

# ADVANCING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

**Keys to transformational change in  
public education systems**

*Gordon L. Porter and David Towell*



# Achieving Inclusive Education

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In our increasingly diverse societies, there is global recognition of the importance of inclusive education, not only in ensuring that every young person enjoys their right to quality education but also as a means of building more inclusive 21st Century communities. This is especially important to and for disabled young people and their families.

Yet despite more than 30 years of encouraging educational innovation, it remains the case that rather few jurisdictions have implemented a comprehensive *system* of inclusive education. One of those which has is the Canadian province of New Brunswick. Drawing on this experience and a wider international analysis, Gordon Porter and David Towell set out here to offer a framework for transforming public educational systems so as to provide inclusive education for all.

Published in May 2017, this pamphlet is the product of a partnership between Inclusive Education Canada and the U.K. based Centre for Inclusive Futures.

Sincerely,



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# Introduction

This short pamphlet is about “inclusive education”. It is about the effort to make schools inclusive for the diverse range of students who make up our communities in the 21st Century. It reflects the growing recognition of the importance of inclusive education in enabling all children and young people to realise their human potential and be afforded the opportunity to play their full part as citizens in delivering on the widely-held belief that *a better world is possible*.

What do we mean by inclusive education? Stated simply, it is the creation of learning environments that maximize the potential for every young person in our diverse societies to receive a high quality education alongside their peers in local schools that serve the whole community. An important element of this diversity relates to disability.

As many as one in five young people has some form of physical or mental variation from the “norm”. In the past this has been the basis for educational discrimination and segregation. In this discussion, we focus on their full inclusion as valued students in mainstream schools and classrooms. The right to an inclusive education has been most recently expressed in Article 24 of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, which calls unequivocally on governments to ‘ensure an inclusive system of education at all levels...’ We support that proposition.

The published evidence (1) and our own personal and professional experiences tell us that when inclusion is done well, all children benefit. However, more than 30 years on from the pioneering efforts in different countries to deliver on this aspiration, it is troubling that there are very few jurisdictions where we can genuinely speak of a truly inclusive *system* of education. Rather we have typically seen either small scale successes in perhaps the odd single progressive school guided by charismatic leadership, or a wider approach where inclusion is ‘grafted on’ to traditional educational practices, meaning that more disabled children are ‘integrated’ into local schools but without the changes required to ensure their equal participation in learning.

**What is inclusive education?**  
**Learning environments where**  
**all children learn with their**  
**peers in community schools.**

These deficiencies can be most simply understood as evidence of good intentions being undermined by systemic contradictions. For example, students may learn together but efforts to promote inclusion may focus too much on additional help to students identified as ‘special’ rather than managing the class so that everyone learns in their own way. Moreover, standardised examinations may not enable some to show their full talents or even perhaps graduate with their peers to the next year’s classes. It may be



that some schools welcome a more diverse intake but the expert resources which might enhance student learning (and indeed the classroom teacher's teaching) are mainly deployed in specialist schools. In some situations, state acceptance of a plural system of schooling (e.g. public and private) doesn't adequately counter the problems of negative selection by which some students are excluded from the schools most focused on academic success.

Accordingly, this pamphlet is addressed to the proposition that delivering inclusive education for all requires transformational change in public education systems so that inclusion becomes an intrinsic feature of policy, culture and practice from the classroom to the education ministry and a core expectation of the communities in which schools are embedded. We use the phrase *education system* as shorthand for the complex pattern of relationships between different stakeholders, different organisational levels and different activities which, over time, determine educational experiences for all the children and young people in a given jurisdiction.

One of us, Gordon Porter, has spent his professional life as a teacher, school principal and local authority manager. He has been a senior adviser to education ministers in New Brunswick and the Northwest Territories in Canada. (Canada has a federal system in which each province and territory has responsibility for education policy.) He has also provided policy and program support to national authorities in a number of countries including Portugal, Panama, Peru and Colombia. His home province of New Brunswick (population 750,000) has been involved in the journey to inclusive education for more than 30 years and has reached a stage of maturity which is close to meeting our test of seeing this – inclusion – as the only way of delivering a quality, meaningful education to all students.



Of course, that is not to claim that this journey is finished, far from it. One characteristic of transformational change is the recognition that sustainable development requires continuous monitoring and adjusting as we learn how to do education better for learners of all ages. We offer New Brunswick as a living example of system transformation.

**“ ...inclusive education for all requires transformational change in public education systems so that inclusion becomes an intrinsic feature of policy, culture and practice ...”**

The other contributor, David Towell, is the brother to a profoundly disabled woman, Patricia, whose life informed his national leadership role in advancing inclusion in the United Kingdom. David is a sociologist who has worked internationally - including in Canada, Eastern Europe and Latin America - on the challenges of delivering large scale social change through partnerships between public agencies and civil society.

