

MOBILIZATION OF THE YOUTH OF THE NATION FOR ADVOCACY OF DISABILITY, EDUCATION, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

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Much is made of disability, education, and social justice on the stages of the world. When it comes to equitable education for citizens with disabilities, few would argue with the concept. Many, however, would dispute whether the concept can be realized for all learners with disabilities. To a significant degree, those on the “Nay” side of the dispute out-number and outcry those on the “Yea” side..

This is made obvious by the slow growth of inclusive education, an enactment of social justice in education for learners with disabilities, across the globe. Those who cry “Nay” point to curriculum, pedagogy, differing learner development, management, and policy as reasons for continued separation of learners with disabilities from other learners. Interestingly, these are the themes of this conference. On this basis, this presentation could be considered to cover all conference themes. However, it is related in particular to learner development and policy.

Learner development, in that it concerns the moral development of all students as activists for social justice. Policy in that it calls on educational decision-makers to create and support in-school structures which realize social justice in education for all learners.

The Marsha Forest Centre, with funding from the Canadian federal government, has developed and implemented an initiative focused on disability, education, and social justice. The thrust for the initiative grew from two realizations. First, that most educational decision-makers were too mesmerized by the implacableness of curricula, pedagogy, differences in learner development, school management, and existing policy to develop new management approaches and policy based on principles of social justice for

all learners. Second, that typical students and students with disabilities, themselves, did not labour under this limitation.

The Marsha Forest Centre decided to turn to the youth of Canada to advocate for disability, education, and social justice. A national project, PlayFair Teams, was developed and implemented. The name was inspired by the oft-heard child invocation to “play fair” in sports and other interactions of students.

PlayFair Teams is based on volunteer students in secondary and elementary schools who join an extra-curricular club focused on disability, education, and social justice. PlayFair Teams are comprised of students with and without disabilities. Teams develop presentations (skits, songs, and other activities) designed to sensitize audiences to social justice for all learners. Presentations are made to school and community groups. Each PlayFair Team is guided by an in-school staff person and a Mentor for Disability from the local community.

The Marsha Forest Centre has developed a PlayFair Teams training DVD, a training manual, a manual for advocates wishing to approach schools with the concept of PlayFair Teams, publicity posters, a central website, and PlayFair Teams’ shirts and caps. These supports enable schools at a distance from the Marsha Forest Centre to begin PlayFair Teams.

Development of the PlayFair Team concept and implementation will be described in a multi-media presentation making use of all the above support systems.