

The Inclusive Education - "Poster Principal of the Month"

Name: Chris Treadwell -	For www.inclusiveeducation.ca
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Short Bio: Chris Treadwell has been a principal for 23 years of schools at all levels. He feels honoured to have had the opportunity to work with many outstanding educators who have shown the compassion, vision and skills to implement exemplary practices of inclusion. He also is thankful for the relationships he has had with children possessing exceptionalities. <i>- Chris Treadwell</i>	

The Questions for Chris Treadwell:

1. What do you mean when you say your school is "inclusive"?

I believe that a school is inclusive when everyone, despite their differences or challenges, is made to feel important. An inclusive school certainly needs to provide for those with obvious exceptionalities, but it should also differentiate to address the passions of all students.

2. What experience do you have with "inclusive education"?

For the past 21 years I have had many children with exceptionalities in my schools. These children have had physical, emotional, and behavioral challenges, some of them severe. I have worked with many outstanding classroom teachers and specialists from inside and outside of the school in a collaborative effort to assist these children.

3. Does inclusion make your work difficult?

The inclusion of some exceptional students in a school is one of the greatest challenges, but also one of the deepest satisfactions, that a principal will experience. However, with the cooperation of teachers, support staff, specialists, other students, parents and the whole school community, the work is shared and the difficulty significantly reduced.

4. Does being an "inclusive school" make your school a "better school?"

An inclusive school is definitely a “better school”. This is because the children and staff develop a sensitivity to the needs of all members of society which gives them insight that will make them better citizens.

5. Do you enroll students with special needs/disabilities in your French Immersion classes? How does it work? What do you do to make it successful?

Children with special needs are enrolled in French Immersion classes, and they should be. We provide French Immersion Methods and Resource assistance. To work most effectively, though, French Immersion teachers must also be given in-service to develop their own capacity to be able to educate children with special needs.

6. Is inclusion good for all your students?

Inclusion is a benefit to all students as they learn skills and attitudes necessary to co-habit in a society with citizens that have the right to be respected and included. As well, all students have the opportunity to develop positive relationships with students with challenges. I have seen many close friendships develop between students with challenges and their peers who do not.

7. Do you consider parents your partners in making inclusion a success?

Parents are critical partners in the inclusion process. They have much information to offer educators on how best to include their children in school. They are also essential advocates for resources to help the school provide the best environment for the child.

8. What is the toughest challenge for a principal to make inclusion work?

The toughest challenge concerning inclusion is to find the right way to help each child. All children are different and the differentiated and individualized approach that must be taken with a child having special needs, at times, demands that the school put much time and thought into preparing a plan that works.

9. How do you help teachers manage the challenges of inclusion?

Teachers need to be given skills to help include all children through effective in-service, access to advice from specialists and parents, and by encouragement and resource support from their principals.

10. Can you share an example of how inclusion was successful for a teacher and/or student in your school?

We have had success with many students with special needs. One child came to us in grade 4 who had severe attachment disorder issues, and therefore behavioral challenges, was a particular success. Through the close cooperation of the teacher, Methods and Resource specialists, home and librarian the child became a model student. She went from a child with angry outbursts and uncooperative behavior to a student who was a pleasure to have in the school. The librarian included her in the library club, but more importantly she became a Peer Helper. In this role she worked with younger students helping them get ready to go outside. She also developed a relationship with a severely physically impaired child in a wheel chair who she looked after with a teacher assistant at noon and recess. The change in this child was remarkable and we still talk about her with great fondness.

11. What advice would you give a principal just beginning to make his/her school inclusive?

I have several suggestions:

- *I would advise the principal to read the research on the best inclusionary practices and to share it with the staff.*
- *I would also suggest that parents with exceptional children be given the opportunity to work closely with the school.*
- *I would advise that successes be a focus of discussion as much as possible and that the child's strengths not be forgotten.*
- *As well, I would advise the principal to hire teachers who have the best attitude toward including children with exceptionalities.*

12. Do you have a final comment

Some of the best memories of my career so far, concern the success of including in my school, children who need great care and compassion. It has not always been easy to include them. Yet with help from other committed professionals, and parents, many children whose lives would not have been enriched by contact with their peers have had a wonderful school experience.

I have also developed many wonderful relationships with children, parents and professionals in the process. It has been a privilege to be in a position to support children who have so many struggles and to have played, at least a small part, in adding to the quality of their life.