



No. E-8

Hansard

Official Report of Debates

Legislative Assembly of Ontario

Select Committee on Education

Philosophy and Goals of Education

First Session, 34th Parliament

Monday, July 25, 1988

Speaker: Honourable Hugh A. Edighoffer
Clerk of the House: Claude L. DesRosiers

Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario
Editor of Debates: Peter Brannan

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

SELECT COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Monday, July 25, 1988

The committee met at 10 a.m. in room 151.

PHILOSOPHY AND GOALS OF EDUCATION (continued)

Madam Chairman: Welcome to this session of the select committee on education, as we look at the philosophy and goals of education in Ontario. We are pleased to welcome today the Down Syndrome Association of Metropolitan Toronto, the Down Syndrome Association of York Region and the Integration Action Group. Welcome to our committee. If you would like to identify yourselves for the purposes of electronic Hansard, then you can start your presentation. We would hope that in the 45 minutes we have allotted, you will leave sufficient time at the end for questions, because I know the members are quite interested. Commence whenever you are ready.

DOWN SYNDROME ASSOCIATION OF METROPOLITAN TORONTO DOWN SYNDROME ASSOCIATION OF YORK REGION INTEGRATION ACTION GROUP

Mrs. Langdon: Thank you. My name is Lynda Langdon and I would like to say good morning to everybody. We are here today because we need your help. All of us are parents of children who have special needs. The current term in the education system is that they are called "exceptional children." All of us have experienced lack of equal educational opportunity for children in the system or, in Fran's case, stand to experience it at some point in time. We desperately need changes to the Education Act and the regulations to make integration available to our children and we need you, the lawmakers, to help make that happen.

The motto of the Integration Action Group is *discant cum ceteris*. What that means very simply is let them learn with the others, and that is all we want. Today we will tell you why that should happen and how it can happen with your support. We are going to tell you very briefly some personal stories so that you will know a little bit about each of us. First, we have Marilyn Dolmage, who is a director from the Integration Action Group.

Mrs. Dolmage: I am personally challenged by my son Matthew, who is 14, and I believe that all of you are challenged by Matthew and other children like him too. I hope you would see more than Matthew's disabilities, because I think he has a unique contribution to make. Unfortunately, Matthew and my whole family have suffered greatly because of Ontario's present Education Act. We disagreed with the Muskoka Board of Education where Matthew was isolated from his brother and sister, from his friends and from his neighbourhood and sent to another town to attend school. He was denied an appropriate education and he was given no opportunity to associate with nondisabled children.

The resulting Bill 82 appeal process that we undertook was an incredible waste of time, energy, money, resources and talents. Matthew lost two years of his education and we were forced to leave our home. By moving to the neighbouring school board in Simcoe county, we have been able to create better opportunities.

I am here today because I feel that students like Matthew, my children, your children, our families and our communities should really no longer experience this kind of discrimination.

Mrs. Langdon: Next is Stan Woronko, who is the past president of the Integration Action Group.

Dr. Woronko: I have a daughter, Katherine, who just turned 17. Just over three years ago, she was in a so-called class for retrainable retarded in the York Region Board of Education. We tried very hard as parents to get her out of there because she was not learning anything, she was exhibiting behaviour problems and she had no friends. Life was miserable for us and for her. Then we fought through the appeal process that exists for identification placement review committees and we got nowhere because the school board was fully complying with the Education Act and had the power to decide whether a student is segregated.

We then saw an opportunity. We redirected our taxes to the separate school board in York region and then Katherine, at the age of 14, was enrolled in a regular high school. Within two months, she was registered in regular classes with typical peers. She does not speak, she does not read and she does not write, but they

developed programs for her which enabled her to learn alongside her peers.

1010

Today it is a big success story because she has been there for three years, she has a lot of friends and she is enthusiastic about school. The life of our family has changed. There is something very wrong in the education system when something that one school board says is impossible and inappropriate turns out to be a big success story in another school board. It is time to have the Education Act changed so that school boards no longer have the power to arbitrarily segregate students with disabilities. It is time for all children to have the same opportunities that my daughter now enjoys.

Mrs. Langdon: In my situation, I have a five-year-old daughter, and towards the end of May, the public school board offered me three options for her. She is about to start kindergarten. One option was to be bused out of the neighbourhood. The other option was to go to a nice little segregated class with eight kids, where she could sit for four years. There happened to be, I think, eight boys ranging in age from seven to ten in that class, and I have a very little five-year-old girl. The other option was to go to the local kindergarten but with no support for Stacia and no support for the teacher. That is what in our terminology we have referred to as dumping. That is not integration; that is dumping. That is not fair to anybody.

