of changing our school practices.

Our school has been on this path for nearly a decade now and at times has been very challenging. As a team we have constantly been planning and developing the 'next steps' in conjunction with our school stakeholders. But it has been worth the effort!



By the third year of the process, we could see we were making real progress! Teachers were much less rigid about both curriculum and teaching methods. They worked to accommodate diverse student needs more readily and this particularly benefited students with disabilities. Teachers developed more positive attitudes toward inclusive education and this change was reflected in their classroom practices. Little by little, teachers ensured that more students could successfully participate in their courses. Each staff member now understands that it is their job to teach all students!

Throughout this process we have worked to improve our school by following a four-step process. We have successfully used this approach to advance our ideas and transform our practices. Let me share the process with you.

1. Time to Reflect and Plan:

Our first step in initiating our project was for the school 'team' to reflect on our vision and what we needed to do to realize it. The 'team' included the managers, the school principal and vice-principals, as well as the three education support teachers and four teachers with responsibility for particular aspects of the school program. During this stage, our 'support team' identified the most pressing needs of the different actors in our school community and discussed the path we should follow to move forward. We also sought out ways to bring them into the process so we could have confidence we shared the same vision. Our most thorough collaboration was with teachers, but we also considered the needs and views of educational assistants, parents, community members and our students. The focus was on themes specific to the work that we needed to do in the classroom: ensuring teamwork and collaboration; targeting academic success for ALL students; making our classrooms engaging; and, aiming for inclusion not just integration.

2. Time to Identify Opportunities:

The second step in the process was to identify the programs and structures that were already present in the school that we could build on and advance our agenda. These were the practices and institutional traditions that were consistent with functioning as an inclusive school.

As an example, our school 'support team' met on a regular basis to support teachers and consider the needs of students.

We helped them identify winning strategies for student success. This was the beginning of a school structure specifically designed to engage with teachers in this way. To this end, we built into the schedule the time curriculum leaders and education support teachers could engage with classroom teachers and better support them to accommodate the diversity of their classroom. We ensured that these curriculum leaders had a least one planning period per day to work with teachers. This is an example of a structure that allowed us to meet the needs of students, by supporting teachers who were working to implement a more inclusive pedagogy. This step was important because it was a clear acknowledgement that teachers can no longer meet the different needs of students by acting alone.

Another example of a structure that made a difference was introducing a greater degree of practical, hands-on learning for students. One successful initiative was a Grade 9 course that focused on bicycle mechanics. This permitted many students to have success in a highly motivating experience that developed their skill in analysis and problem solving. This helped them develop social, teamwork and communication skills in a creative work environment. Curricular innovation and flexibility were encouraged in this and other ways.

3. Time to Take Action:

The third step of the process was to systematically engage teachers in discussion about how we could improve student learning and success. Our 'team' regularly asked teachers, 'What can we do better?'; 'How can we help you?'; 'What do you need?'.

This stage of the process involves ensuring continuous opportunities for training and professional learning for staff members. We worked hard to provide them with what they needed to achieve their goals. We discussed and collaborated on class management skills. We took every opportunity to look at our instructional strategies and seek ways to improve our pedagogy. Our actions included: inviting specialists and experts to share with our teachers; providing teachers with planning days to focus on challenging issues; collaborating as a staff on what we were learning and how we were making progress; sharing common reading material on important concepts and practices. Together, we identified strategies and techniques that would better meet the needs of all students.

4. Time to Assess Progress: In the fourth stage of the process, I emphasized to teachers that to continue on a path to success we must keep ourselves open to new ideas and be willing to thoroughly examine how we could improve. We did this by discussing and reflecting together on what was happening in our classrooms. We had to question ourselves in order to advance our purpose. This was also the time to make sure we shared the same understanding of the key concepts, practices and structures that we were using in our work.

I admit that sometimes the discussions were difficult, but they were a necessary step in the process of change. These courageous discussions allowed our 'team' and our teachers to consolidate our progress toward our goal of becoming an inclusive school.

This time of assessment was also pivotal in taking our work to the next level. By assessing our progress thus far, we could develop our plan to move ahead again and thereby start the 4-step process again.

This 4-step approach provided me the approach I needed to provide the leadership our school needed. It has served me well since the beginning of my tenure at École Marie-Esther, 10 years ago. We have pursued these four steps every time our team initiated a new effort to make our school more effective and inclusive.

