

Inclusion, from the heart

Thank you for the privilege of speaking to you today. Throughout my 35 years as an educator, I have learned a lot and I feel honored to share some of it with you.

I will start with a quick overview of my career with the learning pieces that shaped what I know of inclusive education.

First, I am not an academic or a researcher. What I share comes from my personal experiences as a practitioner. Because this issue is so close to my heart, I ask that you please listen to me with not just your ears, but with your hearts as well, because successful inclusion needs to have the heart and head come together.

I started off as a “closed” class special education high school teacher. **That** is where I learned that there had to be a better way to educate children (young adults) with learning challenges.

I resigned from that position after 4 years when I became a mother and stayed at home to care for my children. However I taught adult education for 12 years to keep a foot in the teaching door and – to be honest – to keep my sanity.

While teaching adult education I learned to manage diversity. Diversity of ability, motivation, and background. I learned to individualize and differentiate because that is what adults who are learning need and indeed expect. I didn’t understand what I was doing in quite the way I do now, but the experience clearly had an effect on me. Some I taught were drop outs but many of them were also very able. They just needed a chance to learn in a supportive environment.

When my youngest child was in grade 2, the principal of my children’s school offered me the opportunity to teach a grade 1 class. By the way he was a McAdam, New Brunswick native and an educator “extra ordinaire”. I guess he saw potential in me even if I had never taught elementary students before. I had become quite involved in the school as a volunteer mom and Clayton knew I had teacher training. I accepted the position but with a good deal of hesitancy.

In September, I met my 29 grade 1 immersion students. Among the 29 there was Michael. He was knee high to a grass hopper, tube fed with the feeding tube taped to his cheek, had a mild intellectual handicap. He had spent 4 of his 6 years in the hospital. Michael’s first language was Arabic which he spoke

with his parents; he spoke English with his siblings; and of course he was now in my French Immersion class. His social skills were lacking as he had had to face many medical challenges and had not had much opportunity to develop social skills with peers.

On the first morning of school Michael roamed the class, pulled books and puzzles off the shelves and wrote on the board. You get the picture. He was a real challenge and I had no idea what to do about it. At recess time I walked down to principal's office and asked what I thought was a simple question.

"Why is Michael in my class?", I asked.

Mr. Storr looked up from his desk and said: "Because he is 6 and lives around the corner!" He returned to his writing.

I said: "Excuse me for asking, but, what am I supposed to teach him?"

He put down his pen, looked at me and said: "Alice, teach him what he needs to learn".

I was really not happy with the answer. But, I knew the question had been answered and that I had been dismissed.

As I left the office I walked towards the school yard. I saw that Michael had gotten into the school. He was hanging by his arm from a drinking fountain. I went to get him, took him by the hand and walked back with him to the school yard. I am not sure his feet touched the ground!

When we got out the bell had just rung. I took him to where my class was lining up and said: "This is your line up and if you don't learn anything else this year you'll learn to line up!"

Later that day he sat at a table and I realized that his feet did not reach the floor. I thought I'll need to speak with the janitor. He needs a small foot stool to rest his feet on.

That was the first day and I had already learned a lesson. I learned many more lessons that year. But the most important lesson had been taught that first day by Clayton Storr, the principal at St. Lawrence School in Brossard. He taught me that you teach kids what they need to learn. It's that simple. **NOT easy, Simple.** That turned out to be a wonderful – if challenging - year for me and I had Michael and Mr. Storr to thank for a lot of what I learned.

A few years down the road I was asked to go into administration. My second

school (Margaret Pendlebury) in St. Lambert, which by the way, was the birthplace of French Immersion, was a regular elementary school that housed special education classes for half of my school district. I arrived in December.

As I observed things in the school, I realized that the “special ed” children arrived on a “special ed” bus or one of several taxis. They arrived 30 minutes after regular students were at school. They ate lunch first, and left the cafeteria when the other students ate. They finished classes 15 minutes early. They had little or no contact with their non-disabled peers. The feeling seemed to be that they caused too much commotion and disruption to be with typical children.

Some of the special needs children came from away and spent 1½ hrs on that special education bus. They rode with 24 other special education children. It wasn't rocket science for me to figure out why they were rowdy when they got off that bus.

Within the first few weeks I became determined to close those classes. The classes were a mixture of students with behavior problems, learning difficulties, intellectual handicaps and physical handicaps. The classes seemed to me like a dumping ground for any child who was a challenge to teach.

As fate would have it, in February of that year, a young family made an appointment to register their son in our kindergarten program. When they arrived, Trish, our secretary, ushered them into my office. As I looked up I saw that Adam was a child with Down's syndrome. I felt a sense of panic!

