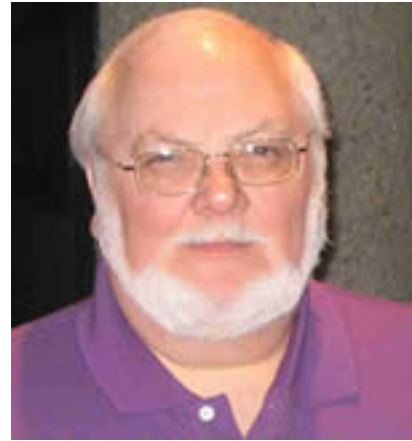


Is Inclusive Education Realistic? You Bet It Is!

By Gordon Porter

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Gordon Porter I talk to many people who wonder how they can support inclusive education when the reality of what is called IE in many schools is not good. It is a real dilemma. It is great to be a visionary and support inclusion in a theoretical sense – but what do you say when confronted with the reality of poor practice in the school and classroom.



The examples are quite common. We have all heard about:

- teachers who have a child in their class ... but ... don't really think that is the best place for him;
- teachers who are willing but declare they have no training or experience with a child with special needs;
- a school principal who agrees to accept a child but only if supports that are not available are provided;
- a school that agrees to a child's placement but if anything at all doesn't go well – the deal is in off;
- a school permits inclusion but fails to ensure the teacher has access to a resource/support teacher or a paraprofessional when needed.

These and other things can and do happen.

Schools may not properly train and support their teachers; districts may say no money is available for needed accommodations; teachers may say the child's placement in the class will disrupt other children's learning; principals say the child with special needs will simply take up too much of the teacher's time.

And so it goes. In the face of all these and other challenges it is easy to conclude that inclusive education may be a worthy goal, however it is not easy and it may well be unrealistic!

BUT ... it doesn't have to be that way. We have more than enough examples of quality inclusive education in Canada to demonstrate it can be done. Check out the examples provided in the interviews with school leaders on the Inclusive Education Canada website (www.inclusiveeducation.ca). They tell the stories of success in schools in throughout the country. The gloomy and dark descriptions of inclusion are outweighed by these stories of people who are making it happen now.

The fact is teachers can develop – and keep - positive attitudes toward including kids with diverse needs in their classes. Principals can provide leadership and support their teachers and their students. Districts can develop policies and programs that empower and make quality inclusive education a reality.

The dark and gloomy reality of today's inadequate inclusion programs can be changes. Working to make inclusion successful can lead to more positive outcomes for our children in the future.

We need to focus on the fact that access to an inclusive education is a right – one now included in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Article 25) – as well as human rights legislation in Canada.

Not only is inclusion a right – but it is also good educational practice. In my experience schools that are successful and provide quality education can provide inclusive education – if they chose to take on the challenge.

Teachers, principals and parents can mobilize to make inclusion not only a progressive vision – they can also make it a reality. Problems can be solved, challenges can be met.

Thousands of teachers in Canada are doing it today. More need to do it in the days ahead.

So – is inclusive education realistic? You bet it is!