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Each Belongs:
A rationale for full inclusion

Abstract

The issue of special vs. regular education, which has dominated the field of mental retardation for more than thirty years, is no longer an issue. Children with mental disabilities can and should be fully included in regular classrooms and schools. Educators are now focusing their attention on implementation: developing, testing, and refining their knowledge about how to facilitate the full integration of students with disabilities in the most effective and responsible manner. This paper presents a rationale for full integration, exploring a range of perspectives–historical, human, ethical, legal, developmental, social, and educational. The benefits to children with disabilities, to their nondisabled peers, and to society are discussed.

Résumé

La question de l'éducation de l'enfance en difficulté par rapport à l'enseignement normal qui domine le secteur de l'arriération mentale depuis plus de trente ans, ne constitue plus un problème. Les enfants atteints de difficulté mentale peuvent et doivent être entièrement intégrés dans les classes et les écoles du courant dominant. Les éducateurs se penchent aujourd'hui sur la façon d'étoffer, de mettre à l'essai et de peaufiner leurs connaissances sur la façon de faciliter l'intégration des élèves en difficulté de la manière la plus efficace et la plus responsable possible. Les auteurs de cet article établissent le bien-fondé de l'intégration complète, en analysant tout un éventail de perspectives—historiques, humaines, éthiques, juridiques, développementales, sociales et éducatives. Ils analysent les avantages qui en découlent pour les enfants en difficulté, pour leurs camarades sans handicap et pour la société en général.

The issue of "special *vs.* regular" education, which has dominated the field of mental retardation for more than thirty years, is yesterday's issue. Whether individuals with the label "mental disability" can and should be fully included in family, school, and community life is no longer the question. As we move into the twenty-first century, educators are now attending to questions of implementation: developing, testing, and refining our knowledge about how to facilitate the full integration of students with disabilities in ways that are responsible and effective for all involved.

Why have so many educators agreed that integration is a valued and desired goal? The purpose of this paper is to present a rationale for integration, drawn from a rich array of perspectives – historical, human, ethical, legal, developmental, social, and educational.

To begin, it is important to clarify terminology. The terms "educational integration," "mainstreaming", and "full inclusion" are used interchangeably in this paper. By definition, these terms mean that: (a) children with the disability are educated for all or most of the day in an ordinary classroom with their age peers, (b) the educational program is adapted to meet their social and academic needs, and (c) the child and teacher receive the support and assistance they need to succeed. These terms **never** mean simply placing a child with challenging needs in an ordinary classroom without adaptations or supports.

The model of full inclusion differs from the cascade model, prevalent during the past two decades. Using a cascade model, students with challenging needs are assessed, categorized, and (depending upon level of disability) placed into service options that vary in the degree of integration with others— from regular class, to special class, to special school, to institution. A child may be bussed far from his or her home in order to "fit" into a class for "mildly", "moderately", or "severely" mentally disabled children. In our opinion, this is an outdated model that is based on values, such as, only some children belong, homogeneity in classrooms is desirable and achievable, and segregated education is acceptable for students who are "different".

In contrast, in a model stressing full inclusion, students with challenging needs attend ordinary school with their brothers and sisters, neighbours, and friends. They are assessed to determine strengths and needs; this assessment is done for planning and programming purposes, rather than for placement purposes. A team of regular and special educators plan curriculum to ensure social and academic needs are being met; the child, parents, and other students may be significantly involved in the planning and implementation process. This model is based on values, such as, it is important to make schools into communities in which all children are welcome, diversity in the classroom is desirable as well as realistic, and segregation is unacceptable.

Thus, the underlying philosophy of educational integration is that "each belongs" and that schools can make accommodations to ensure that a child with special needs belongs.

> Regular education for all students means creating a community in which each person belongs. It is first and foremost a social ethic of acceptance of diversity, followed by common sense curriculum planning. (Forest & Lusthaus, 1989, p.44)

Historical Context

Noted historian, advocate, and Professor Emeritus Gunnar Dybwad has characterized this century as a struggle toward progressive inclusion for people who have been labelled as mentally disabled. Inclusive education is one part of an overall movement to bring people who have been left out back into our communities and into our lives.

Early years

The turn of the century was perhaps the blackest of times in the history of how society has treated people with disabilities. During the early 1900s, scientists viewed people with a mental disability as subhuman organisms, referring to them as animals and vegetables, or even worse, as garbage or refuse. In 1916 thousands of Canadian citizens signed a petition to the Prime Minister and the legislatures of each province that called for a study on how to control the great menace that the "feeble-minded" presented to the community (National Institute on Mental Retardation, [NIMR], 1981).

This was the era of the eugenics movement, a movement conceived on the faulty notion that society's problems could be reduced by improving the racial strain of the human species. Eugenicists promoted the myth that mental retardation was the cause of poverty, crime, and all social evils. Early in the century, leaders decided upon two possible means of eliminating the problem: sterilization and lifelong segregation.