Do I tell them I know almost nothing about Down's Syndrome, or do I pretend??

As they sat down in front of my desk, I welcomed them to Margaret Pendlebury School. They wanted their child registered in a regular class. I told them I would respect their wishes but was unsure at the time of how to proceed with his registration. I also told them that they had 5 years of experience with Adam and his needs and that I would need their help.

The mother was very involved with the Canadian Down Syndrome Association and with the people of the McGill summer institute, where Dr. Gordon Porter, from New Brunswick was teaching at the time. She provided me with a wealth of information and resources. She was one of those parents who made it her business to learn what she needed to so she could properly advocate for her son. With her encouragement and assistance, I was on my way.

My first task was to change the mandate of the school. It had been designated as a receiving school for children with special needs to be taught in what we called “closed classes”. I persuaded Adam's parents to be part of a parents' committee

to help me convince others that inclusion was the way to go and to change the mandate.

Over a 3 year period we achieved our goal. We managed to include all the children and closed the special classes. I must confess that I made many mistakes along the way. I didn't have all the answers. There were many things I would do differently, were I to do this again now. Despite these shortcomings we were successful and the children and their families seemed happy with the change. Some of the teachers were skeptical but I had become a believer in inclusive education.

During the 3rd year of implementation of our plan I was seconded to the Quebec Ministry of Education to prepare and support staff in English and Immersion Schools in Quebec who wanted to proceed with inclusion. I initially agreed to do that for two years, but it ended up that my mandate was extended to 6 years. And what a six years it was!

During those six (6) years I worked with teachers in over 300 of Quebec's 450 English and Immersion schools. I worked with 1000's of teachers and saw their progress toward including 1000's of children in their classrooms. It was a truly great privilege to play a role in supporting the effort of these teachers. Their efforts transformed practices in the Quebec schools where they worked. Together we made a difference in the lives of the children and their families. I am proud of what we were able to do.

Mon exemple le plus remarquable est l'histoire de Johnny. Un enfant vivant avec une trisomie 21. Presque non verbal, je l'ai suivi de sa 4^{ième} année à sa 10^{ième}.

Lorsqu'il était en 6^{ième} année, son enseignante était très inquiète de l'avoir dans sa classe, moi pas du tout. Elle était une excellente enseignante avec une gestion de classe participative, une pédagogie centrée sur les besoins des enfants.

Avant le début de l'année, on a travaillé ensemble le plan d'intervention c'est-à-dire : l'enseignante de 5^{ième} année, la mère, l'aide enseignante, la direction, Anne-Marie et moi. Et l'année est bien partie! En novembre, je suis allée faire un suivi. Les élèves étaient au labo d'ordinateurs. Ils étaient tous assis sur le plancher devant l'enseignante face au tableau blanc.

Elle leur disait qu'ils devaient écrire une histoire située dans une époque qu'ils avaient étudiée en sciences humaines.

Elle leur demande : « Avez-vous des suggestions ? » Les mains des élèves se sont levées !

Un élève suggère :
« On pourrait choisir Jacques Cartier ».

Anne-Marie imprime **Jacques Cartier** au tableau en feutre bleu.

« De quoi faut-il se souvenir si l'histoire se passe au temps de Jacques Cartier? Il n'y a pas d'électricité de dire un. »

Anne-Marie écrit en rouge :

1. PAS D'ÉLECTRICITÉ - fait une pause encercle le . . . **J** . . . (le plan d'intervention de Johnny contient l'apprentissage des lettres de son nom.) et demande :

« C'est quelle lettre? ... Johnny ? »

Il répond « . . . J ... »

Elle continue : « de quoi d'autre faut-il se souvenir ? »

2. « PAS DE ROUTE » - suggère un élève.

3. « PAS D'AUTO. » - de dire un autre

Elle change la couleur du marqueur à chaque réponse.

« C'est quelle couleur?... Johnny? » « Vert »

Le **remue méninges** a continué pendant encore quelques minutes. Les enfants maintenant étaient prêts à commencer la rédaction. Chacun s'en est allé à son ordinateur.

Johnny avait son ordinateur.

Anne-Marie lui avait installé un programme de reconnaissance de lettre minuscule / majuscule.

En février, Anne-Marie m'a invité à la foire des sciences. Au laboratoire, tour à tour les élèves présentaient leur expérience scientifique.

Johnny, Anne-Marie et Julie, l'aide à l'enseignante, avaient décidé que Johnny allait démontrer une tornade.

