

# 10 KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL INCLUSION

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This brief paper focuses on 10 keys to inclusion and success based on my experiences in Canada. All of Canada, by no means, has embraced inclusive education wholly and warmly. The traditional special education model is the model of choice across most of the land, particularly for educators and governments. There is much resistance toward change to inclusive education in the land. There are many naysayers who do not believe that learners with disabilities can learn effectively in the same classrooms as typical learners. They believe that being in the same classrooms will diminish the learning of all students and drive teachers toward frustration and burnout. There are many instances where educators are using the terms associated with inclusion, but support inclusive education. There are many who are more comfortable with the past than with the future.

However, inclusion is spreading, slowly, across my nation. As it spreads, it is disproving the fears of the naysayers. The following are my thoughts on what is supporting spread of this educational revolution called inclusion in Canada. In many ways they are thoughts that have come to me as I have visited other nations and found inclusion to be spreading everywhere.

## **ATTITUDE**

Where inclusion has taken hold in Canada, there was always someone with the attitude that questioned why it was necessary to educate learners with disabilities in special settings. There was someone who questioned the effect on learners, teachers, schools, and families of the special education model. There was someone who asked why learners with disabilities could not be educated with their typical peers in the school down the street.

Where such questions were not asked, likelihood of acceptance of exclusion for students with disabilities was higher. Where such questions were asked, likelihood of change toward inclusive education was higher.

It is true that, in Canada, a questioning attitude is more common among parents than among school administrators, teachers, teacher educators, and governments. It is a lesson in itself that this is true of Canada. However, when members of these other groups who also had a questioning attitude came together with parents, inclusion began to appear. Thus, when educators and parents came together in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada in the late 1960s, an entire school system moved to inclusion. This was one of the first school systems anywhere, if not the first, to do so. Today, there is not one student in this system who does not attend the regular classrooms of the school down the street, no matter what type or degree of disability is involved.

Later, when educators, parents, and governments came together in the province of New Brunswick and the northern territories of Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut, inclusive policies and practice resulted. In other instances, individual leaders have moved individual schools or classrooms to become islands of inclusion in a sea of special education settings. All of these have been path breaking leadership moves in a largely special education Canada.

All these changes were based on attitudes that there must be a stronger, more socially just way to educate learners with disabilities. Those involved in advocating for a better way turned to inclusion to find that way.

## **UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO CURRICULUM**

Northern nations have embraced, as never before, the notion that the curriculum must be sacrosanct. Content must be set, learning expectations laid down, and teachers required to ensure that all students meet these expectations. Those who could not meet the expectations could expect to have their presence in a regular classroom reconsidered.

In my own province of Ontario, this requirement was supported by a four level rubric which classified learners as level, 1, 2, 3, or 4. This, in effect, is a labeling system which sorts learners out at levels from minimal competency to mastery. All learners, no matter what their personal learning abilities, were to be

exposed to the same content in basically the same manner. If the learners did not succeed, that was their fault. Few appear aware that this rigid approach cuts off universal access to the curriculum and supports separation of learner from learner.

Where inclusion has succeeded in Canada, the curriculum is regarded as a tool, not as a controlling agent. It is viewed as flexible. It is to be attuned to an individual pace of learning. Students in the same classroom can learn together, though they may be at differing parts of the curriculum. In other words, curricula are designed for universal access for all learners, when inclusion is the objective.

## **COLLABORATION**

Inclusion is founded on collaboration among all players in education: teachers, teacher specialists, parents, supporting disciplines, and even the students. The view is that education and learning will proceed more powerfully if all involved understand what is happening, and if they all have a part to play.

In Canada, collaboration traditionally has been more of a theoretical concept than one practised in schools. Parents, to a large degree, have been seen as interlopers in schools. They have not been welcomed. Support from other disciplines was to be delivered outside of school hours or in special education settings. Specialist teachers were seen as possessing special knowledge about special things and were loathe to give up their power. Students were to be seen, but not heard. This separation of player from player has been lessening over recent years, but not in any significant degree. A collaborative attitude is not yet common amongst Canadian educators, though rhetoric abounds.