In what follows, we draw on our combined experiences to examine four main aspects of transformation in education. **First**, we have identified ten key strands in strategies for change which need to be interwoven to deliver the fundamental transformation we are seeking. Critical here is an enriched conception of quality education as the right of every young person, coupled with a commitment to a set of core values to make inclusion work for everyone. These ideas underpin all the other activities required to develop an effective state or country-wide education system.

**Second**, these ten key elements need mutually reinforcing actions at the level of - the classroom and the school, the local education authority (e.g. municipality or school district) and the level(s) of government where education policies are made. Together these two dimensions define a transformational matrix (Box I) which we fill out in the rest of this pamphlet.

A **third** dimension is time. We think of transformation as a journey in which leaders have to clarify their vision of a better future to all stakeholders and plot a route towards system-wide change attending to the contributions required at all three of these levels. Even with supportive conditions, in our experience this may take five years or longer for a whole school district and longer still for the whole system. The New Brunswick story (Box II, later) illustrates the nature of this journey.

**Fourth** and finally, transformation clearly needs to find ways of mobilising the contribution of all the stakeholders in education. These include:

- families who seek inclusion for their children;
- the young people who often are the best in seeing other kids as kids like themselves;
- teachers who learn new ways of working and offer leadership in their classrooms;
- other professional experts who put their skills to use in ensuring every child is able to learn to the best of their abilities;
- school principals who make this transformation central to the school improvement plan;
- educational policy-makers who define the framework for system change and ensure that the resources are available for delivery;

- leaders of the communities of which schools are a part who recognise that inclusive schooling helps to build inclusive communities.

Often this begins as a process of struggle as one group or another (a parent association; a group of newly inspired teachers etc.) advocates for principled change. There will always be challenges and struggles but implemented over time, our transformational matrix illustrates and affirms the need for creating and nurturing internal and external partnerships across different interests to ensure that reform is sustained and lessons learnt from the experience.

In all this we do not expect readers either to copy New Brunswick or to see the points in our transformational matrix as prescriptions. Rather we hope that this pamphlet will be a helpful stimulus and resource to leaders everywhere seeking to work with their partners in finding their own route to transformation. In our different roles, we are keen to learn from your experience.

Box I: The transformational change matrix			
	System levels		
Ten keys	School/Classroom	District	State
1. Educating for life	✓	✓	✓
2. Promoting inclusion	✓	✓	✓
3. Encouraging transformational Leadership	✓	✓	✓
4. Developing partnership	✓	✓	✓
5. Investing in equity	✓	✓	✓
6. Tackling barriers to participation	✓	✓	✓
7. Strengthening inclusive pedagogy	✓	✓	✓
8. Prioritising professional development	✓	✓	✓
9. Learning from experience	✓	✓	✓
10. Plotting the journey to inclusion	✓	✓	✓



# Ten Keys to Transformation



## 1. EDUCATING FOR LIFE

Efforts to achieve transformational change at all levels, from schools to government, require that participants in the educational system invest in developing a shared vision of what education is for and how every student can benefit. Traditionally in many jurisdictions, education has been focused on standardised knowledge acquisition (and standardised assessment) on ‘subjects’ defined academically, achieved through whole class instruction in ways which fail to recognise that every student is different.

By contrast, Article 24 (speaking of disabled students but in fact relevant to everyone) offers a more holistic and empowering conception of education as being directed to:

- ‘a) the full development of human potential and sense of dignity and self worth, and the strengthening of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity;
- b) the development by persons with disabilities of their personality, talents and creativity, as well as their mental and physical abilities, to their full potential;
- c) enabling persons with disabilities to participate effectively in a free society.’

We call this *educating for life*. In a rapidly changing world faced with huge and unprecedented challenges, education needs to prepare young people to play their full part in creating a better future - for example, in enabling humankind to live in harmony with our natural environment. As well as traditional subjects like languages and literature, the curriculum needs to embrace respect for nature, living sustainably and building social justice. Moreover, if a better future requires active citizens with different skills, thinking critically and working collaboratively, then these attributes need to be developed during the school years through classroom strategies which tailor learning to each student, engage their hearts and their hands as well as their minds, foster creativity and encourage cooperative working with others.

