

Quality Education: "It's Not a Choice!"

by Marsha Forest & Jack Pearpoint

Segregation is NOT acceptable. It is bad pedagogy (for ALL children), it is uneconomic, immoral and unethical. In short, segregation must stop. This newspaper is about how to integrate children, end segregation, and improve educational outcomes for all.

Annie, Tommy, Jay, Andreas, Katherine, Becky, Erica, Mark, Greg, Miller, Katherine, Peter... the list is too long and too painful to produce. These are the names of children who have been rejected by the public schools of Canada and the USA. They are black and white, girls and boys, youth and teenagers. In common is their parent's simple dream of having their children accepted and educated in one quality school alongside their neighbors. In common is their rejection from the schools of our nations. In common is the label "disabled" pinned on them, like the yellow star pinned on people labeled Jewish, and the pink triangle pinned on people labeled homosexual, during that terrible period called World War II.

The Nuremberg Trials confirmed to the world that pinning yellow stars and pink triangles on people was unacceptable. It was ruled a crime against "humanity". But today, no Nuremberg trials have ruled that IQ scores and disability labels are often death sentences to the children we "place" into "disability" boxes. Special education is one such disability box which we know now is neither special nor indeed educational in any sense of the word. This is no longer hot "news." The data has been in for several years. The outcome for people labeled "disabled" is a life of loneliness, poverty, and joblessness - not an outcome any family would choose for their sons or daughters. Despite this data, segregation still thrives and is considered an "acceptable" educational placement and practice. It is still OK to talk of "them" and "us." It is still a choice.

No matter where we go, people are talking about the "Butwhatabout" Kids. Some of the presently popular euphemisms include hard to serve, at-risk, etc. Why don't we just admit it outright. These are children and teenagers who scare us to death, who threaten our mortality and who make us vulnerable and nervous. That is natural, normal and human. What is unnatural, abnormal, unacceptable and inhuman is our systematic "boxing" and subsequent rejection of the people - or the illusions about people that we fear. We encourage people to square off with the fear - conquer it, and welcome all people back to our communities - complete with their mortality, vulnerability and incredible capacities to teach us about what is important in life.

THE MONSTER WE CALL FEAR

The first task is to face this monster called fear. Mythology tells us that most monsters are slain merely by facing them. We don't tell teachers to give up their fears. Rather, we suggest they face them - head on; take up a mighty sword and slay them, one by one.

FEAR is the most frequent word we hear as we talk with educators. "Don't be afraid," many people say. But not us. We encourage teachers to, "Be afraid! Talk about the fear. Name it! Get it on the table!" When the fear monster is out in the open, you can kill it, go around it, or learn to ignore it. You can manage it. But as long as the fear is unnamed, the fantasy will frighten us more than any reality. Fear of the unknown, fear of failure, fear of not knowing what to do, fear of mortality. These are real fears. Once faced, fears can be overcome.

When we meet fearful teachers, we offer a little "monster dust". We propose an alternative to these fearful human mortals who are just like us. Our "monster powders" are state of the art strategies that build confidence and a better future for all our children. MAPS, PATH and CIRCLES of FRIENDS are tools which take the responsibility off one person and puts planning in the hands of a team comprised of school personnel, family and the children themselves.

We no longer have to prove that quality education can work. It can. It is now up to others to justify why they cannot deliver quality education to all children.

REVERSING REJECTION - FULL INCLUSION FOR ALL

The Centre for Integrated Education and Community is devoted to reversing the rejection of the Beckys, Katherines, Judiths, Suneels, Sunitas, etc. We are developing state of the art strategies and training workshops to help systems and individuals reverse the terrible tide of segregation and engage the challenge and thrill of full inclusion for all. Because we are white water canoe and kayak enthusiasts, we see the path like a white water rapid - full of rocks and churning water - but a great challenge and lots of fun!

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