Step Process to Implement Change



Final Comment

While I initiated our school's movement towards inclusion, I am pleased to report that today the work goes on with leadership much more widely distributed. The school leadership team as a whole have continued to further our efforts and guide the support we offer to our teachers.

What has been different about this process has been the work we have done to collaborate with all the stakeholders before we moved forward.

The full discussion of our vision and the exploration of possible strategies has helped ensure we had a common understanding of why we needed to change and what might work best to do so successfully. This required us to work together and collaborate as each stage progressed. We didn't just talk about the strategies; we took practical steps to implement them into our daily actions.

Making our school inclusive was my dream when I became the principal of École Marie-Esther and I proud to say it is now a commitment shared by our entire team. If one day you have the opportunity to visit our school, you will see examples of inclusive practices in action.

However, our most important accomplishment is not necessarily visible to the naked eye. The most significant change is in the attitudes, values and beliefs of our teachers and other staff. Teachers at École Marie-Esther now accept that all students can learn and work to make that a reality. They also understand that student success does not necessarily just translate into a grade found in the school report. Our teachers aim to develop the full potential of all our students not just in academics but as complete individuals.

Our continuing challenge is to continue to work towards ensuring that being inclusive is a key pillar of our work as a school and guides the choices we make as part of an educational system that presents us with new projects and programs. At École Marie-Esther, inclusive education has become a central element of our mission to serve our diverse student population. Our teachers share the commitment that inclusion is connected to the well-being of our students. We must ensure that it does not change.





Developing Inclusive Education In Two Newham Schools

by Linda Jordan

Newham is a borough in the east of London with a total population of 350,000 of which 78,000 are children and young people aged 2-18. Newham is the most ethnically diverse local authority in the UK and is one of the poorest. Despite widespread "disadvantage" children in the borough's schools achieve above national averages based on the government's measures of attainment. In the UK, policy on education is devolved to local education authorities within what in the 1980s was a permissive national framework.

In 1986 the local Council adopted a policy of inclusive education and over a ten-year period closed six special schools and set up a system to support all schools to include all children and young people. The main thrust of the policy was that children would attend their local school from the early years. Most of the children transferring from the special schools moved to their local schools and in addition, "resourced schools" were established. Linda Jordan was then the active parent of a disabled child and became an elected councillor, indeed chair of the education authority. She remains an active parent and is now a governor of Eastlea Community Secondary School. She writes:

Resourced schools were a response to some parents' concerns. They were worried about their children being separated from friends and also from teachers who knew them and their support needs well. So, gradually as the special schools closed, some resourced schools were set up. Resourced schools receive a budget allocation for a specific number of children (between 10 and 15 in a primary school and around 30 in a secondary school) with high support needs. They employ additional teachers and supporters. Today fifteen resourced schools support around 250 children and young people with complex autism and profound and multiple learning disabilities with the overwhelming majority of children and young people attending their local schools.

The policy was developed on the basis of a human rights approach to education. The Council realised that it was bizarre to continue to segregate children and young people on the basis of disability labels. By the early 1980s there was enough evidence of the negative outcomes of segregation that the Council was very keen to make sure that all children were included in their communities and that the whole population became aware of the benefits of learning and living together. Segregation had led to social isolation and unfulfilled lives and the local community was not benefitting fully from the contributions of disabled citizens.

Each school had to learn how to include children and young people who had previously been segregated and they rose to the challenge brilliantly. The most common comments were that it was just about good teaching and learning and person-centred practice. It soon became clear that inclusion led to better, more humane schools which also improved when measured against government attainment targets.

Cleves primary school and Eastlea secondary school are both inclusive schools which are resourced to



include children with “profound and multiple” learning disabilities in addition to local children with the whole range of disabilities and additional support needs. Both schools have been inclusive since the early 1990s following the closure of several special schools.

Eastlea Secondary School

At Eastlea every child or young person is fully included in the life of the school – in lessons, in the playground, at breakfast and lunch breaks, after school clubs, school trips and work experience. There is some small group work, but the aim is for children and young people to be included in mainstream lessons as much as possible. The impact on the school is so positive, it is hard to put into words but a film about the school gives a good account of the positive impact of inclusive education.