## 2. PROMOTING INCLUSION

The second component of this vision is concerned with how every student can benefit. Put most simply, inclusive education means that all students, including those with disabilities and other special needs, are educated in regular classrooms with their age peers in community schools. Students with disabilities go to the same schools as their brothers and sisters, are provided with access to the same learning opportunities as other young people, and are engaged in both the academic and social activities of the school. In turn, all young people build their own stock of ‘social capital’: their network of relationships with, and empathy towards, a diverse range of other people of similar age which may be important to the opportunities they get as they become older and take up adult roles in their communities.

This requires that the public education system:

- sees universal education as a human right and actively reaches out to young people at risk of exclusion;
- seeks to remove or minimise the attitudinal and environmental barriers to everyone's full participation;
- ensures that schools respect all kinds of diversity and make every young person welcome;
- recognises that every young person is different and organises educational programme according to individual strengths and needs;
- expects all teachers to accept responsibility for teaching all children while offering them support to make this possible.

These first two keys establish clear goals for education. The remainder identify the means of achieving them.

### **3. ENCOURAGING TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP**

Change may often proceed through small steps but the changes required to deliver this vision of inclusive education cannot be achieved just through tinkering with traditional education; rather it requires a transformation in which new ways of thinking are reflected in action at all levels in the education system, especially of course in the classrooms where teachers and students meet.

Transformational change requires a significant investment in developing transformational leadership, not only among policy-makers and professional staff but also among parents and students. Such leadership (2) involves:

- understanding the importance of change;
- working with others to develop a vision which inspires transformation and communicating this throughout the system;
- encouraging a wide variety of innovations to demonstrate the vision in practice;
- assisting innovators to build networks for sharing knowledge across schools and communities and celebrating successes; and
- gradually consolidating progress into laws, policies and the culture of schools.

Such leadership needs to be found and nurtured. People stepping up to leadership roles need opportunities to be inspired, especially through learning from the achievements of students, as well as 'space' for developing their skills through reflecting on their own experiences in the company of fellow-leaders.

### **4. DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIP**

Beyond professional leadership, we need to recognise that schools are vital parts of their communities and education at its best involves working in partnership with students and their families. As we have argued, effective education requires that students are active participants in the classroom and in school improvement. This is an authentic vehicle for learning about active citizenship.

Parents need to be involved with teachers in developing and delivering each child's educational



programme and parents will be helped in this if there is encouragement for parent-to-parent support. More widely, parent associations and NGOs providing advocacy support are important in strengthening the demand for inclusive schooling. Organisations of disabled adults can help to reinforce this work, for example through campaigns for universal school registration. Disabled adults' own experience of education can be a valuable experiential resource to schools and policy-makers in advancing effective inclusion.

These efforts are further enhanced where there are adult educational programmes available to help citizens, including parents and disabled adults, to become 'partners in policy-making' and where civil society networks take on the long term challenge of raising everyone's awareness of the benefits of inclusion and the need to tackle discrimination (3).



## 5. INVESTING IN EQUITY

Achieving major change requires governments to invest resources in education system development and ensure that specialist expertise is shifted into the support of mainstream schools. Moreover this investment needs to be made equitably with the aim of ensuring (in the words of Article 24) that disabled people access education 'on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live'.

This has implications for resource allocation at all levels and for the ways in which performance is monitored. Government must attend to imbalances in resource distribution (for example, between urban and rural areas) and ensure that public funding and the staff this supports are allocated according to population need. They may also need to legislate to ensure that schools in the private sector play their part in preventing disability discrimination. Likewise, school districts must allocate local resources to schools in ways which encourage inclusive school enrolment and fairly reflect the needs in each school. And principals must allocate resources available to the school fairly so as to best ensure that classroom teachers are able to support the learning of all their students.

## 6. TACKLING BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

Both within schools and outside them, there are often physical, material and attitudinal barriers to the equal participation of all young people in their schooling. Some of these are about access, for example in the physical design of buildings or the local transport system. Some are about the availability of aids and adaptations, for example to support communication for students with sensory impairments. Some are about how students are understood, for example, recognition of how autistic traits may impact on the capacity to concentrate in the common learning environment.

Identifying and reducing these barriers so no student is disadvantaged is an important task of policy and practice at all levels. First, there is a need to see ‘disability’ as a consequence of poorly designed environments, not something which is located inside the individual and can be mainly understood through clinical ‘diagnosis’. Legislation can set out the requirement for public services to make ‘reasonable adjustments’ including ensuring that students experiencing obstacles to learning gain access to, and achieve success in the regular classroom. School districts have responsibility for the accessibility of school buildings and the availability of transport. Schools themselves need to demonstrate creativity and learn from others about how best to accommodate the needs of every student, either through universal design for learning or through individual adjustments (4).

