

TWO ROADS:

EXCLUSION OR INCLUSION?

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The key educational question for the year 2000 will NOT be "What is inclusion, integration, or mainstreaming?" The key question will be: **WHAT KIND OF SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES DO WE WANT FOR OURSELVES AND OUR FAMILIES?** Will we take the road that says "educate the best and manage the rest", or will we take the road towards a peaceful and truly democratic society that will adequately meet the needs of all its citizens — rich and poor, black, white, red & yellow, male and female, old and young.

There is no doubt that we have the skill, technology and knowledge to build any kind of society and school system we want. If we can pinpoint bomb cities, send teams into space, build robots and mini computers, surely we have the ability to serve all our children in quality schools. The question is do we have the values and the political will to make the choice that will serve the many rather than the few.

We must decide. We must choose to travel one of two roads. We can't be in the middle. We have called these choices **THE ROAD TO EXCLUSION** or **THE ROAD TO INCLUSION**. The roads lead to radically different outcomes. Society is at a choice point — the road we choose has little to do with finances or law; it has everything to do with values and leadership.

The Centre for Integrated Education and Community has chosen the road less travelled — the road of inclusive schooling and community. This road welcomes everyone on the journey. As we travel together, we figure out what to do about the daily challenges presented to us. There is no blueprint or map. This is the road of the pioneer, the innovator, the creator. People choosing this road believe that "together we are bet-

ter," and that "cooperation and collaboration are the keys" to solving problems. Most positive solutions are found not by "experts", but by people themselves, as they get involved in their own interests, in their own neighbourhoods, churches, schools.

The Inclusion Road thrives on diversity and celebrates differences. It is the road which welcomes back those we have left out, kicked out or pushed out of systems, either through benign neglect or systemic and institutional abuse.

We must each choose consciously which road to travel. The road to inclusion is one of building **intentional educational community** in our schools. It demands hard work and commitment to the new ABC's. These ABC's are:

**ACCEPTANCE,
BELONGING,
COMMUNITY.**

We know that when children feel these ABC's they will also learn the famous educational three R's:

**READING;
WRITING;
RELATIONSHIPS.**

The Problem is the Solution

The secret of making this all happen is to turn the problem on its head and make the problem into the solution. Those we have seen and labelled as "the problems" can be our greatest advocates and allies. It is often the "drop-outs", the "street kids", the people with disabilities, who have the most creative answers. They have the most to win or lose; and they have the most intimate knowledge of their own problems. Given an invitation to **partner with skilled professional educators**, this new team can truly resolve problems and change the system.

**Each of Us Must Choose:
Inclusion or Exclusion:**

Exclusion

Both roads are open. Each of us has to make a conscious choice about

the path we travel. Leaders on the exclusion path "blame the victim" for his/her own problems. The exclusion road creates new labels as old ones die. "Learning disability" and "attention deficit disorder" are the current labels of choice. Exclusionists hold fast to the "medical model" and still believe that IQ tests, diagnostic assessment and packaged programs will save the day. They buy and sell solutions, and promote "things" and "medications" that will solve all our ills. This road has architects who build more prisons, institutions and sanitized homes for the aged. As Dr. Norman Bethune, the noted Canadian hero and physician once wrote so poignantly, "These men make the wounds."

The meaning of a policy of exclusion is revealed by a "reliable" senior government official's retort when asked "What should we do about those who aren't in the 'main' stream?" He responded partly in jest, partly in frustration: "We train the best, and shoot the rest." The comment was off-hand but identifies the dilemma. the unstated under-lying assumptions of exclusion are, among others, that:

- * We are not all equal in capacity or value.
- * It is not feasible to give equal opportunity.
- * We must choose and thus train an elite who will take care of the 'rest'.
- * 'They' will benefit through the trickle-down theory.

Inclusion

The road to inclusion is also a choice. People choosing inclusion look at whole systems and only label people by their names and their needs. Inclusion leaders foster cooperation and collaboration to solve problems while exclusion stresses competitiveness and individualism as the modis operendi.

Inclusive educators know through experience that they can solve virtually any student problem by putting people together and brainstorming on the problem. The people who gather know the person involved intimately, and they care. They are not psychologists and

doctors. Rather their first label is citizen, then neighbor, relative or friend (some of whom may coincidentally be psychologists and doctors.) Inclusion proponents believe in technology and science which serves people and is not used to make profit or war at the expense of human beings.

