

## **Keynote Speech at Inclusion Event**

Dr. Michael Bach, Executive Vice-President of the Canadian Association for Community Living was the keynote speaker at a major inclusion event held in New Brunswick November 26-28, 2006. Dr. Bach opened the session by addressing over 300 teachers and educational leaders in attendance. He spoke about the context in which the demand for inclusive education occurs in Canada and analyzed critical factors that require discussion and reflection.

See full speech below.

## **Solidarity forever?**

### **What prospects for a movement for inclusive education?**

By Michael Bach, PhD. Executive Vice-President Canadian Association for Community Living

Presented at The New Brunswick Professional Development Conference on Inclusive Education November 26, 2006

#### **Introduction**

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this Conference on Inclusive Education. It is an honour for me to be here and share an opening talk with participants – in the jurisdiction that has led the way in formulating and implementing inclusive education in Canada and internationally. It appears that inclusive education is at something of watershed moment in New Brunswick. Having laid a solid legislative and policy and practice framework over the past twenty years, Wayne Mackay suggests in his New Brunswick Review of Inclusive Education – *Connecting Care and Challenge: Tapping Our Human Potential* – that the education system is at an important turning point. Can the system be adapted to meet high expectations of students and parents, and needs of teachers, with limited resources, or will it buckle under the stress and not deliver on the promise of inclusive education. As Wayne MacKay writes, the “promise of inclusive education is tremendous but so are the challenges... The challenge is how to do a better job of implementing real inclusion in the classrooms of New Brunswick” (2006, 24).

The MacKay report lays out a plan for transforming the education system in New Brunswick that is impressive in its scope, visionary and comprehensive. It is a landmark educational report. There are many reviews of special education across the country but none so comprehensive. It represents so much of what we have been calling for as an Association of families and people with intellectual disabilities. And I want to congratulate Wayne MacKay, and all of those who contributed to this exercise, for this extraordinary blueprint for building an inclusive education system. It will serve jurisdictions in this country and internationally for many years to come.

I sense there is consensus on the solutions and on steps that need to be taken – but the comprehensive nature of the solution will require significant investment, restructuring of roles of many of the educational actors, a massive professional and leadership development strategy, restructuring of funding, new accountability mechanisms, major institutional change within government and districts and schools, and new relationships between schools, parents and communities to bring the plan to fruition. It’s an exhaustive, and exhausting even while compelling, plan to read. As MacKay notes, “... we recognize the path to inclusive education is more easily charted than followed” (2006, 24).

It is at the point of major social or systems change that the ties that bind us together can unravel – some parents, in Wayne MacKay’s words ‘might cross the line’ in their advocacy efforts out of frustration with the slow pace of change. Educators might retreat from leadership in a defensive move just to resist the high expectations and demands to do more with flat lined resources; the provincial government could express commitment rhetorically, even as the resources and vigor for institutional change wane. I don’t sense at all that this is happening yet. But I also know that the 95 recommendations MacKay lays out are daunting in their implications, even if entirely doable.

I want to reflect in my comments this evening on how one tackles a change process of the scale the MacKay report envisions. How does one think about a multi-year process of change in a way that is sustainable and real – so that a decade from now we don’t look back to clear the proverbial dust from the MacKay Report?

In reflecting on next steps, I want to be clear that I am not trying to advise the actors on the ground in New Brunswick about inclusive education, the specifics of implementing the MacKay report or how to reform the education system in New Brunswick. Those in this room are much better positioned and much more knowledgeable than I to do that. Rather, I am speaking in my capacity with a national family-based and self-advocacy based organization and movement that have roots in New Brunswick and across the country. We are a countrywide federation for which the MacKay Report represents enormous hope and possibility not only in this province but also across the country. Its successful implementation is a priority for the Canadian Association for Community Living. It is the most comprehensive roadmap we have for creating inclusive education systems in this country, for scaling up what in most parts of the country remain relatively small, adhoc and highly localized successes in creating inclusive classrooms and schools. So there is urgency for us in thinking through what the next steps are, and what foundations need to be built so this roadmap can actually take us somewhere new, and become an example for the rest of the country.

**Relationships, Rights Responsibilities and Solidarity** To think about the challenge of sustaining long-term systemic reform, I turn to two main insights from the philosophy of law and theories of social change we might draw some guidance from. I want in my remarks this evening to play these insights out a bit, see what they might suggest for next steps. So we are tacking into philosophical territory here – for sustenance, for ideas, for direction from others who have thought deeply about the long march of legal, policy, systems and social change.