## **7. STRENGTHENING INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY**

Within schools, the vision of inclusive education and a welcoming culture provide the context for developing and delivering better teaching and learning. Good teachers think carefully about how each student learns best, taking account of different aptitudes and learning styles. As we have just noted, universal design for learning and tailored individual adjustments provide a framework for equal and equitable participation. Within this model are several classroom strategies (5) which help to define inclusive practice including:

- Differentiating lessons so that all students can participate;
- Recognising diversity honestly and explaining differential expectations;
- Personalising learning plans so as to set achievable goals and assessing progress so as to encourage all students;
- Managing lessons so as to promote cooperative learning through fluid groupings of students;
- Ensuring all students have peer support.

Schools can provide support to classroom teachers through such practises as the deployment of teaching assistants and allocation of relevant resources. School districts can, among other contributions, provide support to schools through sharing best practice and providing multi-professional expert advice. Government can foster inclusive pedagogies through policies on flexible curricula and investment in teacher education.

## **8. PRIORITISING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Clearly transformational change is most dependent on raising the expectations and developing the capacities of teachers and others to demonstrate new ways of thinking and working throughout the educational system. We have already discussed the need to invest in developing transformational leadership, for example, focused on school principals. It is equally important that teachers and other staff are fully equipped to deliver inclusive practices in the school and the classroom.

In part, this is about the reform of teacher and other professional education in the Universities and other training institutions. It is also about prioritising continuous professional development for qualified practitioners. In particular, the education system needs a commitment to deep professional inquiry (6) in which teachers and others get the space, time and support to reflect on their experiences with other teachers and learn from parents and sometimes other experts like psychologists, physiotherapists and

speech therapists. More concretely, methods like ‘solution circles’ offer practical and efficient ways in which small groups of teachers can help each other find practical solutions to challenges arising in the classroom.

## 9. LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

We have already identified the importance of leadership development and professional education. But educational transformation also requires another kind of learning: learning across the system as a whole (i.e. both ‘vertically’ and ‘laterally’) so that policy is responding to experience in the classroom as well as *vice versa*, and innovation in one area is informing innovation in another. Throughout the system we need leaders to be engaging with each other and drawing on many perspectives to assess challenges, identify priorities and monitor progress against the shared vision of inclusive education.

The New Brunswick case study (Box II) provides one illustration of this commitment to regular review of progress in the whole province. The ‘Index for Inclusion’ (7) is one of many systematic approaches to reviewing progress at the level of the school.

## 10. PLOTTING THE JOURNEY TO INCLUSION

As we have already argued, achieving whole system transformation is best understood as a journey in which value-driven and creative leaders work with each other to plot the journey towards an inclusive future. This journey can start in different ways - parents coming together to seek mainstream schooling for their own children, a cadre of imaginative teachers starting to innovate in their own classrooms, charismatic principals taking their own schools in new directions, political leadership inspired by a human rights perspective - but whatever the initial impetus, leaders will need to establish a compelling vision of inclusive education, build wider support for change and start mobilising mutually reinforcing actions at different levels and in different parts of the education system so that all efforts are increasingly working towards the same goals.

Over time these efforts will need to address, and indeed weave together action on all of the ten keys we have identified here, including:

- Widening, supporting and linking up leadership networks;
- Strengthening partnership between educators, students and families;
- Investing in training and support for both new and established teachers as well as other staff;
- Creating positive models of success which demonstrate ways of removing barriers and strengthening inclusive practice, and sharing these across schools and communities;
- Encouraging the growth of parent associations as advocacy organisations and partners in policy making;
- Working towards a coherent transformation plan, with matching resources;
- Ensuring careful attention to learning from experience; and above all;
- Helping all those involved to sustain their vision and passion along the route.