However, I was lucky. A number of years ago, my parents decided to baptize me as a Catholic. I was able to do the same thing for my daughter. She is now being welcomed into a marvellous school. She is being welcomed with support, open arms, encouragement and marvellous teachers. It is as if the public school system treated her like a label and the separate school system is treating her like a marvellous little girl. I feel very fortunate because I had that option. The point to be made here is that most people do not have that option. Most people cannot send their children to an alternative school board. They have one choice and that is it. Even though my daughter is being taken care of, I am even angrier now, because that is not fair.

This is Fran Jaffer, who is with the Integration Action Group and the Down Syndrome Association of Metropolitan Toronto.

Mrs. Marinac-Jaffer: Good morning. I have two sons. My older son's name is Aschif. He is 18 months old and he has special needs. Ever since he was born, I have been advocating his rights. Since he was one year old, he has gone

swimming with everybody else. He goes to integrated nursery school, and for the future, segregation is something that is not even the remotest possibility for me. If that is all that is offered, I will have to find some other sort of solution because I want him to grow up and go to school and be alongside his brother. That is the only solution for me. I feel it is his right.

Mrs. Langdon: This is Louise Bailey, who is the president of the Down Syndrome Association of Metropolitan Toronto.

Mrs. Bailey: I have two children, a nine-year-old son and a beautiful seven-year-old daughter eating chips back there, who has special needs, especially for chips. Andrea has never been in any kind of segregated setting. That means she never went to any special preschools or any kind of program in which she was separated from typical kids. She never has felt herself to be anything other than a typical kid.

When the time came for me to look at kindergarten and grade 1, watching people who had gone before me, I became terrified because I knew that where I live in North York, being under the auspices of the public school board, I had no options at all for integrated education. So what I did two years ago was to set up my own private, integrated school at great personal cost to me. I have to fund-raise and get a budget of \$25,000 every year. I am not a rich person. We are a typical family with typical resources. But there is no way that our daughter is going to be damaged by the segregated school system and come out at the other end as a person with very few opportunities, being isolated and feeling herself apart from the rest of the world.

May I continue on? You will see behind you several little children here, some of whom have labels and some of whom do not. You will see a couple of parents and a grandmother. All of them are here because they are interested in what is going to happen to people with labels. Everybody here wants all of us to be members of the same community, to go to school together, learn together, play together, grow up together and work together.

Parents of children with Down syndrome want the option of integrated education for their children. This means we want them to walk with their brothers and sisters and friends to their neighbourhood school as a matter of right, attend regular classes with their age-appropriate peers and have individualized programming geared to their strengths and needs delivered to them in their regular class.

The mainstream is where we want our children to lead their lives. Our kids are beggars at a banquet. When they are locked out of integrated education with their typical peers, they embark upon a course of life which runs parallel to the lives of ordinary people but does not intersect with them.

The education system is the main processor through which all children must pass. It needs to look at its foundation to see what it is teaching Ontario students about the concept of community and its responsibility to bring us together on the basis of our common humanity.

It must teach us to respect human diversity and give us the open attitude and opportunity to learn from it. Equal membership in the community leads to equal opportunity in adult life. Forced segregation of persons with specific labels such as "educable mentally retarded," "trainable mentally retarded" and "multiply handicapped" teaches division and separateness. Integration teaches that all of us are members of one and the same community.

The concept of readiness for the community which is often sold to parents implies that there are qualifications for the role of human being. People do not qualify for the community; they belong by right. Integration is not a matter of ability, as many in the educational system seem to believe. It is a matter of choosing to support and transmit respect for human values rather than survival-of-the-fittest values. It is most assuredly a matter of human rights, entitlement to equal benefit of education and entitlement to equality of opportunity.

The philosophical principles of the Ministry of Education in Ontario in the Special Education Information Handbook, which I show you here, refer generally and specifically to:

"All pupils should have the right of educational opportunity and a curriculum of a high quality appropriate to their needs, abilities and interests.

"Both the program and environment of the school should reflect respect for the worth of the individual and respect for the differences among individuals and groups."