One insight from the philosophy of law and social change is that realizing equality in relationships and rights requires a foundation of social solidarity. In his report, Wayne MacKay speaks of the new 3 R’s in education – rights, responsibilities and relationships. His main point as I understand it is that the *Charter-protected* right to equality demands proactive efforts to ensure equal rights in education –

and that the ideal model for realizing equality rights in education is in a classroom and school characterized by principles of inclusion. However, Mackay notes, these rights are pursued and exercised in a context of relationships with others – students, teaching assistants, parents, teachers, principals, school boards, and the broader public. Rights of one have to be balanced with the rights of others. As relationships and exercise of responsibility are very human affairs they do not always provide the context for realizing rights as they are formulated in their ideal terms. He advises that there will be balancing acts and compromises, but as long as we are guided by what he aptly calls the “lighthouse of equality” these balancing acts should tip in favour of advancing equality – meaning belonging and community for all in regular classrooms, along with equal benefits from education.

But how will this actually happen – how will the balancing of rights tip in favour of advancing equality? We know from the history of institutionalizing human rights instruments in Canada and internationally that too often this does not happen when it comes to people with disabilities. Exit systems are built in to law and policy and discretionary program implementation of the type – ‘to the greatest extent possible,’ ‘in the least restrictive environment,’ ‘according to the best interests’ as defined by professionals. We know from our experience, and from the continued marginalized status of children youth and adults with disabilities that the balance too often tips away from the lighthouse.

Mackay makes ninety-five recommendations to weight balancing acts in the direction of equality for students with disabilities. But I think there is an ingredient implicit in these recommendations on which more light might be shed. It is the foundation on which relationships, rights, and responsibilities rest when they tip in favour of equality. And that foundation is social solidarity. Axel Honneth, a contemporary German moral philosopher looks at the evolution of the idea of equality and struggles for equality in this way. He suggests, as have courts in Canada, that equality is about each of us being recognized in an equally valuing way by others, and by the institutions of society. That is what dignity and equal respect is all about. He looks at the evolution of ways that equally valuing recognition is secured. First and foremost it is secured in our intimate and close personal relationships with others – in love. But as we know those relationships don’t always secure equally valuing recognition – they can be places where harm is done, where the bonds of intimacy become shackles and worse. So the idea of institutional rights is born – to regulate in some way the basic relationships of society – in families, in communities, in markets, and between individuals and the state.

However, the history of institutionalizing rights – as we have seen in the past few hundred years, even up to the human rights instruments being crafted today, being ratified or not being ratified by Canada and other countries – shows that rights are not enough. Too often they have exit systems built into them. Too often they value certain human characteristics and relationships over others. This has certainly been the history of rights and people with disabilities. It is not to say that

rights instruments are not essential – of course they are, just as relationships of intimacy and love are essential to nurturing the valued recognition from others in the light of which we all grow, develop and thrive.

Honneth suggests that in order to tip the relationships of love and the exercise of human rights, and the responsibilities that come with them both, in the direction of advancing equality, we must seek also to strengthen the bonds of social solidarity – the deeper cultural valuing of different forms of life. Intimate relationships and the exercise of rights must be supported by a broad social solidarity, where they are valued as ends in themselves. Otherwise, they do not fulfill their promise of securing a good life for people. Hence the appeal – ‘it takes a village to raise a child.’ Families can’t do it on their own; legal frameworks and policies and programs on their own don’t make it possible. It takes a village, a community where children are valued, where responsibility is shared, to enable families to raise their children, to enable children to flourish.

This ingredient of social solidarity is critical for the equality of people with intellectual and other disabilities, and other groups who face devaluation in society – whether by virtue of their gender, ethno-racial-cultural differences, sexual orientation, aboriginal status, or other differences. Unless their particular forms of life, the diversity they bring to their communities and broader society are valued, respected, encouraged – personal relationships and statutory rights will not be enough. Why do people with disabilities face such high rates of violence and abuse by those with whom they are most in contact with? Because if their lives are confined to a small circle of paid or unpaid care giving relationships, outside of valued recognition and inclusion by their broader community, both individuals and those relationships are vulnerable. Research in Canada and internationally has demonstrated this time and again.

