Preface by Gordon L. Porter

Connecting Inclusive Schooling to Teacher Support

Andreas Köpfer has made the critical connection that is the key to inclusive schools – provide classroom teachers with the flexible supports they need. In schools that provide the supports, teachers can make inclusion a reality.

Inclusive education is a simple concept. In 2013 it should not be a serious challenge to a public education system based on sound principles and research-based practices. But it is, and we need to ask why.
The focus of my work for the last 30 years has been to examine this question. We need to sort out the multiple factors at issue, some of them simple and some of them complex. How can we explain that schools in some of the most wealthy and progressive countries in the world remain mired in an outmoded model that is based on segregated practices? Why have they failed to meet the expectations of the 21st Century? Why have they failed to become inclusive?

First, inclusive education is a matter of principle. The separate and not equal "special education systems" wealthy countries have developed may be well intentioned but they clearly assault the principles of democracy, equality and equity. Segregated education in publically funded schools is an affront to human rights and is not consistent with a progressive and positivist view of our future.
Inclusive education is primarily about accommodating students with diverse needs in our public schools. The diversity is cultural, racial, religious, socio-economic and it also includes students with disabilities and other special needs.
The vision of an inclusive school is a response to this diversity and the challenge of having a public education system that contributes to the democratic nations we are building for the 21st Century. The call for inclusive education is clearly cited as a priority in Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Secondly, inclusive education is about good pedagogical practice. We now have the knowledge to train our teachers to provide instruction that meets the requirement to be both effective and personalized. The concepts of "universal design for learning", "differentiated instruction", "multi-level instruction" and "multiple intelligences", to cite just a few of those currently popular, are well articulated, well researched and available to those who want to move forward with inclusion.
A colleague and I recently completed a report on inclusive education in New Brunswick, Canada. We titled it, "Strengthening Inclusion, Strengthening Schools" (Porter & AuCoin 2012). Our research and analysis led us to conclude that the strategies that build stronger school and classroom practices for inclusion also provide opportunities to enhance and boost the quality of instruction for students generally.

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Third, we have learned that supporting teachers is the most critical factor in making inclusion work in our schools. In circumstances where teachers know and use effective pedagogical practices, inclusion works. When they are assisted in identifying and resolving problems that inevitably arise, inclusion works. When school principals, expert teachers, school psychologists and others provide front-line teachers with the support they need in a timely and constructive way, inclusion works.

Finally, let us be very clear. Whether we have inclusive schools or not is a choice we make. The students and teachers in Canadian schools – and might I suggest, German schools – can make it work if we build the support systems for them that are needed. There are more than adequate examples of this right now in schools in many countries. The question we need to ask is whether we want to do it or not.

This study by Andreas Köpfer on "Inclusion in Canada" is of interest to us in Canada as we consider ways to strengthen our strategies and programs. I am confident it will be a real help to our colleagues in Germany who share our vision of the "inclusive school", and agree that it is a goal worth fighting for.

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Literature:

Porter, Gordon & AuCoin, Angela (2012): Strengthening Inclusion, Strengthening Schools. Report of the Review of Inclusive Education Programs and Practices in New Brunswick Schools. Online: http://www.gnb.ca/0000/publications/comm/Inclusion.pdf [10.05.2013]