The doctrine of separate as inherently unequal has long been established. Forced segregation of children with labels promotes the concept of two communities: one normal, one abnormal; one well, one sick; one valued, one devalued. No amount of money or focus on "special" can disguise to all children, typical or otherwise, the reality that some belong and some do not. This streaming continues on through adult life,

leading persons with special needs to lives of chronic isolation, poverty and unemployment.

Keeping in mind the ministry's reference to needs and abilities, parents across the province have been battling in identification and placement review committees to have the curriculum of children with special needs based on a strengths and needs assessment. However, children continue to be tested, labelled and slotted in the traditional manner. There exists no specific forum within which a parent may challenge the appropriateness or efficacy of his child's program, though he may challenge, mostly in vain, his child's label or placement.

The goals of education in this handbook state the specifics of the ministry's philosophy. None of these goals is anything that any of us could disagree with. However, we do not believe that these goals are achievable for children with special needs in a system of forced segregation, nor do they reflect a philosophy of community or belonging. In fact, the reality of the manner in which education is delivered in this province mitigates against it. Let us look at some of these goals in detail.

"The Ministry of Education strives...for equal opportunity for all." It "has the overall purpose of helping individual learners to achieve their individual potential in physical, intellectual, emotional, social, cultural and moral development."

Forced segregation and equal opportunity are mutually exclusive.

If the Ministry of Education truly believes that the accurate indicators of the achievement potential of persons with Down syndrome are social isolation, maimed self-images, chronic poverty and unemployment, then it is doing its job very well.

The rate of unemployment among persons labelled mentally retarded ranges from 80 per cent to 90 per cent. People First, a national self-advocacy organization of persons so labelled, estimates that out of 650 Ontario members, eight to ten have real jobs in the competitive marketplace. They state that this is not the result of lack of motivation or lack of ability but is a direct outgrowth of forced segregation and its devastating consequences in adult life. Workshops are attended, despite their terrible working conditions, because they are the only available option to overwhelming social isolation.

Goal 6: "Develop a feeling of self-worth." Persons learning in circumstances of forced segregation do not develop feelings of self-worth, despite the best efforts of their families.

Regulated contact with typical students at lunch, music, gym or art classes only serves to reinforce the feeling of differentness and isolation. They do not make the student with special needs ready for the community, nor do they fool the typical students into thinking they are one of the crowd.

1020

Forced segregation is a process of searching out, isolating, labelling and slotting. Mental health professionals from a variety of disciplines all can testify to the centrality of individual self-worth in determining school and work performance and social, sexual and family role behaviour. Do we really think different mental health rules apply to people who require extra supports?

Goal 8: "Acquire skills that contribute to self-reliance in solving practical problems in everyday life."

Our kids are not allowed to participate in that everyday life. Segregation is not real life. It is a fantasy land of many caretakers, permission for dependency, age-inappropriate learning activities, tolerance of age-inappropriate behaviours, all based on the assumption of inability to function independently as adults. Our kids are being well prepared to be the clients of social workers.

Goal 10: "Develop esteem for the customs, cultures and beliefs of a wide variety of societal groups."

Forced segregation does not teach typical kids—most of your kids—to value or respect their peers with special needs. It encourages typical students in their attitudes of derision, pity and low expectations. These attitudes continue through the life cycle, as typical people avoid, deride or pity people with special needs. Through misguided paternalism they create special places for them, such as segregated classes, segregated schools, group homes, workshops and institutions, and therefore, as potential employers or fellow employees lock them out of the competitive marketplace.

Typical students are denied the enrichment of learning and playing with their friends who may need extra help, but who are also capable of helping, learning and having fun. Those boards which integrate consistently testify to the benefits of integration to their typical students. Everyone profits from learning and working in an atmosphere where all people are truly valued for their contributions.

Goal 11: "Acquire skills and attitudes that will lead to satisfaction and productivity in the world of work."

Persons with special needs are locked out of competitive employment. Forced segregation, and all it implies about goals, expectations and curriculum, is the beginning of this process. Chronic unemployment and spending time in a sheltered workshop for a disability pension of perhaps \$5,000 a year and maybe up to \$10 a week can in no way be imagined as satisfying or productive.

Goal 13: "Develop values related to personal, ethical or religious beliefs and to the common welfare of society."

The operative word here is "common." Typical people and people with special needs are carefully taught that they belong to separate communities, one functioning and one custodial. Typical people have been denied the opportunity to grow up alongside their peers with special needs, to learn with them, to work with them and be their friends. Our community is denied the talents and contributions of thousands of its members.