Inclusion is the opposite and works from opposite assumptions:

- * We are unique in value; however, each has unique capacity.
- * All people can learn.
- * All people have contributions to make.
- * We have a responsibility and an opportunity to give every person the chance to make a contribution.

The criterion for inclusion is breathing, not IQ, income, colour, race, sex or language.

Critics of inclusion say:

- * It's too expensive.
- * 'They' can't learn.
- * 'They' don't know what's best for 'them.'
- * It can't be done.

As critics of exclusion, we say:

- * It's too expensive.
- * 'They' can learn.
- * 'They' - people - know a tremendous amount if asked.
- * It can be done.

OUTCOMES

EXCLUSION	vs	INCLUSION
Segregation, brokenness, elitism	vs	wholeness harmony Integration
group homes/ institutions	vs	real families
special schools special classes	vs	quality school where kids belong together
ghettos/gangs/ violence	vs	neighbors & friends
nursing homes/ prisons	vs	community options

The Inclusion Road is a Paradigm Movement from:

DISABILITY Paradigm	to	GIFTEDNESS Paradigm
isolation	to	community
rejection	to	acceptance
medical labels & stigmas	to	first names & citizenship
loneliness	to	friendship
being unwelcome	to	being welcome
competitiveness & individualism	to	cooperation & collaboration
blaming the victim	to	acknowledging systems failure
oppression & exploitation	to	full human rights & social justice

Problem or Opportunity

The Chinese character for the word *crisis* is an amalgam of two pictographs - *problem* and *opportunity*. Few would deny that education is in crisis. This crisis presents an enormous opportunity to build something new. The issue is not to change the old, not to "move chairs on the Titanic", but to build a new ship with new seating.

The OUTCOMES of the old ways are clear. Today's education system serves one-third of its students well. But two thirds are either hanging on or dropping out. For students with disabilities, the post secondary school graduation picture is bleak.

The state of Colorado asked parents where their children (with disabilities) were five years after graduation. The findings were dismal and depressing. The majority of "graduates" were at home watching T.V. "What did we miss?" the Colorado educators asked. "You missed my child's social needs...My child has no friends....Nobody calls.....My son/daughter has no where to go and nobody to go with."

Colorado is moving to change this

outcome. In the past five years they have moved 4000 students into regular schools from segregated institutional models. They are moving to a total inclusion model for ALL students and paying special attention to all "at risk" students by providing alternative choices at the high school level and full inclusion at the elementary grades.

Dr. Brian McNulty, State Director of Special Education for Colorado, learned that inclusion was not a money issue as their transition took place in the worst economic downturn in the state's history. Money had to be transformed in its flow. The real challenge was how to use the existing budget differently.

Elsewhere in the USA and Canada, the same challenge is being met, and experience confirms that the barriers to "inclusion" are values, not budgets. Wherever change is occurring, two factors are common. Firstly, there is **visionary leadership** from senior management. Secondly, there is a grass-roots parent or consumer movement that demands ALL children be served by our education system.

The THREE DRAGONS

There are three dragons out there that prevent this from happening.

The first dragon is FEAR.

It is critical to name the fears and deal with them. All of us are afraid of the unknown, but instead of telling the fear like it is, we hide and blame others or say that something is impossible to do. But now we know that integration is possible. The data is in. The children will do just fine if we don't let our adult fears get in the way of progress.

The second dragon is CONTROL.

As professionals we have to give up control and share power with those who have been in trouble. The first step is to invite those who have been left out to join us at the table. By asking the "problems" to be part of the solution, we are entering into powerful partnerships for change. We empower both ourselves and our new partners. Everyone wins in this scenario.

The third dragon is CHANGE.

Change, though inevitable, scares us all. We fear it. We are always more comfortable with the status quo. We must make the change we want explicit, then face the fear, and give up the old controls that stop us from moving ahead.

In-service education and staff development must deal with the three dragons before building models of curriculum. Creative curriculum will flow when teachers leap over the three dragons and know that their jobs and futures are secure. Teachers need to fully understand WHY change is being made. If THEY UNDERSTAND, most will buy into the process with enthusiasm.

Once the three dragons are out in the open field, we can laugh and cry together over our fears. Then and only then, can we start to deal with teaching all kids to read, write and be literate citizens in today's quickly changing and complex world.

