

Freeze, R., Fuchs, D., Lutfiyya, Z. M., Trudel, L. E., Bartlett, N. A., Freeze, T. B., Stephenson, T., Matanga, Z., Taylor, A., Wells-Dyck, A., Reimer, K., Voutier, A. R., Desmarais, M-E., Kokorudz, S. & MacLoed, G. (2023). *Transformative Inclusive Education*. Canadian Scholars Press. 429 pages. ISBN: 9781773383620

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Transformative Inclusive Education is a book balanced by both authenticity and scholarship. This is a text focused on “a search for social justice along a road where all voices are valued and essential to finding the way” (Freeze et al., 2023, p. 2). The retinue of authors work together to bring a tangible definition of inclusive education to the fore and then take the reader through applications of inclusive educational work at macro and micro levels, from policy writing to classroom activities. Its thesis is that it is possible for all students to receive equitable access to an inclusive education, but for this to happen educational systems must confront “inequities and troubling traditional practices that perpetuate norms of exclusion” (p. 404).

Transformative Inclusive Education is divided into five sections:

- I. The Foundations of Inclusive Education,
- II. Recovering Lost Voices in Inclusive Education,
- III. Service Delivery for Inclusive Education,
- IV. Inclusive Teaching and Learning, and
- V. Building Inclusion for All

Part one scaffolds for the reader a context and vocabulary for disability and inclusion in Canadian education. This section presents the foundation of inclusive education as resting upon four cornerstones, which the authors described as “four big ideas that underpin the direction and shape of the transformational changes in education needed to achieve full inclusion for all” (Freeze et al., 2023, p. 1). First, they believe that inclusion is at a crossroads in education. As such, we must choose to move away from the path we have been on, what Rick Freeze calls the “naive understanding of inclusion,” to head down a new road to achieve “truly meaningful social and academic inclusion with equitable outcomes for all” (p. 1). Second, there must be a move away from what author Donald Fuchs calls a “medical model” of understanding students’ learning needs towards a social, strengths-based model that “predicts very different approaches to assessment, instruction, and service delivery in education” (p. 1). The third cornerstone is an enhanced understanding of the means of oppression related to race, colour, religion, gender, ethnicity, language, class, and other human differences. Zana Maria Lutfiyya writes that this understanding would enable educators to unpack how “historical biases are recapitulated in contemporary thinking about learning differences, learning materials, assessment practices and support services” (p. 2). Finally, the fourth cornerstone of section one is built upon the legal foundations for inclusion as explained with great clarity by author Lesley Eblie Trudel. She emphasizes the importance of litigation

in terms of inclusion advocacy in education, complicating the community-focused vision of the book as the challenges of conflicting definitions of inclusion hit home in court.

Starting the book in this way sets the reader on a solid foundation, laying out both the history and possible future of inclusive education in Canada. Section two offers a more intimate look at inclusion, presenting what it looks and feels like when disability is “othered” in educational contexts through stories shared by some of the lost voices in inclusive education. Bartlett and Freeze (2023) start this section off arguing that inclusion must be an expression of truth and reconciliation that transforms education for Indigenous Peoples. They dig into how the special education paradigm in Canada has done such damage to Indigenous communities with the “misreading of Indigenous students’ behaviours, the exclusionary placement of Indigenous students, and the social construction of disability in ways that are unfair and disadvantageous to them” (p. 75). They state that the way forward to ensure quality education for all students must include Indigenous students and Indigenous ways of knowing.

Chapter six of this section brings the voice of Tabitha Stephenson forward as she shares her lived experience of disability and marginalization in school. Writing with Trevi B. Freeze, Zana Marie Lutfiyya, and Rick Freeze, Stephenson documents her accomplishments as an artist, women’s rights advocate, and disability activist, pointing to the power of changing the lens through which she sees herself, replacing a disability lens with an equity lens. Chapter seven presents disability and education through another lens – that of the parent advocate. A key takeaway from author Zephania Matanga’s experience is that parents of children with disabilities need more information from schools to feel empowered, and they have to fight to gain access to it. He writes that their voices are missing in the conversations happening around inclusion in K-12 education; therefore, the current discourse is lacking their perspective. Section two closes with chapter eight’s highlighting of neuro-complexities as author Taylor (2023) writes of conquering internalised ableism via tools like art and the very real need for allies in the educational space. She calls her lessons learned in schools “ones of survival” (p. 124). Taylor’s art, which is interspersed throughout the chapter, acts as a visual reference point for the pain that this section of the book highlights. The very real human experiences of exclusion that too many students have faced at the hands of unfair educational systems shine through in her drawings. Importantly, so does a spirit of resilience and resistance.