Il avait collé avec un ruban gommé, 2 bouteilles de 2 litres. À l'intérieur d'une, il y avait de l'eau. Il a inversé les bouteilles et de la main a montré la tornade.

Anne Marie s'est levée pour le remercier et il lui a fait signe d'arrêter.

- Il se penche vers la classe et dit "ANY KESCHTON?"

Anne-Marie, me dit : « Qu'est- ce qu'on fait ? » Avant qu'on ait eu le temps d'y penser, les élèves se mettent à lever la main.

Emmanuelle : « Combien de bouteilles as-tu eues besoin pour cette expérience ? »

« Deux. »

Greg : « Quelle couleur de colorant as-tu mis dans l'eau ? »

« Bleu. »

De Johnny et l'équipe de l'école Holland à Québec, j'ai appris 2 choses importantes :

1) Que si on veut garder l'attention de tous les enfants, il faut questionner **tous** les enfants.

- Johnny était attentif parce qu'il savait qu'Anne-Marie allait l'interroger. Il savait aussi que toutes les règles de la classe s'appliquaient à lui.

2) La deuxième leçon pour moi, était que les enfants modèlent ce que les adultes font. Les élèves traitent les autres tout comme le font les enseignants.

Pause

Après 6 ans au M E Q, mon directeur général m'a rappelé à ma Commission Scolaire comme directrice d'une grosse école d'immersion. J'ai pu mettre en pratique, au sein de mon équipe école, les meilleures pratiques pédagogiques de l'inclusion.

Ma vision était claire – pas complètement acceptée, mais claire et j'étais en charge!

Le cheminement que nous avons à faire a été planifié avec le conseil des

professeurs et à mon heureuse surprise, nous pouvions, en grande partie, faire notre développement professionnel avec les ressources que nous avons. Là, j'ai appris l'importance du développement professionnel.

Après 3 ans, on m'a demandé de travailler à la Commission Scolaire comme coordinatrice des services éducatifs, responsable d'évaluation des élèves et du développement professionnel.

En 2003, on a appris que ma mère n'avait que quelques mois à vivre, donc, j'ai pris une retraite anticipée, pour l'amener mourir chez nous.

C'était le dernier cadeau qu'elle m'a fait

Une retraite anticipée dont je jouis pleinement.

Ce que j'ai appris là, je le savais déjà. C'est l'importance du soutien de la famille.

Allow me here to make a personal note – I learned from what I saw in the classroom, but I have also had personal experience. Both of my parents were handicapped:

My father suffered from hemi paresis¹, that caused him difficulty walking. My mother lost her eyesight to macular atrophy when I was 4 years old. As a consequence I've had a lot of years to practice making adaptations, without formal training. I have to admit that it was only when I started working with inclusion that I realized that both my parents were handicapped. It happened while I sat in a McGill course listening to definitions of handicaps and disability. Until then, they'd simply been my parents.

So, I was quite young when I had the privilege of understanding that differences were normal. What is more important, over the years I made the link with other families and realized that no one chooses to have a disability, a handicap, or a problem. My mother often said she only really started "seeing people" when she became blind. Her awareness

and sensitivities were remarkable. However, I can assure you that my mother did not choose to raise her family without seeing us. She did not choose to live her life without being able to see her grandchildren or her great-grandchildren. I tried to help by telling her not to worry, since we are all beautiful and handsome.

I knew from my personal experience and came to recognize from my work with many families of children with special needs that:

- 1) No one chooses to have a child with problems;
- 2) No one that I know was prepared to have a handicapped child.

Numerous times parents expressed fear. They were afraid:

- Of not knowing what to do.
- Of not knowing what to expect:
 - When will he walk?
 - When will he talk?
 - Will he write?
 - Will he work?
- Who could help them?

I am saying this because we know that we have these same questions in our role as a teacher. We also have these same feelings or uncertainty and fear of the unknown. When

¹ ... hemi paresis (paralysis of voluntary muscles on either the left or the right side of the body) affecting about 75% of stroke victims. Impaired walking function.

we are told that a child with “**Tourette’s Syndrome**” or “**Angelman Syndrome**” or “**Williams Syndrome**” will be our class, our first questions are:

- “What is that?”
- “What do I do?”
- “What can I expect?”
- “Who is going to help me?”

There are hundreds of handicaps, syndromes, learning disabilities and developmental disorders. No one can expect to know them all, and we don’t expect teachers to know them all. We need time to learn about what the unique needs are of a student who is actually in our class. We need to familiarize ourselves with their differences and to have our questions answered. We also need time to make a plan.