**Many of these features can be seen more concretely in the New Brunswick case study, which follows.**





## Box II: Education system transformation in New Brunswick, Canada

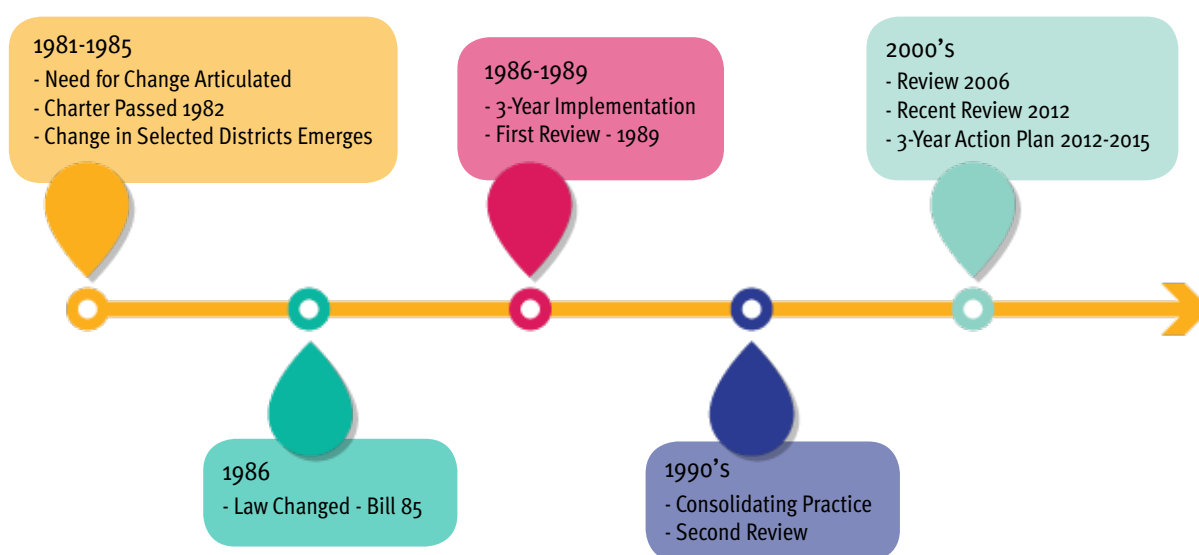
Gordon Porter, as a teacher, school principal, district leader and state policy adviser has been an integral part of radical changes in the small Canadian province of New Brunswick for more than 40 years. Here he tells a succinct version of the long journey to inclusive schooling that began in the early 1980s, was largely achieved by the 1990s - but continues to unfold as new challenges emerge and strategies are sought to deal with them.

In New Brunswick, there were three major factors at work as the movement toward inclusion began in the late 1970s. First, many families were unhappy with the outcomes of segregated schooling for their children. Even school access was not assured since parents had to organize schools themselves with only partial support from government. The result was increasing demand and advocacy for better options and better outcomes for children with disabilities. Parents were not satisfied with the lack of progress their children were experiencing that resulted in social segregation and limited academic learning. Schooling, when it was available, was not providing positive outcomes. Parents were becoming vocal and increasingly their voices were being heard.

Second, there were legislative and policy factors that became clear in the early 1980s. The move to require public education systems to serve all children – including those with disabilities – was felt in both Canada and the USA. These forces were also growing stronger. When Canada included a Charter of Rights and Freedoms in the constitution in 1982, discrimination on the basis of disability was specifically prohibited. This had an effect

similar to Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities now driving change in many countries.

Finally, a number of teachers and school leaders developed a commitment to providing instruction to all students, including those with intellectual and physical disabilities. This was an outgrowth of the “effective schools” movement in Canada and the USA. It focused on the belief systems and practices that could ensure learning for all students, not just those who learned easily. One of the core beliefs of this thinking was that ... “All students can learn”. After initial cautious steps onto new ground, principals and teachers developed increased confidence that the fears and uncertainty about serving all students in regular classes could be overcome. It meant talking about the vision, clarifying the commitment to every learner and being open to new approaches to curriculum and teaching practices. Building on success, one teacher at a time, then one school at a time, New Brunswick’s educators found there was a path forward that provided both quality instruction and inclusion for all students.



We need to acknowledge that the transition to an inclusive system took time. In the district where I worked, centred on the Town of Woodstock, it took us 2-3 years to fully define our approach (from 1982), then a further 3-4 years to institutionalize it (by 1989). Once early adopters developed confidence in inclusion they were invited to share their experiences with their peers. So we proceeded, teacher by teacher and school by school, until inclusion became the established way our educators did their work. We were not alone since several other school districts welcomed the change to inclusion and invested in the training and capacity building needed to give teachers, principals and support teachers the training they needed to succeed.

At the provincial level, the Ministry of Education provided a policy framework as well as funding to support the change. There were province wide seminars and training events over the course of several years. Materials were developed and videos were produced. We accepted that if we waited until everyone in the system was ready for inclusion to begin, we would fail to move ahead. There were many obstacles to be overcome, including fear and uncertainty about the value of inclusion, concern about the adequacy of support for teachers and students, as well as addressing the prevalent “medical model” perspective of professionals in the special education field. However, the focus was on moving forward and solving problems as they emerged.



One of the strategies we found most effective at the school level was to identify several of the most challenging situations faced by one or more teachers and provide as much support as needed to make the situation better. This might mean providing extra support from a para-professional for several weeks; it might mean consultation with a specialist to develop a sound plan of action; or it might involve providing the teacher with opportunities to learn a new skill or strategy in a workshop or seminar.