So relationships of love, rights, responsibilities *and* social solidarity are essential for equality. What would it mean to foster broad social solidarity to move the MacKay plan into action? Well, first I think it would mean a willingness to build bridges across the fault lines that could otherwise stall or undermine implementation of his recommendations. It would mean stepping beyond our usual claims for action, our advocacy-based or professionally based identities to begin a dialogue with each other. We’ve been trying this at CACL as have our Provincial/Territorial Associations, and I think to good effect.

For example, when CACL began working towards a National Summit on Inclusive Education a few years back, one of our first steps was to begin a dialogue with teacher federations and associations – both the CTF and provincial/territorial associations. The dialogue was intense and challenging and I think we moved somewhere unexpected. Through the course of those dialogues, and in preparation for the Summit, we heard from teachers about the stresses they faced, the burn out they were encountering, the huge numbers of young teachers leaving the profession – because of the expectations and challenges of teaching to the growing diversity in their classrooms without the needed back up

and supports. As we sat down with the CTF to grapple with what this means for advancing the inclusive classrooms we came to a new understanding. As an association advocating for inclusive education, we believe that classrooms need to be student-centred – in all the diversity and possibility that students with disabilities bring to the classroom. But what we learned through our dialogue with teachers, and what we now advocate for in addition, is that strategies for advancing inclusive education must be teacher-centred. If teachers aren't supported to transform their classrooms – supported by principals, parents, communities, school boards, health and social support services, policy and legislation – it just won't happen. So with the Roeher Institute and the Canadian Teachers Federation we wrote "Supporting Teachers" – a tool for assisting all the stakeholders to think about how best to support teachers, and which is being used in sessions over the next few days. And teacher federations also built a bridge – working with us on that document, and committing to hold a National Conference on Inclusive Education – a year ago this month.

In the course of building those bridges, across fault lines that have threatened in recent years to widen, and still do in many places, we began to build bridges, and began to fashion a new 'we' to advance inclusive education. This is an essential point in solidarity building. Solidarity is not simply about building public support; it's more than social marketing policy change. Solidarity is the expression of a social actor, a collective identity, a social movement that says 'we are in solidarity,' 'we act in solidarity for change.' 'Solidarity,' for example, is the name of the Polish labor union that launched a civil society movement in that country and began the great transformations in Eastern Europe in the 1980s and culminated in the tearing down of the Berlin wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s.

I think an important question for all of us is this: When the going gets tough on implementing MacKay, will there be a 'we' that can step across the fault lines between parents and parents; between parents and teachers; between teachers and administrators; districts and the Department; the public and the provincial government? Indu Varma, President of NBTA, writes in her President's Message to the Teachers' Association, where she also reflects on the promise and challenge of the MacKay report:

The real challenge, for us as educators, lies in removing the barriers to learning so we may teach effectively. There are times when despite our best efforts we feel overwhelmed by the diversity and high concentration of needs in our classes, wide spectrum of academic levels in a class, disruptive behaviors at all learning and grade levels, and a complexity of medical, social, and emotional needs of our children. Education's increased mandate hasn't seen proportional increase in resources, funding, or support from other government departments.

There is one 'we' in this statement, and an essential one in transforming education in NB along the lines MacKay outlines in his impressive blueprint for change. But the magnitude of recommended changes will raise huge challenges

for implementation as the NBTA knows. The going will get tough. Will there be solidarity with others at those moments, a collective identity that recognizes the differences among us, and values them in the name of common cause?

### **Legal and policy change: So what's the story?**

To reflect on how we go about building solidarity, let me turn to another insight from ethics and the philosophy of law and social change that provides some guidance. That is, that legal and policy prescriptions – like those recommended in the MacKay report – will fail in formulation or implementation without a solid social narrative, a story for which there is wide agreement that says yes, the Education Act in New Brunswick as it would be amended and the various other proposals, make sense. These directions accord with our understanding of how children best learn, how we as a society can best maximize individual potential, child welfare and how we can weave social cohesion across differences.

Robert Cover, was a leading legal theorist and philosopher informed by his 1960s civil rights and antiwar activism, and writes in this regard:

No set of legal institutions or prescriptions exists apart from the narratives that locate it and give it meaning. For every constitution there is an epic, for each decalogue a scripture. Once understood in the context of the narratives that give it meaning, law becomes not merely a system of rules to be observed but a world in which we live... History and literature cannot escape their location in a normative universe, nor can prescription, even when embodied in a legal text, escape its origin and its end in experience, in the narratives that are the trajectories plotted upon material reality by our imaginations. (Cover 1983, 95-96)

Cover suggests that legal and policy prescription – of the type we find in MacKay's report – cannot escape "its origin and its end" in narratives – in the story that gives it meaning and purpose and ongoing resonance. What this means is that for a law to make sense and resonate in private and public life, it must emerge from society's understanding of itself – woven into a story of its past, present, and future hopes and promises. Which is why law and policy are ever changing, ever resisted, and ever called upon to be transformed. Our understandings of ourselves shift, the contradictions between values and new realities demand action, and we begin to re-write the scripts we've grown used to living by.

