

TEACHERS AS LEADERS

ACHIEVING INCLUSIVE & QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ALL

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THE CONTEXT

Across the globe, there is widespread understanding that a better future for today's youth depends on achieving quality education for all. While the contributions of students and their families are important, the role of teachers is fundamental.

There are significant differences between regions and countries, including the ones we consider here. There are also differences within countries, for example between public and private schools, those in urban and rural areas, as well as between primary and secondary schools. At the same time there are emerging and notable similarities in what effective teachers do to ensure that every student is successful in their increasingly diverse classrooms.

This pamphlet offers a short guide to effective classroom practice that addresses the goal of achieving quality and equitable education in inclusive schools.



WHAT WE DID

Input for this pamphlet was group discussions with teachers and school leaders in Canada, three countries in Latin America (Bolivia, Colombia and Peru) and the United Kingdom. They generously participated while dealing with the unique challenges of teaching during the coronavirus pandemic. Each informant was an experienced professional knowledgeable about effective inclusive practices. Our analysis was shared with a wider network with relevant expertise who provided feedback and suggestions

We asked teachers three questions:

- 1. What do you do to ensure quality education for all in your classroom?**
- 2. How do your schools provide positive support for these classroom practices?**
- 3. How do you learn to be a more effective teacher in an inclusive school that aspires to serve all learners?**

We now share what they told us. We hope this will prove to be a valuable resource to schools and teachers as they pursue their own journey to quality education for all.



The critical importance of teachers

Good teachers and effective instruction are critical to each student's success. We all know this from our own experience as students. Successful teachers relate to each student as a young person with promise. They inspire us to learn, and just as importantly, help us learn to manage our own learning. Teachers offer direct instruction but also use a wide range of approaches to cultivate our curiosity and creativity. They encourage us to have high expectations and to work cooperatively with our peers. They use common learning environments that are structured to meaningfully engage us in active learning. Effective teaching begins with knowledge of the student and an in-depth understanding of the subject matter but it also requires an actor's creative skills to ensure that every lesson is an engaging performance.

STARTING WITH FUNDAMENTALS

What do we mean by achieving inclusive & quality education for all?

UN Global Sustainable Development Goal #4

Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.



THERE ARE THREE KEY INTER-RELATED ASPECTS OF THIS GOAL:

1

QUALITY

The fundamental purpose of education is what British educationalist Ken Robinson (Creative Schools, Penguin 2016) inspiringly defines as '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'. As Plutarch expressed this 2000 years ago, 'Education is the kindling of a flame, not the filling of a vessel'.

2

EQUITY

To fulfil this aspiration our schools must celebrate the many forms of diversity among students. Teachers need to attend to what is uniquely important to each child's development by adapting a broad and flexible curriculum that provides them with what they will need to flourish in a rapidly changing world.

3

ACHIEVING THIS FOR ALL

In turn requires an inclusive approach to education that we define as 'delivering quality education through common learning environments where all young people learn with their peers and where diversity is seen to bring benefits to everyone'.

1

SEVEN PRACTICES OF EFFECTIVE TEACHERS

Our first question focuses on what good teachers do to ensure quality education for all in their classrooms.

Of course, there is a lot involved in good teaching! Our discussions in three continents explored how teachers approach their role; how they prepare lessons; the nature of their relationships with students, individually and collectively; how they motivate and enable all students to learn in the ways that suit them best; how they engage families as partners; and how they assess classroom effectiveness?



We distilled seven key themes in effective classroom practice:

- 1 Teachers understand education broadly, as a process that enables students to build self-esteem and emotional resilience, learn how to learn, acquire literacy, numeracy and other kinds of knowledge and develop the skills required to live well as they grow and mature.
- 2 Teachers work in partnership with families to promote high expectations for all learners.
- 3 Teachers attend to the well-being and engagement of all students as a key to effective learning.
- 4 Teachers plan their lessons with the whole class in mind, applying universal design principles and other pedagogical practices to promote accessibility.
- 5 Teachers integrate their differentiated plans for individual students into the whole-class plan for learning.
- 6 Teachers recognise the important contribution to success made by students helping each other in the process of learning and personal development.
- 7 Teachers use a variety of assessment methods to monitor student progress as they ensure that each can demonstrate their learning in a distinct way.