People with special needs refuse to be streamed away from the community. They belong simply because they are here. They want to learn, play, work and contribute to the community. They do not want the protectionism and paternalism which they are offered and which they know to be soul-destroying. They want integration, human and civil rights, personal choice and reasonable accommodation.

The Ministry of Education must decide and then teach, in a proactive manner, that all belong. We support a philosophical foundation for education in Ontario promoting one community with a common interest in its own communal preservation, welfare and progress, respecting and appreciating human diversity.

With respect to persons who will require some extra supports, we advocate a philosophy which believes that all persons have the right and capacity to lead what we call normal lives. What is a normal life? It is going to school with your friends. It is having friends outside of school in your neighbourhood. It is having hobbies. It is getting a job, moving away from home, establishing your own family setting and contributing to the community. All people are capable of that.

Persons with special needs have been protected from the dignity of risk in the system and so have been blocked from reaching their potential and leading typical lives, albeit with varying levels of support. Their lot has been chronic poverty on social assistance, social isolation and the devaluation of their abilities, talents and desire to contribute and belong.

Our educational system and community cannot continue to waste precious human lives. We are saying to you that you will not waste our children's lives.

Mrs. Dolmage: What is the reality? As long as geography and religion continue to be the major determinants of quality of education, this province has a long way to go to provide equal opportunity for all children to meet basic educational needs.

The discriminatory manner in which most students with special needs are currently treated by school boards has a double negative effect:

1. The labelled students are deprived of quality education and introduced to lives of poverty, isolation, unemployment and a succession of services.

2. The typical students learn to perpetuate these discriminatory practices.

The present education system stresses segregation versus integration, labels versus individuals, placement versus people and efficiency versus quality. It even allocates money to categories, not kids. Some school boards make a pretence of complying with ministry regulations by offering what is euphemistically called a "range of options," which implies choice; but the reality is that there is no choice. Either all the options are bad, or the unwritten but strictly enforced corollary is that each option applies only to a specified type of student.

The phrase "appropriate education" is being narrowly interpreted by appeal boards to refer only to a board's existing services. Thus, if a student requires a program, placement or service that a particular board does not offer, he or she is denied the right to a truly appropriate education. The act pays mere lip service to the role of parents in the educational process. While it sometimes invites parents to attend meetings about their children, it ensures that such meetings, especially in the appeal process, are controlled by professionals. These fundamental injustices are not tolerable as a value base for a system that proclaims equality of opportunity.

In attempting to redress the inequities inherent in the current legislation, each of the three groups represented here today prepared detailed recommendations for amendments to the Education Act and regulations in response to the minister's request for reactions to the proposed amendments to the special education legislation in January 1986. Over two years later, the amendments have not even reached the Legislature, let alone brought about any positive changes in our children's lives. We are waiting.

Meanwhile, many parents have been forced to take drastic steps to avoid having their children damaged by being forced into segregated settings, steps such as opening their own schools; changing their religion; enrolling their children in private schools at great personal expense; leaving jobs and family and friends behind to move to a school area where integration is available; keeping their children at home and teaching them themselves; retaining lawyers and spending thousands of dollars fighting an appeal system that is stacked against parents and children, or being required to volunteer inordinate amounts of time at school because their children have special needs.

Clearly, none of these measures should be necessary in an education system that purports to offer equality of opportunity. We offer the following recommendations as a means to bring about what should be the basic right of every student to a good education.

Recommendation 1: That the proposed amendments to the special education legislation be introduced to the Legislature as a priority item in the fall session in order that they may go to committee and public hearings as soon as possible.

Recommendation 2: That the Education Act be amended to ensure that all students, regardless of exceptionality, have the right to be educated in regular classes in their home schools—that is, the schools they would be attending if they were not labelled "exceptional"—with their chronological-age peers, and that supplementary supports and services be provided to exceptional students in integrated classes, as required, to meet individual program goals.

Recommendation 3: That a significant preamble to the Education Act be written which will clearly define its value base and provide a detailed statement of principles. It should include the role of education in enhancing community membership; the right of families to meaningful participation in their children's educational careers and to a fair appeal process; the basic assumption that all children can learn and develop; the principles of normalization and integration as the operating frame of reference for students with special needs; the consideration of individual strengths and needs, not labels, as the criteria for planning individual programs; the right of all children to an education that will prepare them to live and work in the real world, rather than in artificial, sheltered environments; the responsibility of educators to respect and value their students; a recognition that an

appropriate education means one that is geared towards meeting a student's individual needs and is not limited by a board's existing service delivery model.