<http://worldofinclusion.com/eastlea/>



The school has been on a journey during these 25 years. The keys to success have been:

- A belief in equality and diversity and that everyone belongs – by the head teacher and all staff.
- All adults understanding that children and young people who learn together will be able to live together and support each other.
- The whole school community (children, parents and local people) understanding the importance of equality and diversity.
- Teachers and teaching assistants being supported by “specialists” so that each child has a programme of education, health and social care support to meet their needs.
- Collaboration and an understanding that we are doing our best and that we are not expected to be perfect. Everybody helps and works together..
- A differentiated curriculum so that everyone can take part – support teachers and other professionals working alongside class teachers and class teachers respecting the knowledge and experience of teaching assistants.

Looking back, this all now seems relatively straightforward given positive leadership at the level of the school and the education authority and the support from the families of students. But of course, this way of working was highly innovative at the time and had to be learnt through the efforts of many different participants in the school community. Initially there were some concerns among staff at Eastlea and among the staff from the special school who would be transferring to Eastlea.

However, as one teacher said to me recently:

“It was the children who showed us that this was the right thing to do – they were welcoming and happy to include the new children.”

In fact, with such a diverse school community already in the school, the children did not see the inclusion of disabled children as an issue. With over 70 languages spoken, all continents represented, and many people living in poverty and other challenging circumstances, including disabled children was seen as something to celebrate. It provided an opportunity to emphasise our common humanity and the spirit of co-operation. Eastlea is a kind school where all children are supported to help each other.

Staff realise that involving children in the day to day decision making of the school leads to much happier pupils whose behaviour does not need to be challenging. Staff learned very quickly that having disabled children in the school meant that all children knew:

“... if they want them here, then they want all of us; if they have high aspirations for them they have high aspirations for all of us; if they care about them they care about all of us.”

Over the years, the quality of teaching and learning at the school has improved. The differentiation of the curriculum to include all children has benefitted everyone.

A “complex needs” teacher has now worked at the school for a few years and she has transformed the quality of teaching and learning. She works with heads of department to differentiate the schemes of work each term and with teachers to support them to differentiate lessons.

Cleves Primary School

Cleves primary school was newly built and specifically designed to be accessible for all. The children are empowered to support and care for each other and it is a real privilege to witness how very young children are naturally inclusive and giving when adult attitudes do not get in the way.

The first head teacher at Cleves was specifically appointed to run an inclusive school. In addition, all of the staff knew that they were coming to work in a school which included children with complex additional needs. Cleves is one of the highest achieving primary schools in the country (United Kingdom) proving that an inclusive school in a “disadvantaged” area can be excellent on every measure. This gets rid of the myth that disabled children in a school have a negative impact on other children – in fact it is quite the reverse.

At the time of writing, inclusion in our country is under threat as the UK government’s policies are not supportive. There is now an enormous emphasis on academic attainment, and nationally, it seems to have been forgotten that the academic content of schooling accounts for a minority of the learning children experience. Children learn a great deal from the other young people they spend time with as well as from teachers. They learn the skills of friendship and social relationships. Their moral values are challenged and shaped. They learn about sex and hopefully, have fun. But they also learn about power and control and how to have a voice when things are not right.

Children and young people with additional needs have the human right to be included in the rough and tumble of ordinary life. Schools don’t have to be perfect before disabled children are allowed in. They simply need to be committed to serving and learning as they go, including from those who have trodden the path before. Most importantly, they must nurture an ethos that everybody belongs.





Education At The Liceo VAL - Evolution Of A Distinctive Pedagogy

by Luz Esperanza Morales Sarmiento

Colombia's education system has a large and typically well-resourced private sector. One private school, the Lyceum VAL in the capital, Bogotá, has been a pioneer in welcoming disabled students into mainstream schooling.

Its founding Director tells the story of its development and especially its distinctive pedagogical approaches, centred on self-directed learning.

Some Initial Questions

As a public school teacher before founding the Lyceum VAL (Life, Love, Light), I was repeatedly asking myself some questions: 'Is the traditional school effective for all its students? Does it take into account the individual differences, the learning rhythms and the capacities of each one?' 'Do the standard methodologies used allow for flexibility in relation to different ways of learning?' As the answers were all negative, I also asked myself: 'How should an educational institution and its pedagogical strategies be organised so that the answers to the previous ones are positive?' This is how the Lyceum VAL emerged, as an alternative to traditional education.