CLASSROOM STORIES

We asked teachers who participated in our group discussions to share short stories that illustrate what they find most important. Here are some that capture the essential elements of successful practice



Individual progress within the whole class experience

Jane is a year 6 teacher in a primary school serving an economically deprived area of a small English city. She loves this school because of its ethos: the children are very diverse in their origins; many come with significant emotional challenges; and all classes are mixed ability. There is a strong commitment to enabling every child to discover and reach their own goals within a mutually supportive educational community.

The school places an emphasis right from the start on helping students learn how to learn. Accordingly, every year, teachers and teaching assistants together get to know every child well, understanding their strengths, challenges and priority learning objectives. Lesson design seeks to adapt the curriculum to the needs of each learner within a shared 'whole class' experience.

Students support each other and each plays a role choosing some of their own learning resources. The teaching team tries to visualize and anticipate in advance what will be the experience of each child and then 'reflect-in-action' as instruction proceeds, attending to the well-being and engagement of all students.

Quality and inclusion in distance learning

During the COVID19 emergency, many children in Colombia have been left at risk of exclusion, especially as families are expected to play a key role in a child's learning with only occasional and remote guidance from teachers. Although some schools provide a helpful online platform many families cannot access it. Many do not have access to internet services or the smart phones, tablets or computers needed to use it. Some parents who did are not familiar with the use of technological tools.

A preschool teacher at a state school working in this context uses an equitable and inclusive approach to reach all her students. She uses diverse channels of communication to ensure that each child receives the necessary educational materials and support. In addition to using the school platform, she uses a social network to share daily guidance on school routine with parents; she provides printed materials with simple instructions; and, in cases where it is needed, makes phone calls to guide parents on implementing the child's learning plan.

Recognising the value of strengthening peer relationships, she works with parents to arrange virtual "get-togethers" between two or three children and thus maintains the bonds of friendship. This teacher demonstrates the commitment to student success, whatever the circumstance, that is needed to sustain inclusion in schooling.

School culture and peer support

In an economically deprived and multi-ethnic part of London, a secondary school welcomes around 20% of its 1000 students with 'additional needs', including those associated with physical and intellectual impairments. In addition, sixty-seven first languages are currently spoken by students in the school. When you see the students at playtime there is so much diversity that no-one stands out. Significant investment has ensured that the school is physically accessible. There is a strong attitudinal commitment to the principle that students are 'all different, all equal'. This is reflected in the way students relate to each other. One student who uses a wheelchair told teachers that she didn't want so much adult support: she was more comfortable being helped out by her friends. Another small group of boys, including one who also uses a wheelchair, are proud of the way they help each other to make sense of their lessons. They emphasize that 'we can usually work things out together'.





Parent engagement in the school

Leona is a teacher in a rural school in Colombia where she uses the “Escuela Nueva” methodology in her multi-grade classroom. This method helps teachers serve students with diverse needs. It does so by: using booklets that integrate different areas of knowledge; allowing each student to advance at an individual pace; and, encouraging the participation and support of families in using practical activities that engage and enhance learning. In these rural areas, parents labour long hours to support their families, but nonetheless, Leona is always looking for opportunities to enhance home/school partnership.

She concentrates on getting to know the families and identifying in what way they can support their child’s learning, while understanding that their circumstances and availability to assist with different projects varies. She has strengthened family involvement and with their support, enhanced opportunities for learning. Leona shared an example when she noted several families interest in activities that showed their child’s progress during 'science week'.

She exhibited students’ work and invited families to participate in follow-up projects. These included planting and caring for the school gardens, the development of learning materials concerned with local geography, creating an inventory of local farm products and collecting and sharing cooking recipes commonly used in the community.

