



# **Marsha Forest Centre**

***Inclusion • Family • Community***

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## **PRESENTATION TO THE NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS**

### **CIVIC G 8 FORUM - MOSCOW**

We gathered here are closely familiar with inequities and lack of concerted government action around educational needs of vulnerable groups in society. In Canada these groups include people with disabilities and our First Nation and Inuit aboriginal citizens, but also recent immigrants, those who drop out of education early, those in certain socio-economic groups, the homeless, and adults with literacy concerns.

I attend this meeting with a primary focus on people with disabilities. However, I have considerable experience in Canada and beyond with several of the other groups I have mentioned. I am struck by the similarities of educational inequities and lack of government action across all these vulnerable groups, and across nations. I suggest to all of us here that we recommend to the G 8 nations to move from the commonplace strategy of treating each vulnerable group separately, apart from any other.

There is a need for broad strategies addressing broad-ranging inequities and needs. The G 8 nations are positioned to show leadership and example in recognition of educational similarities impeding progress among, and needs across, vulnerable groups in their own nations. They are positioned well to

demonstrate leadership and example, and to provide direct and indirect support for less fortunate nations. Action at home, based on a fresh and wider conceptualization of education and vulnerable groups, coupled with supportive action abroad, should characterize recognition and leadership by G 8 nations in this area of fundamental educational human rights.

To demonstrate what I mean by broad strategies, I offer two examples.

- If we wish a united and equitable society, one central strategy the Marsha Forest Centre recommends for all learners is that they be educated together, in the same settings, in the same classrooms, and by the same teachers. Support may be needed from specially prepared teachers. Concrete supports, as basic as paper and pencils, may be required in some situations. G 8 nations can be of tremendous value in the area of direct and indirect supports. At home in Canada, we are struggling to move to inclusive education for learners with disabilities and to learn what supports are required by this reform of general education; we are struggling to provide appropriate educational opportunities and supports for our aboriginal learners; we are struggling to deal with a significant adult literacy concern. Each nation is struggling to come to grips with the educational concerns of its own vulnerable groups. Yet, bringing our learners together for their education is a common need.

- The second broad strategy orients on teacher preparation programs.

Canada's federal and provincial governments have yet to realize that our teachers must be educated for diversity, not only by race and gender, but also by linguistic backgrounds, levels of academic and social ability, multicultural realities, and by religious background. Preparing teachers more powerfully to

teach all learners in general education settings is needed within Canada. My experience in other nations tells me it is a need elsewhere as well. A focus must be to prepare teachers, not to deal only with academic subjects, but to bring all learners together in community schools and to educate them together in the knowledge and ways of the ever-changing quality of civic cultural realities.

- What better strategies will result in equitable contact and interaction in academics and socialization?
- How better to form an equitable multicultural society other than by bringing all the children of our society together in learning, and educating them with well-prepared teachers?
- How better to support immigrants in becoming a firm and accepted part of our societies?
- How better to form collaborative relationships among all those with interest in education, from teacher, to parent, to businessman?
- How better to advance availability of quality education for all?
- How better to recognize the reality of the globalized nature our school populations than by bringing them together in education with well-prepared teachers?

If there is a starting point, it is by education for all, and by educating all together, under the instruction of well-prepared teachers. The road will be long and not always, or even nearly always, smooth. But an educational system with teachers well-prepared for diversity in its many forms, and with a mandate to educate all learners together is an essential starting point.

I recommend that we together consider the value of broad strokes across education to include vulnerable groups with equity and power. Further, that we encourage G 8 nations to be examples of what is possible, and that they support other nations in achieving what now may appear impossible.

In doing so, we need to emphasize the commonality of the challenges all nations face, though perhaps to differing degrees, and we need to suggest broad moves, which need to be begun now, if we wish to see a more positive future for our educationally vulnerable fellow citizens.

The Marsha Forest Centre  
March 9, 2006