But if legal and policy prescription – of the sort the MacKay Report lays out – requires a narrative to sustain its implementation, what is the story that will ground the vast array of the prescriptions MacKay makes? Is it already written? Is there a story, a social narrative, shared widely enough to get us over the rough spots in implementing such substantial legal and policy change? And how can this story be written and told in a way that gathers together the multitude of stories of exclusion and inclusion; of students who want a chance; of parents who know,

and sometimes they are the only ones, of the potential and possibility of their sons and daughters; of teachers struggling and burning out in the process of trying to make it happen; of health and social support professionals stretched to the limit in trying to respond to demand for school-based supports; of teaching assistants and resource teachers up against limited resources and huge challenges from students, parents, and teachers; of administrators and policy makers trying to put together the pieces of a puzzle that keep shape-shifting and falling off the table? Do we have a story that plots what we imagine is possible upon actual policy; upon the day-to-day practice or non-practice of inter-departmental coordination; upon district management, community-school relationships, school leadership, pedagogy, teacher training and competencies, classroom culture and practice, and the material reality of students lives?

These two insights – 1) that a movement of social solidarity provides a foundation for new rights and relationships to take hold (as it was in Poland and in so many other examples of profound social and legal transformation), and 2) that the foundations of law are narrative in nature – together provide an understanding for how the social change that the MacKay report imagines might actually happen. And that understanding, I think, is that solidarity is born in the sharing of individual stories and the making of a collective story that brings genesis to imagined legal and policy change, and sustains the efforts for its implementation.

In other words, we need a broad-based social movement, with a story about the past and the future, or in the terms of moral philosophy a ‘narrative identity,’ in which the tabling of the MacKay report serves as a central moment in its plot, and its content provides the narrative drive of the story for some time into the future. In short, we have a policy prescription in the MacKay report, in search of a story, and in search of a protagonist that can sustain its vision through time and through the cut and thrust of politics, and through the institutional inertia that so easily threatens as policy agendas become crowded. While I have great faith in the new government in New Brunswick, and am encouraged by the commitments the now governing party made to implementing MacKay when it was in opposition, I also know from experience that the expectations upon them will be enormous. They will have their own balancing act to manage.

So what does it take to write a narrative that can ground a social movement and sustain the implementation of legal and policy prescriptions through time? Teachers of literature in the room could do this more eloquently than I I’m sure, but let me in my own untutored way play with some elements of narrative that I think we need to keep in mind as we explore the writing of a social movement and its plotlines.

Paul Ricoeur was a 20th century French philosopher of law, literature and narrative. Like Cover and others he argued that we experience our lives, we experience time, we develop a sense of what is worth pursuing, always in the context of narratives – individual narratives by which we tell our history, present,

and imagine our future, and collective narratives that do the same for social movements. He points to some key elements of narrative that help us to understand I think what it takes to put together a coherent story, one that a social movement for inclusive education in this province might weave.

### ***A protagonist in the making...***

First, narratives require a subject, a protagonist with an intention, a subject that leans into the future, wants to make something happen. So let me ask you this, and I hope it is not too presumptuous a question. Is the protagonist in this room? Is the subject of this 'story to be' here? Is there a social movement among you, that binds you together with all the other actors, that can write and sustain a story over time in which MacKay's legal and policy prescriptions will find themselves a plotline? Is the protagonist the Minister and Department of Education? Is it NBTA? CUPE? NBACL? Canadian Parents for French New Brunswick? Principals and administrators? New Brunswick Association of Psychologists and Psychometrists in the Schools? New Brunswick First Nations Education Committee? School Districts? Are you identified with only one of those actors? Or are you that and also part of something bigger? Are you, could you be, a solidarity movement in the making?