Fairness in student assessment

Ernesto is a Colombian teacher, with 18 years experience in an inclusive, private school.

The classes are small but very diverse and the preferred instructional method challenges teachers to prepare self-directed learning activities. This allows every student to participate in ways that respect their individual learning modality and pace. Ernesto uses different strategies to assess individual learning. His goal is to give everyone an opportunity to be assessed on the knowledge and skills appropriate for them.

Thus, in a Year-10 science class, where the general objective is the study of the periodic table, the tasks have been accommodated for several students. For example, Ernesto asks them to identify elements by the colour they emit when exposed to a flame. Ernesto supports students by developing learning guides accommodated to individual needs. He prepares individualized questionnaires in advance and ensures that students are able to use them. In addition to subject matter knowledge, assessments are also based on individualized criteria relevant to language development, capacity to follow instructions, success in working in teams and other important competences for the student’s development.



2

SEVEN CHARACTERISTICS OF SCHOOLS PROMOTING INCLUSIVE & QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ALL

Our second question explores how good schools shape and support effective classroom practice.

While most learning takes place in classrooms, the school as a whole provides direction and support for what teachers do. Schools tackle the barriers to full student participation; ensure that curricula are both relevant and flexible; value teachers as leaders in their own classrooms; and promote cooperative ways of working so that the whole school team can collectively improve instruction by reflecting on student success.



We identified seven main characteristics of these whole school efforts:

- 1 The school leadership, the head teacher and management team, play a central role in demonstrating through their own behaviour that the school welcomes everyone and expects everyone, teachers and students, to succeed.
- 2 The school ensures teachers and others share a common understanding of the goals of education and how it can be both inclusive and effective.
- 3 The school demonstrates the high value it puts on teaching as a profession, celebrates good practice and promotes the teacher's role as an autonomous and creative leader in the classroom.
- 4 The school supports the idea of flexible curriculum and empowers teachers to make adjustments and accommodations based on the needs of the students.
- 5 The school encourages multiple forms of student assessment to facilitate focusing on student success and determining areas for improvement.
- 6 The school encourages collaborative relationships and problem-solving among teachers, students and families.
- 7 The school continually monitors what all students are achieving in relation to their own interests and personal learning objectives.

Demonstrating whole-school leadership

Evelyn is a principal in a primary school in a small Canadian city. The starting point for a quality and inclusive school is a vision shared by school leaders, teachers and parents. Evelyn asserts that it is teachers that make the difference. They play the vital role of making the inclusion vision real in the classroom. To support them, Evelyn assures that they have common planning time with their peers so they can assist each other by sharing teaching strategies. It is especially important that teachers have time for teamwork in planning for a student experiencing obstacles to learning. Evelyn has been able to strengthen teachers' success with inclusion by engaging in intensive and sustained planning on the needs of one or two specific students. This is how uncertainty and resistance to inclusion can be overcome. Success leads to a change in motivation and attitude. Evelyn makes sure teachers get help from members of a school-based team. Under her leadership, the team includes support teachers, the school counsellor and others as needed. Evelyn and the team work to help teachers solve problems in a timely manner and thus enhance a culture of inclusion each day in their classrooms. Evelyn and her teachers welcome professional learning opportunities they create themselves as well as those available from outside specialists and agencies. Ensuring students benefit from a quality, inclusive education requires a sustained focus on improving how teachers do their work. Evelyn considers that a critical aspect of her role in the school.



School support to classroom teachers

In the London secondary school with a very diverse range of students described earlier, a lot is done to support classroom teachers to ensure that all learners are able to spend most of their school-day in classrooms with their peers.

An in-house inclusion team, that includes three teachers and 37 teaching assistants, works in partnership with classroom teachers. The team helps them differentiate the curriculum and vary their pedagogical methods in ways appropriate to individual students. They find ways to enable every student to follow the same overall scheme of work but ensure that it is adapted to individual learning targets. Members of the 'inclusion team' also join the classroom teacher by co-teaching where this helps to ensure every student's successful participation.

