

INTEGRATION ENRICHMENT

"SUMMER-GET-TOGETHER"

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This summer the Metropolitan Separate School Board offered for the first time, an exciting and innovative program that brought together children with very special needs and their community peer group at St. Michael School. The program was Integrated Enrichment. It was offered to children between the ages of four and twelve. There were twenty-one children involved. Four of the children came from Ceci's Homes for Children; a group home for children labelled with multiple developmental handicaps located in the St. Lawrence community. Three of the children from Ceci's; Stephanie, Darren and Maria are currently integrated in St. Michael during the school year.

Board staff consisted of one teacher and three teacher's aides. This was supplemented by three staff members employed under the Summer Canada Project of Ceci's Homes and seconded for five weeks by Dr. Marsha Forest, Ceci's educational consultant.

Though this was the first summer the Board offered this program it has been growing for the last five years. It began with one child's need to meet children her own age. She happened to be deaf. It has now grown to the point where there is a Saturday program running throughout the school year at York University, a full time school, Thousand Cranes, and five summer programs. All these programs have waiting lists of children with special needs.

The programs are based on a philosophy of education which holds that children have the right to a learning environment which fosters human diversity, rather than homogeneity. It holds that all children in an integrated environment benefit from the experience. The Summer-Get-Together programs incorporate this philosophy into every part of their school day. All the children, are included in the small group activities (art, science, language experience, problem solving, etc.) Every child in the program takes his or her turn in the lunch program. This involves planning the menu, buying and preparing the meal and then cleaning up afterwards. Gym is a cooperative venture in which every game is modified to suit each child. This program helps to nurture tolerance, acceptance of differences, and friendships between people. Its value can be measured by the relationships which build and by the way all the children become more accepting of themselves and those around them. The values and sense of responsibility which are promoted through daily discussions and enrichment activities carry over long after the summer school day ends.

St. Michael is a particularly good example of how integration in the learning environment can then be carried over into the community. Stephanie, Darren and Maria made friends from their neighborhood peer group during the school day. These relationships carried over the evenings and weekends. It was not uncommon to

find "normal" children from the program walking home with Stephanie and then staying to play before dinner. One of the children was so excited about his new friend, Darren, that he was constantly talking about him at home. When his mother came to meet Darren she was surprised to find him sitting in a wheel chair. That point was not important enough to mention previously. These two examples simply high-light what the staff and children have experienced throughout the summer.

The staff at St. Michael have worked very hard this summer to ensure that the learning environment for all the children was creative and stimulating. They gave one hundred percent of themselves each and every day and came away feeling as enriched as the children. Both the staff and the children had the opportunity to become more aware of themselves and their feelings. They have learned that difference are valuable. It has been a rewarding experience for everyone involved.

RECOMENDATION

1. The program should remain at St. Michael and if the opportunity presents itself there should be programs developed in other areas of the city.

2. The Board should maintain the program as a five week program from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. for next year and discuss the possibility of extension.
3. The Board should apply for government funding to supplement staff and material costs.
4. Due to the nature of this program it is imperative that the staff be involved in a full training program which is run in the month of June by Dr. Marsha Forest. Staff should be paid for this by either the Board or Government funding. Dr. Marsha Forest must be involved in hiring the head teacher.
5. A meeting should be held in the Fall of 1984 to discuss in detail next year's program including staffing, funding and administrative relationships.

Submitted by: Susan Dawe, Teacher of the St. Michael
Summer-Get-Together.

approved by Marsha Forest Fall 1984.