We are pedagogues, we are educational specialists. Our professional training has prepared us to guide development and learning in children. We are not trained to “cure” them, nor to be their therapists. They come to school to learn. They aren’t “sick”, (and if they were, they wouldn’t be coming to school to get better), they aren’t “broken” – they are different. Our challenge is to teach them differently. Perhaps to look for the pair of glasses that will help them see. Do you realize how many of us would be handicapped if no one had invented glasses.

However, you **must** understand that a handicap or disability is not an excuse for bad behavior. A common error that I have seen over and over is to excuse unacceptable behavior because of a handicap or a problem at home (“leave him be, it isn’t his fault”.) Everybody needs to make the effort to follow essential rules. What I want to stress, is that no child should prevent a teacher from teaching, or to prevent another child from learning. Teachers and students need help and support to see that that does not happen.

All children come to school for three things.

- 1) Socialization
- 2) Instruction and
- 3) Qualification (Prepare for work).

For children who have disabilities, the disability must not prevent them from attending school, within a regular program. However it well may be that the socialization dimension leading to appropriate behavior, may be for them the most important aspect.

Many employers will gladly train an individual who is well-mannered, punctual and polite.

All of us need to learn much more in school than just the academic curriculum. Do not get me wrong. Academics are important. However, while some will excel, not everyone will achieve at a high level in academic areas. The value of learning together in inclusive classrooms is that we have the opportunity to teach more than academics. We can teach caring, respect and compassion. These are important qualities our future citizens and leaders need to possess.

Remember the Concentrations Camps in Europe. They were designed and built by highly educated engineers and doctors, the high achievers of their society, who totally lacked caring, respect and compassion. High marks in academic work is not all that is important.

Puisqu'en grande majorité vous êtes enseignants, tournons nous maintenant vers votre classe. C'est louable de penser que vous allez amener tous les élèves à un même niveau avant la fin de l'année. Louable, mais peu réaliste. Vous avez tous des enfants avec des difficultés. Vous avez tous des enfants doués.

Disons que vous enseignez la 5^{ième}. Certains enfants lisent au niveau de 2^{ième}. Pensez-y, ils ont mis 6 ans à lire un niveau de 2^{ième}. On ne s'attend pas à ce que vous les rendiez à niveau. Et les doués, qui lisent au niveau de 7^{ième} ils attendront 2-3 ans avant d'apprendre du nouveau. Bien sur que non. Chacun travaille selon sa capacité.

Ce que je vous conseille, c'est d'apprendre à connaître les enfants personnellement. Prenez le temps d'apprivoiser la difficulté ou le handicap, la douance. Je ne connais pas de syndrome, de condition qui n'a pas une organisation de soutien, l'accès est facile surtout avec l'Internet. Plusieurs de ces organisations ont même des spécialistes en éducation.

Ce qui est aussi important c'est d'apprendre à connaître les stratégies qui fonctionnent avec l'enfant. Les experts sont tout autour de vous : l'enseignante de l'année dernière, l'enseignante ressource, les assistants, la direction de l'école , les spécialistes du district et les parents. C'est souvent révélateur d'écouter la réponse à :

« Comment vous faites quand il / elle fait telle ou telle chose à la maison? »

Utilisez ces informations mais aussi servez vous de vos instincts. Je vous suggère de suivre vos instincts, parce qu'au fil des années, je me suis rendue compte que les enseignants ont d'excellents instincts. Apprenez à vous fier à ceux-ci.

En tant que directrice quand un enseignant venait me dire :

« Il se passe quelque chose avec Suzanne. »

Je m'empressais d'agir, je n'attendais pas. L'évaluation suivra, la confirmation viendra éventuellement

Tel que prédit par l'enseignant.

Depuis la venue de l'adaptation scolaire, (qui en passant, au Québec, n'a rien d'adapté) ce qui nous a causé et continue de nous causer beaucoup de difficultés, c'est la croyance que l'éducation spécialisée pourrait « guérir » ou réparer l'enfant en difficulté. On pensait honnêtement que l'on pouvait sortir les enfants de la classe régulière, travailler intensément avec eux, les réparer et que l'on pourrait les retourner en classe et qu'ils suivraient le droit chemin. L'enseignant régulier n'avait rien à changer, c'était la faute de l'enfant ou des parents.

Les recherches plus récentes nous démontrent que les enfants apprennent différemment. Il est donc important d'enseigner différemment. La théorie des intelligences multiples, l'enseignement coopératif, la pédagogie par projets, la métacognition, la différenciation « Voilà nos défis, s'approprier de ces approches, aucune ne fonctionne pour **tous** les enfants, il faut donc se les approprier et diversifier si l'on veut rejoindre tous nos élèves. »

Donc, suivez vos instincts, participez activement aux activités du développement professionnel, partagez vos bonnes pratiques, travaillez en étroite collaboration avec vos « ressources internes », vos « experts à vous ».