3

SEVEN PATHS TO EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

Our third question examines how teachers learn through experience to improve their practice with all students.

Teachers develop and deepen their instructional skills over time through reflection on their own experiences and by sharing what they learn with colleagues. Effective teachers seek out opportunities for critical reflection and successful schools encourage this learning.



We discovered seven school-based professional learning activities that teachers found especially helpful:

- 1 Teachers learn to work collaboratively, welcoming opportunities to share their own experience and practices with others and have time to do so.
- 2 Teachers utilize a 'reflective practitioner approach' to their own work and the success they achieve with their students.
- 3 Teachers establish and use peer learning methods (like 'Solution Circles') to reflect on and improve their classroom practice.
- 4 Teachers learn to make good use of the school's wider environment (nature, community) as a key resource to learning.
- 5 Teachers learn to make optimum use of teaching assistants and specialist members of the school team to improve classroom effectiveness.
- 6 Teachers seek out and engage with knowledgeable members of the wider community, for example, minority community leaders and experts in health and social care.
- 7 Teachers welcome opportunities to learn additional successful practices by sharing and engaging with peers in other schools and utilize opportunities for distance learning.

School as a learning community

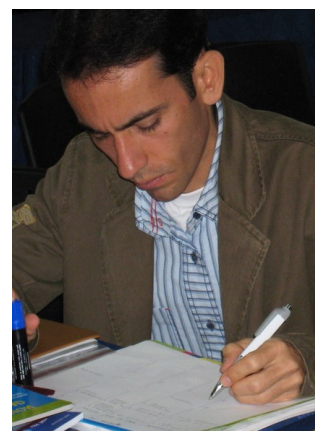
A London primary school, serving the same population as that in the two previous London stories, is resourced to welcome children with physical and intellectual disabilities. Every classroom reflects great diversity. Teachers and other staff prepare carefully for each lesson. They also understand that each lesson is itself a creative journey in which teachers must adjust 'in real time' to how students are responding.

Being effective in this situation requires that teachers are always learning 'on the job'. The whole culture of the school supports this learning. Specifically teachers invest in getting to know every child well; there are high expectations for every student and school-wide attention to monitoring their progress; teachers are motivated to continually reflect on their own practice and what could be done better; a lot of work involves team-teaching; and more generally, there is a strong ethos of collaboration. Teachers share their experiences, ideas and teaching materials, most often through informal corridor and refreshment-room conversations.