What We Have Learned

After 10 years of experience, we have learned that **school children and particularly high school students are far more accepting than we ever thought they would be.** When Tony came to the grade 8 class everyone was terrified. Tony used a wheel chair and didn't speak. We all met the first Dragon - Fear. How would he learn, fit in, be part of anything the rest of the class was doing?

The fear dissolved as Tony wheeled in the door and a class meeting ensued where the students were actively encouraged to ask him or his family any questions on their mind. "How does he go to the bathroom?" was the natural first question. After much laughter more questions poured out, "How does he communicate; does he have friends; would he like to go to the dance next week?"

By the end of the hour, the class had Tony in the middle of their room and were planning how to get him to the Halloween dance. Did Tony understand the grade 8 history class? We don't know. We also don't know how many of

the others kids really grasp the history lesson. However, we do know for a fact that Tony smiled more that week than he had in ten years. We know he received his first phone call, and he did attend the Halloween dance. To Tony, his parents and to us, that spells success! We also know that two potential drop outs stayed in school because of the presence of Tony. Weeks later they told the assistant principal that they were "staying in school cuz Tony needs us." That statement tickled the Second Dragon - Control. Who's in charge here anyway?

We were also recently in an elementary school where 12 teachers sat in two rows waiting for us, "the experts", to tell them what to do about Rosa, a child having major behaviour problems at school. First, we broke the group out of the rows and created a circle. We explained our role was to be facilitators and catalysts, not "experts". We said we could help them figure out HOW TO solve the problem. We suggested that first we needed to find out WHO Rosa was as a person, and who were the important people in her life.

Looking at Rosa's CIRCLE OF FRIENDS, it was immediately apparent that this little 10 year old was devastatingly alone. Her mother and a cat were her only companions. No wonder she was "acting out". She was sending a clear message. "Help me. I am alone. I am afraid."

The classroom teacher was empowered by this revelation. She went back to her class and opened a discussion about Rosa with the children. She asked for volunteers to GET INVOLVED with Rosa. Fifteen children volunteered and have stayed together over a year forming an active **Support Circle for Rosa and her mother.** Rosa has not been "cured or fixed", but her behavior has improved dramatically. The road is being paved for a different and better life for all sixteen children in the Circle. They have all benefitted from their participation in the weekly circle meetings. No course in "civics" could teach the democratic process, or the fragility and beauty of life, as well as these gatherings. It may well be that these lessons

in living are more important to the education of these students than mastering a specific science experiment or equation.

The Myth of Special Education

The "magic bullet", the fairy dust of special education, is simply another case of the emperor wearing no clothes. A medical cure doesn't exist for children born with down syndrome, autism, spina bifida or cerebral palsy. There is no curative pill for the child born into abject poverty, the child trapped in the ghettos of Yellowknife or the Bronx.

Special education isn't a cure either. In the Winter 1990 issue of *Counterpoint*, published by the National Association of State Directors of Special Education, Shirley Thornton, Deputy Superintendent of Instruction in the California Education Agency, doubts special education helps children when she looks at outcome and drop-out data. Her summary is blunt: "Regular education can fail them a whole lot cheaper."

In education, the CURE is hard work, team work and intense struggle to figure out solutions to today's complex social and educational problems. The answers are going to be found simply by people taking time to work together. There are no "micro-wave" answers. It takes time, energy and commitment.

Giftedness vs "Un"Giftedness

We urge readers to join us on the Road to Inclusion by shifting from the disability myth to the giftedness paradigm. This is the heart of the road of INCLUSION. On the Inclusion journey, all children, and indeed all people, are gifted — all are unique and all have treasures to offer. If we fail to find the gift in a child, that child will most likely end up rejected, illiterate and institutionalized - possibly in a jail. If we continue to label and test, we will see more and more gangs, violence and despair. An Inclusive School labels all children "gifted and talented", and works toward an outcome that deals with the full human potential in each of us.

The GIFTEDNESS model is exciting, challenging and dynamic. It is the antithesis of labels and IQ scores. You can

tell a "giftedness" school instantly. You feel the magic and energy. The halls are full of art, music and kids. The principal and staff are excited. No one is burned out and the parents and children are INVOLVED.