One of the key features of the approach taken in New Brunswick was to invest heavily in developing a cadre of “support teachers” who could provide direct and collaborative assistance to teachers as they worked to make inclusion a reality in their classrooms. In some cases this involved re-training special education teachers; in other instances, highly skilled classroom teachers were recruited to learn the additional skills needed to become a support teacher for colleagues. The district I worked in held these training sessions for “support teachers” for a full afternoon every second week, and this strategy continued for more than 10 years.

All these things happened in the context of planning at the school, district and provincial level. The Ministry of Education fostered partnerships with districts and districts developed cooperative initiatives with each other. Parent/family advocacy organizations, universities and professional groups were also part of the partnership efforts. There was strong



legislative, policy and administrative support for inclusive education in New Brunswick schools.

As inclusion gradually took shape in schools across the province, within the first 2-3 years, every child was able to be enrolled as a student in the community or neighbourhood school with their siblings and peers. Principals and teachers focused on practices that make schools inclusive and at the same time make the school an effective place of learning for all students. Learning is not a zero sum affair and inclusion does not result in diminished learning for peers.

We began the effort to make schools inclusive in New Brunswick more than three decades ago. It has largely been successful. However, it is important to acknowledge it has not been easy and there have been four major reviews of the inclusive education effort, each identifying further ways in which we could do better.

I served as the co-chair of the most recent review which was completed in June 2012. Our major conclusion is articulated in the title of our report - “Strengthening Inclusion, Strengthening Schools”. We proposed in particular that further progress could be made if we focused on developing strong leadership throughout the school system, providing direct and effective support to classroom teachers through collaboration, coaching and co-teaching and building capacity by investing in training and on-going improvement strategies.

In New Brunswick, the evidence is that every investment made to make a school inclusive is an investment in making the school a better school for all the students. That means improving teaching and supporting teachers to solve the instruction challenges they face. Making inclusion successful is an educational question faced by the teacher, not one looked at through the traditional “medical” approach that focuses on the defects of the individual “special” student.

In New Brunswick we support building school and classroom practices that enable teachers to serve all students - not just some of them. Quality education and inclusive education are two sides of the same coin. They go together.

This is the path New Brunswick has been on since 1986. Remarkable advances have been made in the province but it is and will continue to be a work in progress.

## Three illustrations fill out this story:

### You Go, MATTHEW!

Matthew, age eight, attends a school in New Brunswick. Lively. Independent, and a go-getter, he swims, skates and plays soccer. Like the other children? Yes, except Matthew was born with moderate to severe hearing loss in his left ear and severe to profound hearing loss in his right ear. The consequence was language and learning challenges other children in his class have not had.



How has that changed his life at school? Very little. “We’ve always treated him like other children. At school it’s the same”, says his mother Sophie. “We haven’t tried to hide his hearing and learning challenges. He wears hearing aids and he’s proud of them.”

Matthew benefited from early intervention to compensate for his hearing loss and to develop language skills he would need. Sensory experiences, games and language exercises made a difference. Now Matthew is in Grade 3. He uses a rich vocabulary and keeps up with his group. There is an FM system in his classroom that amplifies the teacher’s voice. He participates in all activities without an educational assistant. Matthew is included and he belongs!

## TEACHING TEAM MAKES INCLUSION A REALITY

Picture this. Four classrooms along a corridor, each filled with kids ranging in age from Kindergarten to Grade Two. Five teachers, who periodically move from one area to another, as do the students.

The buzz of children actively learning fills the air, yet the atmosphere is relaxed and happy. For these teachers ‘inclusive education’ means treating each student with dignity and respect; taking into account each student’s learning style; having high but realistic expectations for each student.

Instruction is based on the student’s strengths and weaknesses, and developing appropriate learning goals, related to those expectations. It also means that each student experiences a positive and supportive learning environment at all times.

These multi-age classrooms are making inclusion a reality on multiple levels.

These five individuals are the perfect example of the synergy that results when a team is focused on one goal: ‘All kids can learn’.





## NEW BRUNSWICK INCLUSION MODEL: GLOBAL IMPACT

What has been called “the radical introduction of inclusive education” in New Brunswick more than 25 years ago, has had an impact on the development of national inclusive education policies in number of countries.

This includes investing in school-based support teams, providing effective support in the classrooms rather than withdrawing students to work with external specialists and encouraging each school to take the natural proportion of disabled students in their local population, (South Africa); developing the education support teacher model, (Portugal); and focusing on school-based problem solving (Peru, Colombia).

