

INTEGRATED EDUCATION /
NO MORE SEGREGATED SETTINGS

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Foreward

LABELS ARE THE HANDICAP

All children are gifted. All children have unique strengths and needs. All children are human beings, members of our communities, part of our concept of humankind.

Some children have special needs. For generations, children with special needs have been handicapped, not by those needs or their condition, but by the fact that others have focused solely or primarily on what was seen as their weaknesses. This meant low expectations, limited opportunity, frustrated hopes and dreams -- EXILE.

Today, children and adults with special needs are trying to teach us something very important. They are telling us in no uncertain terms that THEY ARE PEOPLE FIRST, LAST, AND IN BETWEEN. They have challenged us to rid ourselves of the attitudes, actions and labels that handicap them, that stigmatize them. Conditions that relegate them to second class (at best) citizenship around the globe.

Special needs mean challenges. The challenge is to respect the uniqueness of each individual and his/her membership -- membership in our communities, our families, our nations, OUR SCHOOLS. The special need is to belong, to fully belong, with all that implies. Complete communities, families, nations, and schools mean places and groups of people who meet each others' needs, and which include rather than exclude.

Special needs mean challenges, NOT special schools, special education, special places, special groups, NOT exile.

Introduction

Education is life. Education is also preparation for life. The aim of education is to provide opportunities and prepare people to live lives that are positive, worthwhile and active in the heart of the community.

All human beings have to be provided with equal human rights under the laws of every country, but SAME does not mean to wipe out diversity or to meet individual needs in exactly the same way. Having the same rights does not mean receiving the same responses or services, but recognizing that differences bring strength to a community.

Respect for diversity is the key. Having the same rights does not mean making all people the same. It does mean recognizing that differences among people make communities rich.

The acknowledgement that all people have the same rights has been confirmed by specific legislation in a number of countries. The degree to which these rights have been achieved, however, varies considerably from country to country and within countries.

The failure to recognize, respect and protect these rights handicaps children -- denies them membership in the community, denies them the chance to prepare for adult life, and in some cases, denies them life itself.

If we as a world community are to recognize, protect and respect these rights, we must ensure that our communities provide an education which is consistent with these rights and the above values.

The Vision

Recognizing that change will occur in many ways and at a different pace in various countries, we also recognize that what is needed is a shared vision of what change should be about. A shared dream to work toward --

- * Rights acknowledged

- * Rights respected

- * The opportunity for all children to belong -- to their schools, their communities, and to care for and about each other.

- * The opportunity for all children to learn to their fullest potential.

The Idea is Community

The goal is for children to live ordinary lives, to learn in natural environments, and to grow into adults who have a range of options for their futures.

For this to occur, "integration" is not the end, but the means -- the means to be a part of, not apart from our international community.

Central to this is an understanding of what a child's natural environments are -- the family, the school, the people and places of the community. Education involves the child in all of the above.

The Family

Families around the world have the same kinds of hopes and dreams for their sons and daughters. The families of children with special needs are no different. The role of the school is to support families in the fulfillment of those hopes and dreams.

The families of children with special needs must be welcomed into the school, by the school, as full participants in an education community.

The vision for the future is that it would be taken for granted by any family that their children could go to the local community school and be welcomed. The vision, as well, is that families are welcomed as partners in the educational planning for their children, as active and decisive participants.

For some families and in some places, this is not just a vision but a reality.

The School

Schools are communities and places of education. In many, if not most, parts of the world, few children go to schools which welcome all children of the community -- most children go to segregated schools, schools which exclude them from a rich and full life with other children.

As communities, schools are responsible for fostering, encouraging, and promoting relationships among members of school communities, acting as a mirror of the larger community.

The logical conclusion of this would mean no special children, therefore no need for special teachers, special classes, special schools -- only children and teachers who create a community of learning.

As places of education, schools are responsible for promoting positive values about the global community, about children, about

unique gifts and needs, about the future. Our schools should inspire a view of the future based on the finest values of humankind.

As places of education, schools are responsible for providing an education and educational opportunities which are respectful of each child's unique gifts, needs, and positive future as an individual and a citizen.

Providing an effective education means effective planning. Effective planning requires the active and decisive involvement of the child's community -- family and school. Effective planning requires the participation of the entire school community, not a single "special teacher".

Effective planning requires action, and regular monitoring of that action by the school and the family. Monitoring and evaluation should lead to corrective action where needed. If problems do occur, they should be seen as problems of the plan or its implementation, not of the child or the child's performance.

Effective planning requires that educational programs and supports be designed in response to the unique gifts and needs of the child and the school community, and fully exploits these gifts and needs. This means, among other things, using the most underutilized resource in all of our schools -- the other children, as fellow learners and tutors, but most of all as friends and fellow citizens.

Schools should build bridges between children who have not had the opportunity of knowing each other and learning from one another. Schools should build bridges to the future.

Local conditions may make these developments challenging. There are some first steps, however, which should lay the groundwork for the future --

- * a commitment that all children will be educated in regular classrooms, and the supports required to make this happen will be provided.

- * the closure of existing segregated schools, and transferring resources to facilitate and support integrated education.

The Community

One of the realities facing children, families, schools and communities is that children with special needs are often institutionalized. An obvious first step in developing a community-oriented, integrated education system is to ensure that all children are members of families and communities.

There are, in addition, two major challenges related to schools and communities --

* Children with special needs will be much more natural members of school communities if they have experienced integration during their early childhood years -- in neighbourhoods, nurseries, kindergartens, day care centres, and so on. Children who are welcomed, supported and prized from the beginning have a better chance of being welcome, supported and prized throughout their lives.

* The community itself provides a rich array of opportunities for learning and participating -- churches, leisure activities, work. These should be explored by the school so as to optimize the environments in which children can learn.

Conclusion

In all parts of the world, children with special needs have been denied the right to belong and contribute to the communities of which they are a part. The option is clear -- another generation of children who have no friends, no community, no futures, no chance to contribute and be respected for who they are or a global commitment to create a new generation with a new vision of a complete society.

THE COMMITTEEMNT FOR THE YEAR 2000 IS TO SUPPORT FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS IN THEIR EFFORTS TO MAKE CHILDREN WITH CHALLENGING NEEDS A VALUED AND INTEGRAL PART OF COMMUNITY LIFE.

This document provides a vision and philosophy of life and of education. The issue is vision and the ability to dream of new futures for all the children of the world. The issue is NOT the imagined difficulties of achieving this vision. Once the vision is clear and shared, the actions are sure to follow.

"Hold fast to dreams, for if dreams die,
Life is a broken-winged bird that cannot fly"

- Langston Hughes

August 1987