In the pursuit of independence, academic goals may not necessarily take precedence over social and personal goals. The school has a responsibility to help students progress in all three areas of development.

1030

Recommendation 4: That all references to special education be deleted from the Education Act, regulations, ministry and school board documents and policies, teacher training courses and qualifications, etc.

We need to debunk the notion apparent in our present approach that two systems of education are necessary, regular and special. As Mrs. Bailey has pointed out, separate is inherently unequal.

The critical philosophical question is deceptively simple. Do we, as a society, value people who have special needs or do we not? Do we value all people?

All children require educational programs and services and deserve to receive them in their home schools. Until a commitment is made to this basic principle, the rights of children currently labelled "exceptional" will continue to be denied as they suffer the status of second class citizens in this province.

Mrs. Langdon: We have a brief video to show you that I think I will cut off at some point. Sometimes people say, "Can this really happen?" Yes, it can really happen.

[Audio-visual presentation]

Mrs. Langdon: Now this lady talks about the support the other teacher has already talked about so I am just going to whip past that section in the interest of time. But you can see a child and what is happening to the child.

[Audio-visual presentation]

Mrs. Langdon: We have one boy at the end that we are particularly enthusiastic about and we have to show you this.

In the interest of time, would it be OK to throw out a couple of questions now while I am doing this.

Madam Chairman: Certainly. The only thing is that Hansard cannot pick up your comments unless you are directly in front of the microphone.

[Interruption]

Mr. R. F. Johnston: That noise was not me clearing my throat.

Mrs. Langdon: This is the part we were waiting for.

[Audio-visual presentation]

1044

Mrs. Marinec-Jaffer: It is interesting to note that the film ends with this young man going to community college and we watch him going and taking his books. So I think the point is well taken.

Mr. Chairman: We have slightly less than 10 minutes left.

Mr. R. F. Johnston: Welcome everybody. It is nice to see you again. I am glad you were able to come. Just a couple of comments if I might for new members who have not been here for many years, they will not know all the work that this combination of groups have done with members trying to educate them around this issue. Unfortunately, some of their key spokespeople in the House were defeated last time and are not around now to take their role. I think of Evelyn Gigantes and David Warner in particular. I am hoping that over the next few months you will get to know these groups well. As their first recommendation says, they will try to put on as much pressure as they can to finally get the special education act back before the House. A lot of us have been waiting a long time for this to happen.

I think one of the things I like most about the notion of your presentation is—and it is a theme that has been coming up in other terms recently—the theme that comes up that all the goals that have been set down for education by the ministry—the 13 goals—are very individualistic and they are all focused on what clearly is going to be the average kid, it seems to me.

I have been asking a lot of my questions in terms of the need to look at more sort of collective social goals for education as well. In particular, I was talking about poverty. There are poor kids who do not make it through the system and who continually get lumped low and streamed low and that kind of thing, but what I liked a lot about your notion is that you bring a very collective philosophy to education, but from a different angle than I was taking it before, and that is that the community as a whole needs to be represented in the schools, as well, and that kind of acceptance and social acceptance of all groups is crucial to the education and thence the wellbeing of our society in the future, as well. I just want to say I really appreciate that notion.

I wonder if I can ask you a couple of difficult questions that are always asked of me by people who are opposed to full integration just to get

some of your responses to it. The first major one I always get is from parents of bright kids who look at exceptionality from the other end and want their kids separated to accelerate their growth in the school system. Can you give me a response that you would give to the parents of bright kids in terms of why an integrated schoolroom setting is better for their kids than what they want, which is the advanced course selection, etc. and the separation of that elite?

Mrs. Langdon: The very quick answer is that we have parents in the integration action group who are also parents of children who are labelled bright or gifted and they do not want that. They want the same thing as we want; they want their children to be integrated in regular classrooms for all the same reasons that we have mentioned before. That is the very quick answer but if somebody would like to do a longer one—

Mrs. Bailey: I think when we talk about children with this exceptionality at the other end of the spectrum, we talk about individualizing and enriching a focus on the individual needs and I think we really see the same approach being taken with children who are labelled bright, that there is no reason why within a classroom, with support, the teacher cannot enrich a program. I think also children at various levels of ability around different subjects, different issues, can often interact and teach and learn from each other, and I think that is an enriching experience.