The only area where collaboration among educators, parents, other disciplines, and students has come to flower in Canada is where inclusion is being practiced. Do not mistake me. Collaboration is not perfect. Students, in particular, often are left out of the mix. Some players must learn to play harder when it comes to collaboration. But collaboration has proven key to successful inclusion in Canada.

Where the lesson of British poet John Donne that “*No man is an island, entire to itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main*” has been learned in Canada, collaboration has been part of the process, and the roots of inclusion have taken firmer hold.

## **LEADERSHIP**

Leaders lead in many directions. This is as true within the fold of education as it is in any other societal endeavour.

With regard to inclusive education, leaders have appeared across the nation, but not nearly everywhere. Where they do appear, they lead others to inclusive education. Leaders share leadership with others and more leaders arise. Leaders encourage leadership in others. Leaders expect leadership in others. Leaders see leadership in teachers, parents, other professionals, and in students.

In Canada, where leaders have made no bones about the value they see in inclusion, the expectations they have for teachers, and the admiration and trust they have for parents, inclusion has flourished. Where they have done their best to provide needed supports, schools and school systems have responded. Schools and school systems also have responded even when concrete supports were scarce or unavailable. It seems that moral leadership can work wonders. Concrete supports are valuable, but not as valuable as leadership and moral support.

Inclusive leaders remain uncommon in Canada. However, more and more future leaders are appearing in the ranks of young teachers, parents, other professionals, and students. Here and there, hope for leadership from government exists. It does not appear that leadership toward inclusive education will disappear, but it will not, for now, burst the banks of special education and flood the land.

We need leaders in Canada to effect change. Leadership is both a personal issue and a necessity. As Gandhi the charismatic leader with a vision

for the future of his nation, has said, “*We must be the change we wish in the world*”. Educators, parents, people with disabilities, advocates, and government must be of the same mind if inclusive education for those with disabilities is to take root and spread. Canada has not yet fully learned this lesson.

## **RESPECT**

The Random House College Dictionary defines respect as “admiration for or a sense of worth or excellence of a person, a personal quality or trait, or something considered as a manifestation of a personal quality or trait”.

Where inclusive education is successful in Canada a particular type of respect is present. This is respect for all people as learners, with specific reference to learning in the regular classrooms and schools of the nation.

Where inclusive education is successful, the desire and attempt to learn is respected, not the place on the curriculum where learning occurs for any individual.

Where inclusive education is successful, all players are respected, whatever their role. Their right of choice is respected.

Where inclusive education is successful, human rights, student rights, are respected.

Where inclusive education is successful in Canada, respect is a uniting element. Where one does not give respect and others do not receive respect, human rights and social justice are more than elusive. Respect in education for all others is a cornerstone of democratic practice. This, too, is a lesson not yet learned by all.

*Democracy arises out of the notion that those who are equal in any respect*

*are equal in all respects. (Aristotle)*

## **LEARNING IS LEARNING**

Learning is at the heart of education. This is true to such a degree for some educators and some governments that they believe they have right of

approval of what learning is acceptable as learning. They discount the learning of some students because they are not considered to be true learners. Often these “not true learners” are relegated to the margins of education, or not admitted to education at all. Learners with disabilities are a case in point.

Where inclusive education in Canada is successful, all learners are viewed as true learners, true learners at their own levels of ability. Learning more powerfully than most, as with students labeled gifted or talented is still learning. Learning more modestly than most, also, is still learning.

Where inclusive education is successful in Canada, learning is considered as learning. It is a quality within the learner and not to be disrespected. All learning has value. All learners have value. When leadership is inclusive, all learners are supported and encouraged to learn as best they can.

This is a key lesson. The speech John Fitzgerald Kennedy never delivered in Dallas on November 22, 1963 contained this thought:

*Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.*

How true in inclusive education.