This is a question about the identity of the social actor who will drive this forward. The provincial government can't do it on its own; NBTA can't do it on its own, NBACL can't do it on its own, or the Autism Society, or the Learning Disabilities Association, or any of the other associations. Each has an identity and a story to tell. How do you weave together a collective identity and social solidarity and tell a shared story that gives birth to a social actor that can remain true to the promise of the MacKay report, and project it into the future? Do we wait for government to be the subject of this story, the lead actor? MacKay's report makes clear this would not work. There are many more actors that need to take leadership, need to put commitment and resources on the line.

In reading MacKay's findings from the consultation with various groups in the province, one of the most striking to me was the following, and I quote:

There are two overarching, universal themes and points of consensus that have emerged [from the focus groups and briefs]. First, the appreciation people felt at having been genuinely consulted and actively listened to. Second, the appreciation people felt for the opportunity to dialogue with others about these difficult issues. Comments about these two themes were frequent. The nature and the approach of this consultation process were welcome and refreshing for many people. Many people claimed to have never been consulted or to have had an opportunity such as this before. This claim came from people both inside and outside the educational system.

MacKay found various areas of disagreement and contention between the actors in New Brunswick, but it was on these two points that all agree – people want to

be engaged in this process of dialogue and consultation, and they want to dialogue with one another. And there is a recognition that this hasn't happened before to the extent it did in the consultation process for this review. MacKay found the lack of "meaningful communication" among all the players in the education system was an issue that "resonated in all of the groups" party to the consultation process.

This is a critically important recognition. It is about how solidarity is born – as Selya Benhabib, a feminist philosopher of cultural identity, dialogue and social change points out. People change their understandings of themselves and others in open, honest dialogue, where different perspectives get a chance to be heard. And it is only on this basis that new cultural formations of solidarity are made possible, formations that embrace differences, and don't disappear them. This point is not lost on MacKay and in his recommendations to make, in his words, "Actions Speak Louder than Words." Recommendation 91, which I think is one of the most important recommendations in the entire set, and is titled "On- Going Consultation and Dialogue." It reads:

The Minister of Education, the District Education Councils and other relevant officials should ensure that the response to these recommendations and the development of policies and strategies for implementation proceed in a broad and open process of consultation and dialogue. In this regard they can build on the positive consultations pursuant to this Review.

Now this recommendation may be stated rather dryly. It is not a rousing call to build a solidarity movement to transform education in New Brunswick, but I think that is what is at the root of this recommendation, what it implies.

So challenge #1 in creating social solidarity and a narrative that can ground the change that people imagine and MacKay details is establishing a social subject for this story – one that intends to see the happen, that can survive the travails and plot twists, the moments when hope is dashed, conflict breaks out and regrouping is essential. What is that space in which this subject might find a voice. Ultimately, for solidarity to grow, there will need to be some declaration of that subject that speaks in the possessive voice – "We" commit to this happening... a 'we' that embraces all the other 'we's' that have so far spoken in the consultation process and all the steps leading up to it.

### ***Finding the character...***

Another key element of narrative, is that of character. Subjects have characters – they have identifications and habits that distinguish them as the same character through time and twists of plotlines – and I expect there will be many twists in the years ahead. A movement for change needs character. It needs the social capital that comes with shared values and trust between the actors that make it up. There is already a lot going for the character of the movement that might come into being more fully around the dramatic event that MacKay's report marks. The

identifications are clear – the vast majority of people across profession, geographic location, civil society, and government are wholeheartedly committed to inclusion as an over-riding principle, as a value that guides them. There is, of course, doubt and question in some quarters about how fully it is or might be implemented, where the balancing act will ultimately place its fulcrum. But nowhere else in the country is there such a unanimity of purpose, such a profoundly shared collective belief in the value of a fully inclusive education system, that accounts for different needs and possibilities. There is in this sense already in New Brunswick the character of a social movement for quality, inclusive public education.

Characters in a narrative also have habits that mark their identity over time. Maybe it still needs to be developed in this case. As MacKay notes, shared dialogue, listening to one another in the non-aligned public space the consultations created, is a new experience. The habits of this nascent protagonist for change are still in formation. How might a movement, if it is to become that, develop new experiences into longstanding practices and habits? Thinking about the task ahead in this way, in the narrative terms of character development, takes us beyond the usual calls for partnerships and partnership tables and partnership agreements, though all of those might be steps along the way, or parts of the infrastructure for education system transformation in this province worth building. But our imaginations should not stop us there. There is something deeper that needs to be built, and the positive experiences of dialogue recounted by participants in the MacKay consultation suggest people are thirsty for more.