Shortly after starting this work, some parents of children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) asked us to enrol a child with Down Syndrome and a child with Fragile-X Syndrome. We asked ourselves: 'Could it be that the methodology used in the Lyceum is suitable for children with these characteristics?' In theory we thought so and decided to accept the challenge and admit these children: thus inclusion in the Lyceum began. Today after 27 years, we have 85 children with different SEN (28% of enrolment), as well as a significant number of children with exceptional abilities and talents, and our educational approaches have progressively been improved so as to better meet this variety of needs.

Our Strategy

In the Lyceum our core strategy for all students is one of self-directed learning. This allows each student to advance at their own pace and according to their abilities. The teacher is a tutor who guides and motivates learning more than a transmitter of knowledge.

For students with SEN this is complemented with different supports according to their needs - for example, we use curricular adjustments, adaptations and / or curricular flexibility, small support groups and individual teaching. All of these are now documented in the Individual Plan of Reasonable Adjustments (PIAR) in accordance with recent national legislation (Decree 1421 of 2017) in Colombia.

In seeking to advance inclusive schooling, we have set ourselves three objectives:

- A. provide opportunities for access to formal education for children and young people with impairments (including physical, visual, cognitive, psychosocial and multiple);
- B. provide students with pedagogical and technical aids that allow them access to, and participation in curricular activities under appropriate conditions in accordance with their individual characteristics; and
- C. promote principles and values of equality, fair treatment, respect for difference and non-discrimination.

Since 1992, this approach has been applied in our school to all the subjects and grades from pre-school to eleventh grade. The characteristics of the students are heterogeneous, a significant number experience disabilities, the vast majority can be described as 'neurotypical' and some have exceptional abilities. We are a private institution, with an enrolment of approximately 300 students, 20 or less students in each class. We have achieved an A + performance level and averages well above those of the country and city in the SABER tests.



For work with students with SEN we start with a detailed assessment, made by a multidisciplinary team (teachers, parents, doctors and therapists), in order to understand what are likely to be their major difficulties. This assessment is used as the basis for each student's study plan which identifies:

- Learning experiences that will work just like the other students;
- Learning experiences that need curricular adaptations but that will work in the same spaces and schedules as the other students;
- Learning experiences that need adaptations such that special support is necessary and may preferably be offered individually or in small groups.

These supports are of three kinds: pedagogical, technological and therapeutic. The main objective of these supports is to improve the learning abilities of students with SEN through enhancing their meta-cognition, that is, their ability to understand better their own ways of learning and thus to select what will work best for them in relation to any learning challenge.

For pedagogical support we have a group of teachers who coordinate and program the different activities and all the teachers of the Lyceum are in a position to provide it in areas related to their discipline.

For technological assistance, didactic resources and spaces especially designed in relation to different learning problems are available. Therapeutic support is seen as the responsibility of parents, often making use of external specialists. In relation to students with exceptional abilities, the general

methodology used in the Lyceum allows them to advance in the curriculum at their own pace and promote themselves from one grade or level to another when they are ready.

Results

The attitude of the different members of the educational community towards inclusion is becoming more positive and more accepting every day.

There is also wide recognition of the importance of teamwork to achieve results. Currently each of the students with SEN has a regularly updated history with information about academic performance, health status, necessary support, etc., that is available to teachers for consultation.

The Lyceum has adapted spaces, acquired a range of physical and technological resources, and prepared teachers to provide the support required by students with SEN. Students with SEN participate in all academic, recreational, sports and cultural activities that take place on equal terms with other students.

Didactic material has been developed in the areas of language, mathematics and science, especially adapted to work with students with SEN.

Support coordinators together with course directors and subject area teachers, define the curricular adaptations and the support that each student with SEN requires.

Periodically, at least every two months, the multidisciplinary team meets to evaluate each student's progress, identify achievements and difficulties and make appropriate adjustments.

Social and academic impact

The inclusive approach that was initially experimental in the Lyceum, is today a fundamental characteristic of our school. It is a major dimension of our Institutional Educational Plan. We have innovative school programs and the Lyceum is a pioneer in establishing a chapter of the "Friends of the Soul" program of the international organization "Best Buddies". This program currently involves 40 friends of the soul and 38 volunteers who are linked with them.

Inclusion has greatly strengthened the development of our school values: coexistence; acceptance of difference; non-discrimination; and tolerance by all members of the educational community.