But over and above all this meeting individual programming goals, I think we have to look at the overall good of the collective, and it is good for all of us that kids who are bright and who might go out there and be people who start businesses and get things going, grow up with people who have varying levels of ability and appreciate that kind of thing so they make room for them.

We think of people who are bright and streaming them off as high achievers, but they leave the rest behind and lock them out. So I think for the collective it is a good experience as well.

Mrs. Langdon: Another thing to point out is that usually parents of children who are labelled bright have options and the thing that we are most concerned about here today is that we do not have options. If your child is bright and you say, "Sorry, I do not want him to go to the segregated class," nobody yells and screams at you or puts you through an appeal process. They say, "Fine" and that is the end of it. We cannot do that; they can. We are asking for the same choices they have.

Mr. R. F. Johnston: That sort of answers one of my other short questions which is, a lot of parents with deaf kids want the choice rather than necessarily an integrated system. Some of them, in terms of taking the Gallaudet style approach to their self-expression and acting as a community on their own, would prefer that rather than to move into an integrated setting, but I gather from what you are just saying that a real choice is really what you want in the system.

Mrs. Langdon: Absolutely.

Mr. R. F. Johnston: Another thing is that we have some boards in Ontario, which I hope the committee gets to see as we go further on, that actually are doing this, as you said. But I have had some concerns registered to me, especially from teachers, although from some parents too, in the Wellington separate system and in Hamilton where this sort of thing has been done now for a number of years, about what the reality is in the classroom in terms of the resources that are really provided. What is happening is that the teacher often is left with as many students as he or she ever had before and the resource specialist becomes this new little elite in the school system that sort of circulates around, really is not present in the classroom on a regular basis. They become increasingly reliant on sort of teacher aid parents in the classroom rather than really having access to the kind of resources that are necessary. Therefore, everybody is being hurt by the lack of resources. I wonder if any of you can comment about that.

1050

Mrs. Dolmage: I would just like to make a comment that I think there needs to be some provincial control and understanding of how boards in the province are delivering services to kids. The board that I left in Muskoka identifies between 20 and 25 per cent of its students as exceptional and provides resources for those students by segregating them, transporting them throughout the area, depleting small schools of even enough students to survive in the name of special education. It is an incredible expense and abuse of resources, I believe.

The neighbouring board to which I have moved identifies three per cent of its students as exceptional and is providing for them by providing resources before withdrawal, so that resources can be delivered to the regular classroom for all the students so that there can be a more individualized approach for all the students in that regular classroom.

Mr. R. F. Johnston: I am be glad to defer in the interests of time.

Madam Chairman: Thank you. I appreciate that, since we do have five members who have indicated they wish to ask questions. With approximately two minutes left, I have a feeling we are going to go over in our time, which we are certainly willing to do.

Mr. Reycraft: Like Mr. Johnston, I too have had a number of opportunities to dialogue with the individuals in the group before us this morning. It is nice to see them back in the Legislature and here before the select committee.

I have a couple of questions that I want to put forward, though. In the first part of your formal presentation, you referred often to forced segregation and mandatory segregation as something you view as undesirable. Yet later in your recommendations, you talked about eliminating all references to special education. That somehow implied to me that we were looking at the other extreme, which is forced integration.

I am trying to just get a handle on exactly what the group is saying. Do you agree that parents should have choice with respect to whether or not their kids are integrated into regular programs or whether they are in segregated classes, or do you think that integration should be mandatory for all kids?

Mrs. Marinco-Jaffer: Because we have suffered from mandatory segregation, I do not think we can then in fairness say to all parents, "You must integrate your child." We believe from our own experience, and our own groups believe, that integration leads to a better way of life for our children, so it is our preference, but we do not feel it has to be mandatory for all students.

When we talk about taking the "special" out of "special education," what we are really talking about within the framework of integration is allowing the special education services, in which we do believe—we do believe they have some value; they have things to offer—but taking these services out of a slot that streams and gives children specific labels means that they are available to all students in the classroom. So the special education resources can, in a typical classroom, be used for specific programming around, say, a couple of children who have specific needs and really do require extra support.

Within a typical classroom, there are always another five to 10 children who are floating around needing extra supports, in either some academics or social kinds of things, emotional supports. Those children who are in the regular stream have not really been able to get access to

special education services because they have not been labelled. What we want to do is make those services available to all the children in that classroom.