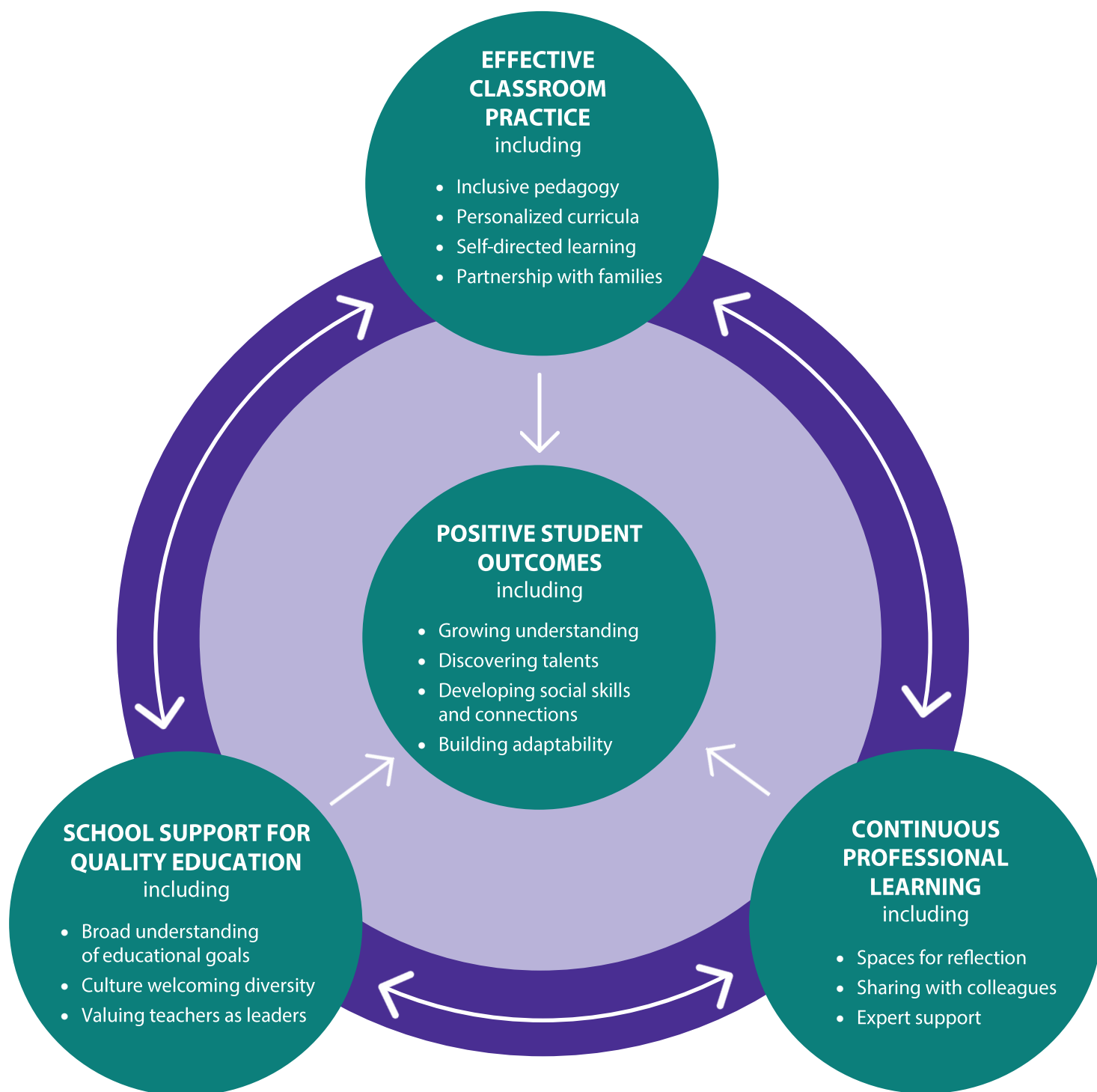
Teachers helping teachers

Suzanne is an assistant principal and teacher in a Canadian secondary school. She emphasizes that the starting point of success with inclusion is a skilled and confident teacher who works in partnership with parents. In many cases she says the challenge for the teacher is to see what she called 'the whole story' for the student and family. School is about academic success but it also about social and emotional well-being. The teacher knows curriculum and teaching strategies and the parent knows the child. Together they can find a way to set and meet the shared goals they consider a priority. Suzanne stresses that the school must find ways to make sure that teachers get the support they need to deal with the challenges diversity and inclusion bring to the classroom. In her school resource/support teachers back up classroom teachers through observing, coaching, modelling and co-teaching. Just as importantly, they help the teacher access the experience and knowledge of other teachers in their school. Collaborative problem solving is an essential function of the school and like others in their region, Suzanne's school uses a Teachers Helping Teachers model.



THE BIG PICTURE

ACHIEVING INCLUSIVE & QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ALL



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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 works internationally on ways of delivering positive social change through partnerships between public agencies and civil society.

Links to more information on achieving inclusive & quality education for all

This is the fourth in a series of pamphlets published on the Inclusive Education Canada website at www.inclusiveeducation.ca. This website has many useful resources including a guide to teachers-helping-teachers.

See also:

- [Advancing Inclusive Education: Keys to Transformational Change in Public Education Systems](#)
- [The Journey to Inclusive Schooling: Advancing School Transformation from Within](#)
- [School Principals: Leading the Way to Inclusive Schools](#)



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