This is illustrated best by the experiences of our alumni. One of them is Heriberto José González Cardozo - here is what he has to say:

"My name is Heriberto José González Cardozo and I am 27 years old. Very early in life health complications led me to acquire cerebral palsy, bilateral hearing loss and apraxia. I entered the Lyceum VAL in 2005, where I had the opportunity to do my baccalaureate.

This educational institution not only provided the basis for my later academic life, but I also had the support of the teachers, classmates and staff. And so, I found ways to overcome the barriers that the traditional educational system and society confer through lack of knowledge about disability. My success is especially due to the fact that at the Lyceum VAL, children with disabilities are going at their own pace, due to the self-directed learning methodology, enabling an optimal use of the student's skills.

Moreover, through support and the integration of both curricular and extracurricular activities, the Lyceum fostered integration for me, a student with a disability, in the school and in society.

Thanks to this methodology, to the personal growth I achieved in this educational institution and to the support of my family, especially my Aunties Graciela and Elena, I was able to do an undergraduate and a master's degree in psychology at the Catholic University of Colombia.



I am currently studying English and Mathematics so I can apply to undertake PhD research in experimental psychology, where I would like to delve into self-control behaviour, given that, God willing, I would like to design behavioural models that favour better adaptation of people with disabilities throughout education."

Conclusions

Inclusive education makes the school effective for everyone, not only for students who have SEN. This includes other students, teachers and the entire educational community. Inclusion develops values of coexistence and allows each student to achieve academically according to their own pace and abilities. Teachers must change their roles from transmitters of knowledge to become facilitators of learning for each student and provide tutoring and support as needed. Multidisciplinary teamwork is essential for inclusion to be successful, otherwise efforts are duplicated, contradictions develop, and results are poor.

Inclusive education should be extended to schooling at all levels and aspects of the education system, including higher education: not to do so is a new form of discrimination and violation of rights.

The experience of inclusion in the Lyceum for almost 27 years has been encouraging. The difficulties that have arisen have been overcome as strategies and didactic resources have been progressively improved. The great majority of the members of our educational community are committed to this process. We work to ensure that each day will bring more progress and success.



Developing A Whole School Approach To Accommodating Students With Sensory Impairments

by Carlos Miguel Caballero Barahona

In Bolivia, the current legal framework recognizes education as a fundamental right and guarantees that "everyone has the right to receive education at all levels in a universal, productive, gratifying, integral and intercultural manner, without discrimination" (Law 070, 2006).

Turning this intention into practice for all students at the level of the public schools remains a massive challenge. Programa Mundo Inclusivo, an important NGO initiative supported by the Caritas Coroico, has considerable experience of working together with students, their families and schools within a human rights framework to advance inclusive education, one student at a time. This process is well-illustrated by the story of Andres Alanoca (pictured above) a fifteen-year-old, who following an accident has acquired progressive hearing loss.

Andrés story

Andrés is a young man who, like any teenager, faces changes and challenges in his life. He has a hearing impairment, and as in many cases, his environment presented barriers in his everyday life. These obstacles are real challenges, but they have been overcome by building an inclusive environment through collaborative practices. Meeting these challenges has been an on-going process.

Andrés' mother, says that in the past, he was left out in the school, he was not understood, and this produced problems that affected his academic and social performance and development.

"Before, my son was excluded. Now, all his classmates love him, they don't leave him out. They even come to the house and ask me if they can go out and play. I would allow him to play. It was not like that before - he only used to sleep and watch TV."

Otilia Saire, Mother of Andrés

This change came about when people in his school began to understand that diversity is an intrinsic part of our society. They learned that, as human beings, everyone has rights and one of these is the right to education. Moreover, at his school, there has been increasing understanding that everyone involved has an active part to play in advancing inclusion and equality, that inclusion benefits everyone.

"This has brought us new experiences that we can apply to all our students. It has not just helped us manage students with disabilities but also students with any kind of learning difficulties."

Osvaldo Lipa - Director

Mrs. Ruth Guevara, Teacher

In Andrés' experience, the role of his teacher, Mrs. Ruth Guevara, has been fundamental because with the right tools and strategies, she has become the main promoter of change in the classroom, not only by promoting rights, but using curricular and teaching adaptations. An essential step was implementing sign language as part of their classes on a daily basis.

"I feel committed to students with disabilities and with Andrés, it is my obligation. That is why I am in the process of learning more about sign language."

Mrs. Ruth Guevara

With Mrs. Ruth Guevara as role model, his peers and classmates have come to understand the importance of inclusion and make it part of their daily lives. They have come to recognize disability as a condition of life, and as part of a human and cultural diversity in their community.



