

# Let's Chat... *about* *Inclusive Education*

*Hosts Gordon L. Porter, Jacqueline Specht and Diane Richler*



**Guest:**

**Donna Barrett**

*Teacher & Education Administrator  
Edmonton/Northland School Division*

*Consultant, Inclusion Alberta  
Edmonton, AB*

Donna Barrett has advocated for inclusive education throughout her career as a teacher, consultant, principal. She served as assistant superintendent in the Edmonton Public School Division and later as superintendent of the Northland School Division serving communities in northern Alberta where 95% of the students are of First Nations, Métis and Inuit descent.

As a parent of an adult son with development disabilities, she appreciates the value of inclusive education and the challenges that parents sometimes face in accessing inclusive schooling for their son or daughter.

Donna holds a doctorate in Education from the University of Alberta and her classification is Education Administration. An active member of Rotary, Donna is a Paul Harris Fellow. She participated in a Rotary Belize Literacy Project, working with a team of school administrators from Canada to offer leadership development programs to school principals in 6 different communities in Belize. "I really enjoyed the opportunity to work with school leaders from other countries."

Donna provides professional development and coaching for educators to enhance quality inclusive teaching and leadership to support learning for all students. Among the priorities Donna has in her work are: a) professional development, consultation and coaching for teachers and school and division leaders; b) sharing successful practices related to inclusive education; c) strengthening links between inclusive education and school improvement.

## Key Issues in this Chat Session:

- 1. Advocating for Inclusion is Necessary:** Donna explains that in order for parents to have their child educated in an inclusive environment in Alberta, they must advocate for an inclusive option. Inclusive practices are usually not the first option provided by Albertan schools to parents of students with barriers to learning.
- 2. Urban Centres Remain Committed to Special Education Models:** In Alberta, many urban centres devoted substantial time and resources to the development of special education models. Subsequently, overcoming ties to special education in urban centres is a challenge. Rural and remote communities did not have the same resources as urban centres for special education models and therefore have always used and continue to use more inclusive practices.
- 3. Best Practices for Parents:** Donna explained that when advocating for their children, parents have the most success when they are clear about what they want for their children without being prescriptive. For example, parents explaining that they want their child in the classroom, supported sufficiently, may be more effective than explaining how exactly they want their child supported in the classroom.
- 4. Quality Experiences with Inclusion are Valuable:** To increase the number of leaders in education with an appreciation for inclusion, Donna notes the importance of having quality experiences with inclusion. Encouraging leaders to realize that their positive experience with inclusion can be extrapolated to enhance the learning experiences of all students can then help grow their appreciation for inclusion.
- 5. EAs as an Extra Set of Hands:** Instead of attaching an educational assistant (EA) to a specific student in the classroom, Donna promotes the idea of EAs acting as an extra set of hands in the classroom. EAs can help teachers so that inclusion can successfully occur within classrooms, with all students supported.

## Potential Discussion Questions (before viewing):

1. How do you think we can encourage those around us to have an appreciation for inclusion?
2. Why do you think inclusive education is not the default option for educating students with barriers to learning in Alberta? How about across Canada?

## Potential Discussion Questions (after viewing):

1. Do you have any thoughts on Donna's suggestion to have EAs function as an extra set of hands in classrooms? How might this improve the peer connections of students with barriers to learning?
2. How do you think the ties to special education models in urban centres can be loosened or cut altogether?

# More from Donna Barrett:

- **From the Inclusive Education Canada Website**
  - Determination And Partnerships: Keys To Successful Inclusion For Secondary Students
- Barrett, Donna (2014), "Resourcing Inclusive Education", Measuring Inclusive Education (International Perspectives on Inclusive Education, Vol. 3), Emerald Group Publishing Limited, Bingley, pp. 75-91. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S1479-363620140000003020>
- Barrett, Donna S. (2007). Leadership: Being in rooms. Edmonton : Alberta, Canada Proquest Information and Learning.



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