Section three of *Transformative Inclusive Education* lays out service delivery models for inclusive education. For example, Rick Freeze’s multi-tiered support service model is presented as inherently tied to collaborative decision-making, while the Universal Design, as discussed by Ken Reimer, is connected to the First Peoples’ principles of learning. The connections these authors make are turns to the community that give this book its power. The pedagogical stance taken on by this diverse group of authors is united in its reliance on collaborative connections. To reconfigure an exclusionary paradigm so as to build something new – something truly inclusive – requires a team, a plan, and tools. Section three offers all of those with its inclusion of accessible resources that offer a way forward for educators, school boards, and policymakers. But those resources are offered with a word of caution, as Reimer (2023) writes:

None of these constructs should be blindly accepted as infallible...That is because *inclusive* and *universal* are not synonymous terms...An inclusive educator recognizes that universal practices are an essential ingredient of inclusive education and so are more specific practices like differentiated instruction, community-based planning, and – at times – individualized supports. (pp. 193-194)

In every chapter, there are sections included that direct the reader to “Recommended Readings,” extended activities to consolidate learning, and key takeaways or “Inclusive Thoughts.” Even with so many tangible resources shared in each of the 20 chapters, Reimer’s word of caution should act as a running header throughout the book. To truly individualize in the world of special educational needs, educators must be prepared to iterate again and again.

Section four of the book zeros in on the notion of teaching and learning in and beyond the classroom, taking a nuanced approach by framing the “learner” as both student, educator, and the community at large. Each one has room to learn and grow, and each one has something to teach the other. In this sec-

tion, topics like Universal Design were looked at more closely, circling back in more detail to what was brought up earlier in the text. A noteworthy chapter is author Alison Wells-Dyck's on Inclusive Technologies. It reads as timely in the midst of institutional fears around AI's impact on education running rampant in staffrooms everywhere. She provides a comprehensive history of assistive technologies (AT) in schools, shining a bright light on what resources are needed to support the use of AT for student success, such as time and training, as opposed to simply framing the AT as the tool unto itself. She problematizes the tendency in educational spaces to place hopes and dreams on the technology without the supports in place to ensure inclusion for the student and teacher using it.

Section five considers what it means to build inclusion for all. In chapter 19, authors Trevi B. Freeze, Ken Reimer, and Rick Freeze present an inclusive, proactive approach to successful behaviour plan implementation, and then in chapter 20, Bartlett (2023) suggests "compassionate and practical" ways forward in terms of adapting intensive interventions for the most vulnerable students (p. 323). She offers the reader a closing wisdom to sit with when she recalls the importance of "wraparound and community schools." Bartlett says that they provide a "structure to translate the philosophy of inclusion into practice" (p. 404). That translation is what this book manages to do. It provides a structure to hold within its philosophical and practice tools that, if adopted, "may ultimately support inclusion of all" (p. 404).

At more than 400 pages, the book's length could be off-putting for some readers who are looking for quick takeaways. And the significant number of perspectives presented in the text's five different sections risks a choppy reading experience, as it is difficult to present thematic clarity with such a variety of voices. And yet the authors succeed in many ways in doing exactly that. This book is about inclusion, that is itself a model of its own subject matter – a truly inclusive text. I see it to be an important and timely resource for pre-service teachers, educators in K-12 classrooms, and those working in the post-secondary environment. Beyond these more traditional educational roles, the knowledge shared by the authors of *Transformative Inclusive Education* has implications for paraeducators, resource teachers, librarians, and many other necessary partners, including policymakers, parents/guardians, and the broader community at large.

Author bio: Dr. Natalie Davey spent 20 years as a secondary school English teacher with the Toronto District School Board. Her transition to the world of higher education included years spent supporting student success and "Learning to 18" initiatives on college campuses. Her early research focused on educational place-making for youth in detention, as well as the gap in care for alternative educators. Her book *Finding Joy* (2023, Brill Press) focuses on critical pedagogies of care in education.

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