## **TEACHING IS TEACHING**

Traditional belief regarding learners with disabilities is that they require special teaching and special settings within which to be taught. For them, the special education view is that teaching in ordinary ways and being taught by ordinary teachers is not sufficient.

What I have seen in Canada, where I have seen successful inclusion, is that teaching is teaching. Teachers know how to teach. They know how to teach all learners. This does not mean that they know everything about how to teach all learners. It does mean that learners are more like other learners than they are different. It means that most of the ordinary techniques of teaching will work. And, remember that inclusive education is collaborative. Sometimes a regular teacher will need and benefit from the support of another teacher, professionals from other disciplines, from parents, or even from students.

The lesson I have learned is that the regular classroom teacher can accept responsibility for all students. Working collaboratively with others supports the teacher in doing this successfully.

Henry Brook Adams, not a Canadian, is mostly known among educators for one thing he wrote. It is, "*A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops*".

Today we know that this truth extends to learners with disabilities.

## **ACHIEVEMENT**

Achievement means to accomplish something. Schools around the world have warped this simple definition. They believe achievement in school equates with how much one achieves in terms of mastering the curriculum at a certain rate. Learners are judged, not on whether their learning is meritorious on a personal and individual level, but against its amount.

The issue of merit in achievement differs in inclusive settings I have visited in Canada. In fact, the way achievement is regarded is almost a litmus test of whether inclusion is happening.

In inclusive settings all learners are supported to master as much of the curriculum as they can. However, it is recognized that learners will master the curriculum at different rates. It is the act of learning which is meritorious, the act of putting forth effort, the moving forward and learning more. Every act of achievement is celebrated.

This view of achievement troubles those who believe that one learner is superior to another based on amount of learning. It is as if a modest pace of learning is offensive. Inclusion values learning, supports every learner in achieving as much as possible, and understands that we all are different in our learning capacities and styles.

Those in inclusive settings in Canada have realized that supporting everyone in their learning does not diminish the learning of anyone. In fact, more learning goes on, sometimes unexpectedly.

## **DETERMINATION**

Determination is a quality not unique to Canada, nor to inclusive education. However, where I have seen success in inclusive education in Canada, I have witnessed determination.

- I have seen teachers and others determined to find ways to teach every learner.
- I have seen teachers determined to make collaboration work to the benefit of a learner.
- I have seen parents determined to actively support those teaching their child, and to accept responsibility for stimulation at home.
- I have seen classroom volunteers determined to help as much as they could.
- I have seen administrators determined to create school environments conducive to learning by all.
- I have seen people with disabilities determined to learn.

Where I have seen these things, I have seen inclusive teaching.

## **GET STARTED**

Now we come to my final and most important key, simply getting started.

I have heard people talk about the values and challenges of inclusion on many occasions and in many places. I have heard administrators discuss why inclusion, though having undisputed value, could not happen in their particular environments. I have heard many professionals explain why a certain child or youth, who would certainly benefit from being included, certainly could not be included due to this, or that, compelling reason. I have heard inclusion described as a wonderful philosophy, but too utopian to be possible. There are many who resist inclusion in these ways.

Where I have seen inclusion succeed in Canada, I have seen educators, parents, and others put aside reservations and simply get started. Without getting



started and finding out what can happen, none of the other key elements I have mentioned is worth anything. They obtain their value by someone deciding to get started and then getting started.

- Attitude
- Universal access to curriculum
- Collaboration
- Leadership
- Respect
- Learning is learning
- Teaching is teaching
- Achievement
- Determination
- Get Started

These qualities are basic to inclusive education where I have seen it in Canada. They do not cost anything. They exist to some degree in all people. They are universal keys to success where inclusive education is the issue. They are not Canadian, or Indian, or Scots, or Brazilian. They repose, waiting to be awakened in the interest of education and social justice, in everyone.

As a well-known song goes:

*Ring the bells and wake the people.*

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