Andrés and his mother Otilia Saire.



Andres' classmates, at least a few of whom have achieved excellence using sign language, in their class.

"I do not see Andres as a 'special' person. He plays on my team, so I talk to him normally and sometimes I use sign language. He's my friend because we play soccer and we like the same things."

Friend

It is a matter of rights

It is important to know that these processes have been based on a rights approach, since all the stakeholders involved refer to laws and rights as a basis for inclusion. One example is that posters have been placed in some halls and classrooms to promote awareness of the rights of people with disabilities.

"Law 045, that is the Law against Discrimination, has been reinforced for us with videos about the rights of people with disabilities. The students know how to greet in sign language, and now all the classrooms are demanding for me to teach them as well because we did it initially with only one classroom, but now those who don't have a disability, they are asking me too."

Teacher Mrs. Ruth Guevera

"People with disabilities' rights have been promoted in different activities and information on the rights of students with disabilities has been distributed to all teachers so that they can raise awareness among students: we do this every year since we started working with Mundo Inclusivo."

Oswaldo Lipa – Director



Oswaldo Lipa – Director

In the experience of Programa Mundo Inclusivo, schools typically lack a good understanding of inclusive education and the practices required for its successful implementation. Accordingly, an important first stage in the process of change is to involve all the members of the educational community (teachers, students, staff, parents and others) in raising inclusion awareness. This needs to be followed by an investment in training teaching staff in classroom teaching and curricular adaptation as well as management strategies. Teachers need support as they implement these changes in classroom practice.

"The first thing we do is raise awareness among students and teachers. We do sessions with the children and they are sensitized little by little. Our staff also attend workshops by Mundo Inclusivo, and it has helped us to make our class plans with curricular adaptations."

Teacher Mrs. Ruth Guevera

"The work with Mundo Inclusivo was positive. We used to do a plan for students with disabilities and another one for other students. But we no longer do that. The training in the workshops has taught us a whole class methodology. In the past, the teachers used to think that it is difficult to work with disabled students. This was something which required specialists. But since we have gone through the awareness raising and training workshops, it has made it much easier for the teachers to take responsibility themselves and the disabled children recognise their teachers are helping everyone. Things have changed a lot."

Oswaldo Lipa - Director

Without a doubt, educational inclusion does not end in the school. It is important to project inclusion from its pedagogical, social and cultural dimensions into a broader framework. We must extend the experiences in inclusive classrooms to the school as a whole and then to the community. That is how inclusive schools can transform our society.

What Andres says:

Very specific and clear, with just a few words, Andres explains his perspective on the situation as he is the "main character" and the most important stakeholder in his story. How do you feel in the classroom now? "All right." And about teacher Ruth? "She is alright." What you like to do at home? Naturally at 15, his answer is "Play soccer."



Success Stories In Inclusive Education: The Journey Of The Colegio De La Inmaculada

by Katherine Britto

The Peruvian Down's Syndrome Society (SPSD) has a strong commitment, together with other advocacy associations, to helping families and their children participate in quality inclusive education and itself works with interested schools to help achieve this. Peru has a mixed public/private system of education with as many as 50% of children attending private schools. One of these schools is Colegio De La Inmaculada which, for more than a decade, has been a pioneer in inclusive education and very willing to share its experience with other schools. This case study was mainly generated from a morning of reflection between school leaders and SPSP staff, one of whom is the author.

In April 2019, a team from the Peruvian Down Syndrome Society (SPSD) made up of its President, Pablo Gomez and inclusive education team, Daniela Gamboa, Katherine Britto and Aime Apaza, together with international guests, visited the educational institution "De la Inmaculada" to meet with the management team made up of the director Oscar Morelli, the academic assistant director Dora Revollo and the coordinator of the school's internal team focused on 'attention to diversity', more simply, 'inclusion coordinator' Sonia Villarán. This well-resourced private school has 141 years of educational experience.

Our purpose was to help the school tell its story of the continuing journey towards inclusion and draw wider lessons from their experience.

The daughter of Pablo Gómez, SPSP's President, is enrolled in the first year at the school. He commented that his family's experience to date suggests that inclusion is working: 'every morning (she) is happy to be here because the school is calm, comfortable and welcoming'.

The director said their story began in 2006 when the school began a process of strategic planning.