The "Giftedness" School is noisy, messy, and full of books, creative art work, music and people. Older citizens can be seen in the halls reading to younger children. High school students do their cooperative job placements helping in the younger grades. There is cross-age and same age peer tutoring and field trips happen all the time. The principal is hardly ever in her office.

The student population reflects the diversity of the society. Hair and clothing styles vary and some kids run around while others zoom by in their motorized wheelchairs. A sign language class is given at lunch so all the student body can communicate with Michael who is hearing impaired.

The fully inclusive quality school is still school of the future (and in some cases it is the school of the present.) Unfortunately, this school is not the norm. Our hope is that by 2000, the Inclusive school will be the norm in education, and that the road to exclusion will be an historical anomaly.

It is unethical, politically unacceptable and repugnant to 'write off' marginalized people in our society. The cost of 'welfare maintenance' is unbearable, either socially or economically. In short, exclusion does not work.

The critics are right if our thinking and answers are limited to the solutions we already have in place. We want to think about a new system, one that replaces the old, not just reforms it. Our vision of the new system is based on the value that 'everyone belongs' - 'all welcome'.

We all have the power to listen to 'voices' that are seldom heard. If we choose to make the time, to learn to listen, and to struggle with the pain and frustration that disempowered people feel, we will see new visions, feel new energy, and find hope in our future. There is power in the powerless. We can be catalysts, or encrusted residue. The choice is ours.

GIFTEDNESS vs DISABILITY:

A Reflection

by Judith Snow

I am somewhat reflective these days, as I've discovered it doesn't help to run after answers. It's better to ask good questions. If we can frame a few good questions, we can spend our lives trying out answers.

One such question for me is: "How is it that I am not perceived to be a member of the public - a citizen? What can my friends do to change that perception?"

When I was born, I was a member of the general public. People were willing to support me because they expected something of me. There were systems to support me: education, transportation, family, etc.

When I was 7 months old, I was labeled "disabled", and that label changed my life. People no longer expected my family to be there for me - or supported my family to be with me. The Educational system was no longer there for me. My family had to fight so I could go to school. The transportation system was no longer there for me - and still isn't. No one expected me to "be there" or to make a contribution.

Luckily for me, my family was different. They expected me to make a contribution. That fact made a tremendous difference in my life.

The fact that I was not considered to be a member of the general public totally changed my life. Today, my life is built around the constant battle for me to simply be a member of the public.

Giftedness - What is it? Who has it?

There are people in every generation who can run really well and do amazing physical feats. People like Ben Johnson, and Olympic divers and skaters. We say they are gifted. It is interesting that there are as many people like Ben Johnson as there are like me. But there is one profound difference. People really enjoy and value the fact that Ben can run, or that my classmate Beverly could dive. I don't understand what intrinsic

use it is to be an Olympic class diver or runner.

For Bev to become an Olympic class diver, our society created thousands of gifts. We created opportunities for pool builders, coaches, pool cleaners, advertisers, swim suit manufacturers, etc. People got up at four o'clock every morning, traveled thousands of miles, raised tens of thousands of dollars. Thousands of people were involved in making this possible.

A person who is labeled disabled needs exactly the same support. I need people to be friends, to tutor, to raise money, to set up special places, to do governmental negotiations - exactly the same things that Beverly needed to become an Olympic class diver.

What is the difference? What prevents society from seeing me as important and exciting as Bev?

There was a serious mistake. Someone jumped the gun and labeled me a problem. Instead of seeing me a gift and an opportunity, I was called a problem and became a project. I was not supported by "the community". I was serviced by staff. People's livelihood was determined by their fixation on fixing me. But this is crazy because we are not fixable. We never stop to think about that. Our society has created a billion dollar industry to fix people who are not fixable. It is destined to failure. It doesn't work, and there are tremendous costs both to society and to the people who cannot be fixed.

Peoples lives are wasted. The "helpers" get trained to do something that is useless and doesn't work. Not surprisingly, there is an incredible burn out rate. When things don't work, people get angry and that breeds violence. It is no wonder that so many special educators and human service workers spend the vast majority of their time doing paper work. It is a logical response when their job (to fix people) doesn't work and only generates frustration and anger.

There is another cost. The Community is denied the talents, gifts, contributions and opportunities of all the people who are excluded.

The answer is simple - see me as gifted not as disabled. Throw away the concept of disability. Welcome the concept of *Giftedness*.