### ***Emplot Time...***

Another feature of narrative, essential in building a social movement – is that of emplotting time. An academic term I suppose, but all it means is that in writing the stories of our individual lives, or the collective stories of the social movements we are a part of, we bend time to our intention and will. As we tell the stories of our own lives, of events that mattered, of events we plan, we shape time to craft an identity. Narrative refuses a linear, objective time line given by others. It is why in our community living movement we so resist the institutional enforcement of a normalized developmental time as a standard to judge and ‘place’ people, because it so masks and devalues the unique life paths of people with disabilities and the stories they and their families want to live by.

“Remember when...” we tell our friends or spouses or children or grandchildren, or from our elders we might hear “you weren’t around when such and such happened but it is part of what made you who you are today.” Just like every person needs a narrative – a history and a future to live a good life, every movement needs a history and a future. It writes this history from a vantage point in the present, and bends it a future it aspires to. And as it matures, the horizon of both its history and its future expand.

The MacKay report provides an expansive horizon for a movement for quality education in this province. But to reach this horizon you will need a solid and mature movement, a protagonist for change. There are the values, there is a vision. There is a plan for the future in the form of the MacKay report, a plan being another essential element of a narrative identity. There is a character in formation, and possibly an emerging subject to take the action needed.

To take the next steps in forming a social movement for change it is essential I believe for you to emplot time to craft a history and a future in which this movement for change can be born. And in this province, with what you have already accomplished that cannot be too difficult to do. Emplotting time involves gathering together events that matter and weaving them into a history that allows you to project yourself into the future. Remembering and recounting those events is critical in creating a movement and its narrative. You know them better than I do, for the most part I think. Certainly 1986 and the adoption of the new Education Act was a singular event, and between then and now, the tabling of the MacKay report, many events have happened which you could weave into the narrative of your movement. There are struggles to be recounted about attempts to make more inclusive the few remaining segregated settings; there is the Scraba report; there are many other events that each of you narrate in your own ways. The challenge is to come up with a shared story that can ground a sustained movement for change.

Let me suggest one more event for the history, present, and future of a social movement for public education in this province, another one you might write your story with. In a couple of weeks time the General Assembly of the United Nations will convene to adopt the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, that has been worked on for the past 4 years by an Ad Hoc Committee of countries across the globe, and by civil society organizations. CACL and Inclusion International, our international federation have been actively involved in the negotiations, and in the International Disability Caucus that crafted, and struggled over, civil society positions to advance in the negotiations.

Article 24 of the Convention reads, in part:

1. States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to education. With a view to realizing this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, States Parties shall ensure an inclusive, education system at all levels, and life-long learning, directed to:

- . (a) The full development of the 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 fullest potential;

. (c) Enabling persons with disabilities to participate effectively in a free society.

2. In realizing this right, States Parties shall ensure:

. (a) That persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability, and that children with disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary and secondary education on the basis of disability;

. (b) That persons with disabilities can access an inclusive, quality, free primary and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live...

In two weeks time, a right to inclusive education will become international law. This was one of the hardest won articles in the Convention. The concept of inclusive education had its birth in New Brunswick. I want to acknowledge, in particular, Dr. Gordon Porter who did so much to craft an understanding of inclusive education, who has written, spoke about, and providing training in inclusive education across the world. But it also took many others, teachers in this room, a provincial legislature to make what we imagined possible a mere twenty years ago, something real, something we could point to as a real possibility to States Parties across the globe. The opportunity to get inclusive education embedded in the Convention was one of the main reasons why CACL invested so much in the negotiations for the UN Convention. We knew that only CACL and Inclusion International were in the position, had the knowledge base, and could draw on the experience in New Brunswick to make the case for inclusive education to be embedded in international law. In twenty short years, the movement in this province, and the links we created together, will realize this outstanding success. I want to take this moment to acknowledge you, to thank you, to ask you to join me in giving all of you, the people who came before you, and those who will struggle for inclusion after you, a huge round of applause.

In closing, I will just re-iterate that the MacKay report leaves us with an ambitious and daunting set of recommendations. If implemented, they would make a huge difference in advancing inclusion. But to make its vision become real, we need to hear and understand the stories and experiences of each other, to remember our history, and anticipate a future. From this I hope you can fashion a 'we' capable of writing a plot that would make the life of every child in this province a personal narrative of inclusion. That could build on an already incredible legacy. The rest of us across the country hope you don't rest too long on your laurels. There's work still to be done. Thank you again for the opportunity to be with you at this gathering. Good luck in the steps ahead.