School leaders met with parents, teachers and administrators to reflect on how to provide better education to students. Their aspirations were ambitious. To begin with, they decided it was important that students become competent in the English language. Thus, the school had to become bilingual. Hitherto it had been a boys' school: now they proposed to serve both boys and girls. They also resolved that the school should increasingly welcome students who have 'special educational needs'.

This latter commitment ran ahead of official education policy in Peru and was not driven by external pressure. Rather it was the result of a combination of school values and emerging opportunities. The school has a religious foundation and is grounded in Jesuit teaching. As a matter of belief, school leaders believed that every child is of equal value and they were determined to act on this belief. Their openness to inclusion of students with 'special educational needs' was in many ways a 'commitment of the heart'.

In order to align the school's practices with a vision of inclusion and equity, school leaders made time and space for very careful preparation for change.



De La Inmaculada leaders, SPSP staff and visitors

A year was spent identifying issues, organizing study groups and undertaking research on the subject of inclusion.

While they were considering how to make the school more inclusive, an opportunity arose to get started for real. In 2008 the family of 'Felix', a child with Down's Syndrome, knocked on the door of the school and asked to enrol him in the first year of primary school. The family was persuasive and assured the school they would share what they had learned from their son's first four years. They asked that the school trust them to be partners in the effort. With some anxiety, the school decided to take up this challenge. The trust the family and the school placed in each other was well-rewarded.

The school learned a lot from working with 'Felix' and his family. Before he joined the primary class, school staff visited Felix's kindergarten. They learned about his experience there and the strategies that supported his full participation. They drew on the experience and expertise of specialists that the family had employed to provide service and support to Felix and the kindergarten staff. They also took the time to engage with the other families who had children in Colegio De La Inmaculada to ensure there were positive attitudes and wide understanding of the benefits of including Felix in the school.

To support the move toward inclusion, the school created a new 'department' focused on dealing with student diversity. The team was led by the school's new 'inclusion coordinator' and also was made up of several specialists. The 'inclusion coordinator', Sonia Villarán, had been the teacher coordinating the pre-school programme and brought this experience to her new role. As a teacher, she focused her team's work on developing the capacity of classroom teachers. They were supported so they could welcome new students with 'special needs'. They also helped teachers develop teaching methods and prepare educational materials that allowed them to deliver a flexible curriculum. While initially seeking advice and suggestions from external educational and therapy professionals, over time the school team found that collaboration among teachers in the school itself was their most effective strategy. External expertise is still valued and used, but only when needed. This approach helped teachers become empowered leaders of school transformation.

Ten years on, it is possible to draw some important lessons from Colegio De La Inmaculada's journey to advance towards inclusion:

As with Felix, it is always important to listen carefully to families and learn as much as possible from them about their child so as to carefully prepare for their admission and subsequent participation in the school.

Likewise, the school needs to engage every family served by the school in the discussion about inclusion since all families are part of the school community. This is a critical way for school leaders to sustain widespread support for welcoming students with diverse needs.

The school learned that other students are a vital factor in successful inclusion: the classroom needs to become a learning community where there is mutual support and collaborative work among students.

The school concluded that continuing success requires continuing professional development and staff learning; the school has set aside or institutionalised 'time' for teachers and others to reflect together and deal with issues at the start of each day, before students arrive.

The process of change is difficult and part of this process is to make mistakes even though we may be reluctant to recognize this. 'Mistakes are themselves great teachers and part of our own efforts to continually learn from experience'.

The school now has significant achievements in creating an inclusive school. School leaders, teachers and parents have confidence that this is the right path to follow even though they know there is much more to do. One of their priorities is to build on the progress they have made in the primary level and extend it to the secondary level.

The leadership team of Colegio De La Inmaculada concludes that the educational community must have hearts and minds which are open to change. 'We must open doors and learn how to live better together'.





Inclusive Education Canada (IEC) is a national non-governmental organization (NGO) committed to quality education for all students in inclusive schools and classrooms in Canadian schools.

We support this by advocating for effective policy provision and investment in supports for teachers and students, as well as building capacity in our schools and classrooms to make inclusion both a successful and practical reality.

The Centre for Inclusive Futures supports networks of active leaders, mostly in Europe and Latin America, aspiring to tackle inequality through promoting equal citizenship and building inclusive communities. It links this agenda for social justice with the radical changes we must all make to live in better harmony with our planet and each other.



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