À plusieurs reprises dans des endroits très isolés où l'accès aux ressources de l'extérieur était presque nul, j'ai été témoin de travail d'équipe où chacun apportait son expérience pour essayer de résoudre un problème.

Par exemple, si nous additionnions nos années d'expérience dans cette salle ou dans votre école, je peux vous garantir qu'il n'y aurait pas beaucoup de difficultés pour lesquelles nous n'aurions pas de solution ou tout au moins de pistes à suivre. En éducation la collaboration professionnelle est essentielle.

Plusieurs d'entre vous avez l'aide d'un assistant, mais, vous êtes la pédagogue. Vous avez la responsabilité de l'éducation de tous les enfants dans votre classe. Les enfants viennent à l'école pour apprendre et vous êtes les professionnels de l'apprentissage. L'assistant est là pour vous à cause des enfants qui ont des difficultés, ils ne sont pas les assistants des élèves. Assurez-vous que le service soutienne ce que vous faites, que ce n'est pas un service en parallèle. Réfléchissez aux besoins que vous avez.

Chacun de nous a des forces différentes, donc des besoins différents. Si l'aide que vous avez ne vous suffit pas, soyez spécifique. Quand j'étais directrice il m'était difficile de refuser une enseignante qui me demandait quelqu'un 3 fois semaine, 30 minutes pour faire de la lecture avec un élève. C'était plus facile de dire « je n'ai pas d'autres ressources » à quelqu'un qui me disait « Paul me rend folle, j'ai besoin d'une assistante ».

Mais si vous pensez que vous pouvez travailler avec un peu moins d'aide dites le à qui de droit. Dites : ça va bien avec Marc, pour 30 minutes après dîner l'aide pourrait être passée à quelqu'un d'autre.

We know that all children come to school to learn, but all children do not learn the same things, at the same time, in the same way. We have identified the students who have difficulties, the children who, for whatever reason, cannot follow the program, or can only follow the program if it is adapted. So, for them and for us, we must have a plan.

For the majority of your students you have the plan, and that is your official program of study. For some of the children the program needs to be modified and adapted. They may need:

- More time to do the work;
- Extra support – for example they may need to use a calculator;
- Support for a behavior challenge – (for example you need to work on developing behavior conducive to learning.)

Sometimes, an IEP (Individualized Education Plan) explains what the child's needs are and how you need to meet them. You may well need to cover only part of the regular curriculum or have some of the program adapted.

For other students, the IEP is the program. They may not be able to meet “end of cycle”, “end of term” or “end of year” requirements. However they can develop knowledge and skill according to their own abilities within the regular class.

A word of caution about IEPs: I have often seen IEPs looking like wonderful wish lists. IEPs need to be real. Make sure the plan is realistic and reasonable. Remember success breeds success! The IEP must be a living document. It is a reflection of needs, both short-term and long-term, taking into account the reality of what we can offer.

Encourage parents to have a part in the development of the IEP. However, I believe we cannot have the success of a school plan depend on what the parents do. We must commit ourselves to action in our work in the school and classroom. We have no control over what happens at home.

Other thoughts:

- Choose to work on only a few objectives at a time.
- Choose objectives that are reasonable, measurable and do-able.
- Remember: **Our goal is to ensure Success For All!**

In closing let me summarize what I think is essential to successful inclusion.

Drawing from my own experience, **Inclusion will succeed if :**

- 1) The teacher knows the child and has clear expectation for what the child is to learn.
- 2) The teacher has the knowledge of how the learning will take place, for example specific instructional strategies, and through use of adapted curriculum.
- 3) The teacher has knowledge of how the assessment of learning is to be recorded and reported and makes provision for multiple approaches based on student needs.
- 4) The teacher utilizes cooperative learning and maintains clarity between individual and shared responsibilities.
- 5) The teacher applies the same ground rules concerning behavior and social interaction for both handicapped and non-handicapped students – BUT provides extra support and initiatives where needed.
- 6) The teacher challenges all students whatever their academic or intellectual level.
- 7) The teacher organizes time, materials and human resources to benefit all.
- 8) The teacher takes ownership of **all** the students in his/her classroom.

So:

- Get to know the children and their needs;
- Get to know your strengths & resources;
- See the children with your eyes;
- **BUT also see them with your heart.**