Marie Schoeman of the Inclusive Education Directorate, Ministry of Education, Republic of South Africa observed: “The progress that has been made on the road towards establishing a fully inclusive education system has been largely due to the critical strategic lessons learned from the New Brunswick inclusive education system.”



# System-wide Implications

Our transformational matrix (Box I) points to the need to engage with these ten strategic themes at all levels in the educational system from the classroom to the education ministry. In our experience, this is not usually either about driving change from the ‘top’ or creating a revolution from the ‘bottom’ but rather working in partnership to deliver transformation in which government seeks to define the policy goals and provide supportive conditions for school districts and schools to deliver change in the classroom. It involves good schools taking the lead in introducing innovations which can then be shared with others and scaled up in a wider change programme. Consequently and importantly, everyone seeks to learn from experience not only about how best to play their part but also about what they need from the other parts to be effective. This is our conception of system transformation.

In what follows we draw out the main implications of this approach for responsibilities at the levels of government, school districts and schools/classrooms.

## I. GOVERNMENT

We start at the level of government (national or perhaps state in federal systems). As we have seen, the UNCRPD (Article 24) places on ‘state parties’ the responsibility for ensuring ‘an inclusive system of education at all levels and lifelong learning...’. The Convention itself spells out what this responsibility means for policy and action and the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education (8) has added considerable detail, further expanded in the recent UN General Comment (9). Combining these analyses with what has been learnt in New Brunswick and elsewhere (10), we offer the following summary of priorities (Box III).

### Box III: Government level priorities

- Establish clear national leadership (one ministry for all of education) to act on the Article 24 responsibility.
- Offer a model of partnership between government, educators and civil society organisations (including disabled persons’ organisations) in plotting the route to transformation and invest in developing visionary leadership across this system capable of delivering radical change.
- Put the right to inclusive education into legislation, starting from early childhood, and prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability.
- Ensure that this commitment is reflected in fair and appropriate financial investment and progressive efforts to remove barriers to participation, provide good supports to students who need them and raise public awareness of how this benefits everyone.

- Promote a flexible curriculum focused on education for life and ensure that assessment systems give credit to everyone's talents and achievements.
- Develop a mainstream system for all, transferring resources and skills from special education (if this exists) into supporting teachers and students in regular classrooms.
- Ensure that all teacher training, both pre-qualification and in-service, prepares teachers to respond effectively to diversity in the classroom.
- Invest in developing and disseminating best practice in inclusive education.
- Provide support to civil society organisations which help parents understand their and their children's rights and provide advocacy support to individual families.
- Establish, in both public and private schools, the means for monitoring school enrolment and participation of disabled students alongside their non-disabled peers.
- Make explicit the responsibilities of school districts in implementing these national policies.

## II. SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Working collaboratively in partnership with schools and the communities they serve, local education authorities are tasked with the responsibility for implementing policies on inclusive education for their local population. In Box IV, we offer the following list of priorities for local action:

### Box IV: School district level priorities

- Establish an inspiring vision and clear leadership for local educational transformation.
- Work with schools to plot the journey towards inclusive education for the whole district.
- Understand the educational needs of the whole school population.
- Identify children and young people at risk of exclusion and monitor the school enrolment and participation of disabled students.
- Ensure that educational resources are fairly allocated, that schools are accessible and that there are enough well-trained teachers and support staff and appropriate investment in equipment and expertise to meet the needs of all students.
- Encourage and support schools to create and deliver their own transformation plans as a priority in school improvement.
- Create an educational support service providing expert support to schools in removing

barriers and adapting curricula for student-centred learning in collaboration with health and other relevant local services.

- Invest in the training and professional development of teachers and other staff and promote best practices in inclusive pedagogies through school-to-school exchange.
- Ensure that there is information and advocacy available for parents and they are active partners in the education of their children.
- Provide guidance and support on the maximum appropriate use of common learning environments.
- Monitor progress to reinforce success and identify lessons for doing better.
- Define the responsibilities of schools and principals in delivering the vision for every student.

### III. SCHOOLS AND CLASSROOMS

Clearly, because education is delivered primarily in schools and classrooms, it is at this level that transformation must be achieved. Moreover this is not a ‘once and for all’ renovation to the system. Good schools are continuously evolving in the light of experience by learning from countless examples of creativity designed to ensure that every student feels welcome and everyone is learning. In Box V, we offer the following list of priorities (11) for school-level action.