Certainly there will be parents who for some reason or another will want their children to be segregated, and I suppose that they have to make that decision; but certainly for the children with the labels that we have experience with, we feel that for our children and for our communities integration is what is necessary so that our children come out at the other end well served.

Mr. Reycraft: If we followed your fourth recommendation and eliminated all references to special education in the Education Act and teacher training courses and so on—by the way, I hope I am not addressing this line of questioning because I feel threatened that you have asked for withdrawal of my own specialist certification, but how would we be able to provide the segregated special education services for those parents who wanted that service for their children?

Mrs. Marinco-Jaffer: I suppose—and you are asking me really to fantasize—if all classes had special education services available to them, then any class that was operating under the auspices of the school board would be entitled to those services, whether they were segregated or integrated. Do you understand what I said?

Mrs. Dolmage: We are suggesting that it is artificial to say there are some regular students and there are some special students and therefore all services in every school board in the province should be divided right down the middle somehow. What we are saying is that the most important label for any student is his own name, his own description and his own needs and strengths, not a category that puts him on either the special side or the regular side.

Really, the best kind of education system does not bother with that, which is costing an incredible amount of money when you consider how many students are identified and just slotted into one system or another. What we are saying is the best system talks about the individual in the classroom.

Mr. Reycraft: One other question, if I may, and it follows the line of Mr. Johnston's questioning. Does what you are advocating not require all teachers to be skilled and trained in dealing with the needs of all children? That is certainly not the situation we have at the present time within the system in the province.

Mrs. Langdon: As a teacher, I would like to answer that one, if I may. I think one of the

parents in the film indicated the same kind of thing. There is a myth out there that there are all these experts who know all kinds of things. I have taken all the special education courses and I would be qualified right now to go to a school board and say, "Would you hire me to be superintendent of all your special ed teachers?" I know much more about teaching kids with special needs from having spent five years with my daughter than I do from the special ed courses.

I am not faulting the courses per se, but it is your personality, it is your humanity, it is who you are, it is how you think, it is how you are able to work with a class, how you are able to divide kids up, how you are able to think and program and plan. I think it is the strength of your convictions, your belief that these children have a right to be here. Those are the kinds of things that will help a teacher integrate a kid. It is the attitudes and that kind of thing which are going to make much more difference than all the special ed courses in the world.

Mr. Reycraft: I do not argue with what you say, but is it not unrealistic to assume that all teachers would be able to deal with kids with those needs as ably as you are?

Mrs. Langdon: Oh yes; and Dr. Woronko will talk about that.

Dr. Woronko: I would like to add to that. A teacher who is receiving a student with challenging needs in his or her class receives, if the system is working properly, support for the needs of that student, so that teacher does not have to be aware of the needs of all other students, of all exceptionalities and all the variances that can occur. He has to be told only about what this particular student needs. This is how it has worked out in practice. It is getting to know the individual and getting assistance from the resources of the school board in serving that student.

Bailey
Mrs. Marlene Jaffer: I think that because each of us has had the pleasure, and I mean that sincerely, of living with a child who has been labelled exceptional, we know that while the label—if you go to an expert or a book which says, "What does it mean to have Down syndrome? What does it mean to have autism?" and then you read all these things about what this could be like, it is a terribly frightening and discouraging kind of thing.

But when you live with a child who has one of these labels and play with other children and learn to love him, then you realize this whole frightening myth of differentness is really a

myth. All it basically means is that some kids need some help to talk, some kids need some help to walk, some need some strategies for learning and some need some help in making connections to other kids.

The myth of this differentness, which is promoted by all this segregation and our medical community, is very frightening. That is why parents get so frightened initially when a child is sometimes born into their family, because we were also sold stuff about how different these people are. But they are not, they are the same as us. The kinds of things that get us up in the morning and make our lives good and the things we want to achieve for ourselves are the same for them. It is no different.

Mr. Villeneuve: I sat on another committee with my colleague Mr. Johnston. I have seen this group here before and quite obviously it did not bear a lot of fruit. Let's hope his visit this time does bear fruit.

Two of you this morning suggested that the public system was not able to meet the particular requirements as you saw them. I would like you to expand a bit. Why was the separate system able to accept children labelled as different or special, yet the public system saw difficulty there? Is there a different mechanism? Is there a different philosophy? Could you in not too many hours explain to this committee why this happened?

