

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

Hosts Gordon L. Porter, Jacqueline Specht and Diane Richler



Guest: **Marilyn Dolmage** *Inclusion Consultant Families, School Boards and Community Agencies, Toronto, ON*

Marilyn Dolmage has worked alongside people with disabilities, their families and communities to end segregation and create new supports and relationships for over 50 years. As an inclusive education consultant, Marilyn assists schools and families to work together to improve education.

She was project coordinator for the Ontario Coalition for Inclusive Education and its member associations.

Marilyn communicates with a broad network of allies across Ontario, Canada concerning the law, provincial policies, educational practices, and advocacy strategies. Since 1995, she's been inspiring school communities to work for change to welcome, accommodate and celebrate individual differences among their students, assisting families to improve individual educational planning so that their sons and daughters get the support they need to learn as members of regular classrooms in their neighborhood schools, connecting special education advisory committee representatives to promote effective inclusive education in their school boards, gathering information from across Canada about innovative career development for students with disabilities leaving high school, and leading research funded by the Ministry of Education in conjunction with the Faculty of Education at Western University.

Her family struggled to ensure that all three of her own kids attended school together and to assist her older son who had significant disabilities to have the education, medical treatment, employment, and community life that he wanted. Matthew's sudden death in 2004 at the age of 29 has heightened her resolve to improve policy, promote effective inclusion, and strengthened families, schools, and communities.

Marilyn has a BA from McMaster University, a BSW from the University of British Columbia and Master of Social Work degree from York University in Toronto.

Marilyn is a valued member of Inclusive Education Canada's Network of Associates.

Key Issues in this Chat Session:

1. Inclusive Education is Paramount to Leading Inclusive Lives: Marilyn asserts that for people experiencing barriers to participation in the ordinary activities of their communities, specifically individuals with disabilities, inclusion in school can make a critical difference. Inclusive schooling with the social and academic benefits that result provides the foundation for meaningful life in the community.

2. Inclusive Education is About More Than Education: Marilyn explained that, in her view, the social aspect of education is often overlooked. Inclusive classrooms make it possible for students with disabilities to feel accepted and valued by their peers and their teachers.

3. Person Power: Over the course of Marilyn's career, she has learned how valuable it is for persons experiencing barriers to learning to gain a sense of power over the decisions made about their lives. Students and parents are too often denied the option of inclusion in schools and classrooms with little regard for the lifetime effect of this. We need to ensure they can choose placement in an inclusive classroom if that is what they consider best.

4. Schools as Active Learning Spaces: Marilyn has promoted change and innovation in schools and maintains that schools do not have to be static institutions. School leaders and teachers can adapt and change their practices based on the needs of students. All learners benefit from schools being active learning spaces.

5. Loving and Caring for All Children: Marilyn believes that inclusive education boils down to loving all children, regardless of their ability. All students and all families deserve the love and support they need for them to be successful during their school years and beyond.

Potential Discussion Questions (before viewing):

1. Do parents have the kind of power and control they need to ensure their child with a disability is included in schools in your community? What, if anything, needs to change?
2. How important is it for families to be supported by an advocacy group to overcome barriers blocking inclusion in neighbourhood schools?

Potential Discussion Questions (after viewing):

1. Do you have any experience or knowledge of groups or networks that connect people who are committed to inclusive education? Do these networks play a role in strengthening and supporting a commitment to inclusion?
2. Do you agree with Marilyn's belief that inclusion comes down to caring for and loving all children?

More from Marilyn Dolmage:

- Evidence of High School Inclusion: Research, Resources and Inspiration, Marilyn Dolmage, Jacqueline Specht, Janice Strickland, Heather Stuart and Gabrielle Young; Principal investigator analyzing how selected secondary schools develop and sustain their motivation and strategies to teach students with significant disabilities as members of regular classes.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/279961938_Evidence_of_effective_high_school_inclusion_Research_resources_and_inspiration
- The What, Why and How of Inclusive Education –a series of training podcasts for families and educators through The Inclusion Academy at
<https://goodthingsinlife.mykajabi.com/inclusion>
- **Inclusion Action in Ontario**
 - Inclusive Education: From political correctness towards social justice – a film to support advocacy, dedicated to the memory of Matthew Dolmage at
<https://inclusionactionontario.ca/why-inclusive-education/>
 - Blog post honouring Orville Endicott to support family advocacy at
<https://inclusionactionontario.ca/the-life-and-contributions-of-orville-endicott/>
- **Resources created with The Ontario Coalition for Inclusive Education:**
 - History of the Coalition http://www.inclusive-education.ca/resources/documents/Coalition_summary_2005.pdf
 - A Tale about a Test: more questions than answers” – a parable challenging standardized testing http://www.inclusive-education.ca/resources/documents/tale_test.php
- Resources created for Inclusive Education Canada
 - Inclusive Education - Aiming Higher <https://bit.ly/3QPkeKr>
 - Getting an Inclusive Start: The Critical Need for Inclusive Pre-school Education: <https://bit.ly/3Li2XrY>
- “Students Learning Together” - Marilyn Dolmage and Nancy Rother -from Accommodation to Universal Design



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