#### Box V: School and classroom level priorities

- The school principal provides visible leadership, working with teachers, other staff, students and families, to promote a holistic view of education and create an inspiring vision of the inclusive school.
- Together they plot the route to whole school transformation, using this vision to make a systematic diagnosis of what’s working and what’s not working.
- The principal mandates a school transformation team to assist classroom teachers and build the school’s capacity to promote student learning.
- The principal allocates available resources, including teaching assistants, fairly to support teachers in the classroom.
- The school strives to identify and remove the barriers to full student participation and promotes a culture in which all students feel welcome and equally valued.
- Teachers develop flexible teaching strategies (for example, based on universal design for learning, differentiated instruction, cooperative learning and peer tutoring) to promote the common learning environment.



- Learning is student-centred and assessment is flexible and continuous.
- The school encourages parent involvement and supports opportunities for parent-to-parent support.
- There is investment in continuous professional development for staff and teachers support each other in improving inclusive pedagogical practice.
- The school seeks to share its learning with other schools and provides feedback about what is required to promote inclusion to the school district.

## A Call to Action

Public education is the investment society makes in preparing children and young people to meet the challenges of the 21st Century and build a better future for themselves and their communities. Every young person needs to be included equally in this endeavour. This is everybody's business.

**STUDENTS** - need to try their best to learn, help their fellow students and contribute to making their schools inclusive.

**PARENTS** - need to advocate for their children, assist in their education and work with their schools to maximise their effectiveness.

**TEACHERS** - need to welcome every child, teach inclusively and play their part in planning school improvement.

**OTHER PROFESSIONALS** - with particular expertise need to help teachers to succeed in diverse classrooms and ensure that students with different needs get the right support.

**SCHOOL PRINCIPALS AND OTHER EDUCATIONAL POLICY-MAKERS** - need to provide inspirational leadership and ensure that teachers and students have the support they need to practice inclusively.

**OTHER CITIZENS** - need to recognise the importance of inclusive education in building an inclusive society.

This short pamphlet is not only an analysis of what is involved in transforming educational systems; it is a call to all of us in these different roles to work together to deliver the promise of inclusive education.

# Notes & Resources

- (1) For an authoritative recent summary, including of the evidence that all children benefit from inclusive education, see Thomas Hehir and colleagues *A summary of the evidence on inclusive education*, August 2016, available at: [http://alana.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/A\\_Summary\\_of\\_the\\_evidence\\_on\\_inclusive\\_education.pdf](http://alana.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/A_Summary_of_the_evidence_on_inclusive_education.pdf)
- (2) We have drawn here on a classic analysis of strategic leadership: John P. Kotter *Leading Change* Harvard Business School Press, 1996. Our understanding of how complex social systems function and change in relation to their environments has been informed by recent developments in the sciences of living systems, well described in Fritjof Capra and Pier Luigi Luisi *The Systems View of Life: A unifying vision* Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- (3) ‘Partners in Policy-making’ is the trade name for a suite of adult educational programmes, originating nearly thirty years ago in the USA but now available in many countries. We have ourselves described the growth and contribution of one civil society network in Colombia over several years which has made advancing inclusive education its primary goal. Heidy Araque and David Towell *Networking For Social Change* <http://www.centreforwelfarereform.org/library/authors/david-towell/networking-for-social-change.html>
- (4) In England, the education ministry commissioned a set of DVDs with more than 150 short videos illustrating different kinds of reasonable adjustment and distributed these to all schools as a resource to teachers. These are available at: <http://worldofinclusion.com/v3/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/RAP-document-with-youtube-links.pdf>
- (5) For more detail, see for example, Gary Bunch *Inclusion: How To - Essential classroom strategies* Inclusion Press, 1999
- (6) We have produced a guide to professional inquiry, including a large collection of case studies with multiple commentaries, as a resource to teacher development: Gordon Porter and Déidre Smith (Eds.) *Exploring Inclusive Educational Practices Through Professional Inquiry* Sense Publishers, 2011
- (7) Tony Booth and Mel Ainscow *Index For Inclusion: Developing learning and participation in schools* Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education, 2011
- (8) UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education Report to the UN Human Rights Council (2007)
- (9) The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities General Comment No. 4. *Article 24: Right to Inclusive Education* United Nations, August 26, 2016.
- (10) We have found especially helpful a recent, comprehensive study of efforts to implement inclusive education in the very varied countries of the British Commonwealth: Richard Rieser *Implementing Inclusive Education* Commonwealth Secretariat (2012).
- (11) We have drawn here on an excellent set of guides from UNESCO *Embracing diversity: Tool-kit for creating inclusive learning-friendly environments* (2009) and developed these points further in Heidy Araque and David Towell *Teachers as leaders in the journey to inclusive schools* <http://www.centreforwelfarereform.org/library/authors/david-towell/teachers-as-leaders.html>

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