1100

Dr. Woronko: I will address that. One of the things we think is the reason is that the separate school boards have started somewhat later in establishing classes for students with special needs. Many of them previously purchased services from public school boards, so they were starting completely from scratch. They had no vested interest in established bureaucracies, so they were a lot more flexible in the way they would approach it; whereas school boards that have superintendents of special education and many psychologists have established segregated schools as well as segregated classes. They have an investment there in philosophy, resources and so on and it is very hard for them to say: "We have established a special school here and somebody does not want to go to it. We think it appropriate that the students goes there." There is that tradition.

Also, there is a component, I think, in that some of the Catholic school boards are practising what they preach. Some of them have this philosophy that all children belong and they try to do their best to make sure the various disabled

children have the opportunity to be alongside their typical peers.

Mrs. Langdon: I think it is important for you to realize too that this is not a public/separate issue. This happens to be in one particular region that Sam and I both live in where we have that option. However, there are lots of separate boards that are not integrating kids and there are beginning to be probably three public boards that we know of that are starting maybe a pilot project, one or two kids here and there. There are two or three that are very slowly beginning to integrate a few kids; so this is not a Catholic/non-Catholic issue.

Mr. Villeneuve: If I hear you right then, we are talking about a very inflexible inside hierarchy within systems that do not want to be disturbed.

Mrs. Marince-Jaffer: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much for coming today. We did have a number of other members who have questions, but unfortunately, we have long ago run out of time and we do have several other presenters who are patiently waiting. In fairness, I think we will go on to the next. Thank you for coming. I do urge any members who have questions that have not been answered to contact Lynda Langdon or any of the other members of the group and I am sure they will be more than willing to offer us additional information.

Mrs. Langdon: We would be. We have put our phone numbers on the front of the brief, so please do not hesitate to call any of us. We have a little gift for you. Unfortunately, Random House ran out of copies of this book, but we are going to be getting several more copies and we will be sending one to each of you. In the meantime, Andrea would like to present this to you. The rest of the members will receive one when Random House gets its stock. This tells the story of integration.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much, Andrea. That is lovely. This takes me back to my younger days.

Mrs. Langdon: It tells our story very simply.

Madam Chairman: Thank you. It was very kind of you to know that the members sometimes need things done in a very articulated and very clear manner. While you have certainly done that, this will be the clincher.

Mrs. Langdon: It is not meant to be an insult, really. It is a very good book.

Madam Chairman: I think there are a number of us who have grown up on Sesame Street; so we certainly do not consider it an insult.

Thank you very much. Would the City of Toronto Residents' Liaison Committee on Assessment Reform come forward. Thank you very much, gentlemen. Please introduce yourselves. I know Mr. Milbrandt from past discussions and meetings, but perhaps you would like to introduce yourselves for purposes of electronic Hansard and then begin whenever you ready.

I do notice that you have quite an extensive brief. In the interest of time, so that the members will have sufficient time at the end to ask questions, you might like to précis certain parts rather than present it as is, but I will certainly leave that up to your discretion.

CITY OF TORONTO RESIDENTS' LIAISON COMMITTEE ON ASSESSMENT REFORM

Mr. MacGregor: Thank you. My name is Storm MacGregor.

Mr. Ritch: My name is Dale Ritch, from ward 3, in the west end of the city of Toronto.

Mr. Milbrandt: I am George Milbrandt from ward 10. We are all members of the City of Toronto Residents' Liaison Committee on Assessment Reform.

Mr. MacGregor: Madam Chairman and members of the committee, the Residents' Liaison Committee on Assessment Reform was appointed last year by the city of Toronto with representation from all the city wards. The reason we are here now, appearing before a provincial committee that deals with education philosophy and fundamental goals, is because we believe that a review of education philosophy and fundamental goals can only be meaningful if the resources to make it a reality are dealt with at the same time.

To illustrate the point we want to make in terms of extra burdens that many boards face, we only have to focus on the need for special language programs in Metropolitan Toronto.

Metro school boards do not have the resources to provide adequate English-as-a-second-language service. The local boards have to find the funding from property taxes, but can only stretch that resource so far. More than 5,000 students in Scarborough alone did not get the language assistance they needed last year because of lack of funding.

Twenty five per cent of all refugees and immigrants who come to Canada each year settle in Metro Toronto. Last year, almost 4,600 students who could not speak English enrolled in Toronto schools. In North York, 18,000 students require special English programs; 4,500 are refugees who often need extensive and expensive