What led to your interest in studying inclusive education?

My interest is probably related to my curiosity as a young student, when I studied in different learning contexts, in different countries in both French and English. I soon understood that context had a big influence on my experience of learning and it became an area of great curiosity. Indeed, I went on to study inclusive education at graduate level. Educational psychology became my main focus of interest; namely, the theoretical understanding of the influence of one’s perceptions on students’ growth. Inclusive education has a lot to do with perception – embracing diversity, or acting on perception (or misconception), relates to the diverse characteristics of the learners.

Can you briefly explain what problems inclusive education seeks to redress?

To address the problem of school failure, different measures of structural differentiated instruction have emerged to meet the needs of students, for whom school is a challenge. We have witnessed the creation of specialised services, such as guidance counselling, psychology, remedial education, psycho-education and small classes, and are finally realising that these services rarely allow students with special needs to confront – or bypass – their problems and succeed in school. Consequently, many researchers suggest a rethinking of the organisation of educational services for these students. Indeed, after a literature review, it has been concluded that, given the diversity of school settings, building an inclusive school is important.

How do you ensure that your research is translated into practice?

Creating strong collaborative relationships with educators and associations is useful.
to translate research findings into practical implementations. I rely on two main strategies. First, I use the dynamic model to facilitate changes in school, and support changes in the workings of a specific school over the course of two or three years. Second, taking inspiration from the educators’ needs and challenges, I produce accessible materials for educators – ones that are always based on research results.

What would you say are the key inclusive education practices that teachers and schools should be implementing?

Cooperation, cooperation and cooperation! It is essential that all stakeholders work together to achieve the core principles within inclusive education. Schools, specialised professionals, researchers, parents and students themselves should all be given a voice. We need to ensure that everybody has their say to develop more inclusive practices and encourage schools to be open to different ways of working.

We are attempting to change a practice that has existed for a number of years; facilitating that change in an effective and encouraging way requires everybody to be involved.

Finally, how do you hope to improve the nation’s education practices within the next five to 10 years?

To facilitate the improvement of Canada’s education practices, I am currently putting together a Canadian network on school context that promotes student success and wellbeing. Importantly, this seven-year project will be dedicated to knowledge mobilisation in response to the needs of practitioners in education. I sincerely believe this project will contribute to inclusive education and the development of a sense of belonging for more Canadian children.

too. As such, she is engaged in knowledge transfer activities with parent associations and committees for parents of disabled children with learning difficulties. “It is essential that parents and children feel some kind of control over their situation,” explains Rousseau. “In order to feel empowered, awareness activities are of great value. Knowing is always a better strategy than ignorance.”

As well as informing parents and children about specific conditions such as dyslexia, Rousseau implements a strategy that explains the individualised education plans and roles that can be played in such processes. This can help alleviate stress and create a more positive atmosphere, one conducive to successful implementation of inclusive education practices.

ROUSSEAU’S FAR-REACHING RESEARCH

Rousseau’s work has had significant impact in schools across Canada, not least because of the long-term relationships she builds and maintains with them. “I have worked with a good number of Francophone schools over the years and in a number of provinces,” she says. “It is always enjoyable to talk to teachers and school principals that aim to be more inclusive and seek the help to do so.”

Rousseau’s work has been recognised with awards (both scientific and professional) and personal calls from parents and teachers alike, but she considers her work never complete, as is evidenced by her ongoing research and sharing of experiences across Canada. Ultimately, this research is contributing to making schools more inclusive and caring, as well as enabling the promotion of individual growth.