Within a few short years, some legislatures in Canada and the United States had passed compulsory sterilization laws and many people with mental disabilities were sterilized and warehoused in large, isolated, barren institutions where they were abandoned, mistreated, and left to die. As Cranefield (1966) said of the eugenics movement:

> Seldom in the history of medicine have so many intelligent and well-meaning men embarked on so vicious and brutal a program with so little scientific foundation for their actions. (p.13)

Laws were passed that mandated permanent commitment; residents could only be released by court order. In the institutions, people were stripped of their most fundamental rights. There was no right to privacy, no right to property; there was censorship of mail and restricted visiting. Sexes were segregated; and institutions were surrounded by high fences. There were no programs or activities.

> We will probably never know the full extent of the crimes perpetrated against mentally handicapped people and humanity itself within the walls of residential institutions around the world. (NIMR, 1981, p.16)

The beginning of change

The 1960s and 1970s saw the beginning of change and "the end of a long tragic era when disabled children were to be hidden away in shame and fear" (NIMR, 1981, p.18). Many factors at work during these decades resulted in a movement to bring people out of institutions and into the community. A number of authors had documented the horrible, abusive treatment in many institutions (Blatt & Kaplan, 1966; Braginsky & Braginsky, 1971; Wolfensberger, 1975). This led policy makers in both the United States and Canada to make improvements of life for people with mental disabilities a national concern. Parents of children with special needs began to organize and lobby for their children's right to live in the community and be educated in noninstitutional settings. Leaders in the field of mental retardation began to define a philosophy of "normalization" and integration, which called for people with mental retardation to have the opportunity to lead culturally valued lives (Nirje, 1969; Wolfensberger, 1972). Finally, courts around the world began to articulate the rights of people with disabilities and their societies' responsibilities to them.

By the middle of the century, the movement had begun to bring people with mental disabilities out of the institutions, but their entrance into the community was usually an entrance into special settings, such as, group homes, sheltered workshops, and special schools or special classes. Community "integration" was still very segregated.

Although segregation within the community was not as blatant as segregation behind institutional walls, it still had a negative effect. It continued to keep people away from each other. Furthermore, researchers later found that specialized, segregated settings within the community did not succeed in preparing people with disabilities to live in the real world. Large group homes continued to have institutional cultures; sheltered workshops did not provide people with the skills they needed for real work and real jobs; special schools did not provide children with the skills they needed to integrate with others (Bruininks & Lakin, 1985; Certo, Haring, & York, 1984; Novak & Heal, 1980).

In all, progress toward integration was made during these decades, but opportunities for mentally disabled individuals to play valued social roles and to participate fully as community members were very limited.

The current era

Since the 1980s, there has been a vast effort across North America to overcome the continued segregation of people with disabilities and to facilitate their full inclusion into the fabric of the community. People who are labelled "mentally disabled" can now live in homes that are truly integrated into the community, work in jobs that are part of the actual work force, and go to school in classrooms with nondisabled children (Taylor, Bogdan, & Racino, 1991; Villa, Thousand, Stainback, & Stainback, 1992; Wehman & Moon, 1988).

In each of these integration efforts, the underlying approach is to provide individuals with the support they need to fully participate in "normal life," in valued roles, in relationship with others. This is an ideal towards which people in the field of mental retardation continue to strive. Integration in school is one part of this overall movement, the next logical step in the progression to full inclusion.

Human Perspectives: The Voice of *People First*

Members of *People First,* a self-advocacy organization of individuals who have mental disabilities, many of whom have lived in institutions, have explained clearly that full inclusion means being recognized as a person and being accepted as having an ordinary life like everyone else. Specifically, it means enjoying the same rights as others; being able to go to school, work, and the movies; having a real job with real pay; making choices about where to live; having a say over one's body; being called by one's name rather than "retarded"; and being given the opportunity to make a contribution to others (French, 1991).

People First, now ten years old, is a strong and powerful force in defining what is "right" for people with a mental disability. Says Barb Goode, founding member of *People First*:

> People feel alright as long as they are loved, needed and included by their family, friends, and society. . . . Most people with a mental handicap don't have a chance to be alright. (G. Allan Roeher Institute, 1991, p.1)

Members of *People First* have clear goals about how they want to be treated and are advocating successfully to have those goals met. They lobbied

successfully to have the name of the Canadian Association for the Mentally Retarded changed to the Canadian Association for Community Living, a change that reflects both their negative feelings about being called "retarded" and their passionate desire to be fully included in community life. In 1986, they testified before the Supreme Court of Canada on behalf of Eve, a woman with a mental disability who was fighting for her right not to be sterilized without her consent. The Supreme Court upheld her plea.

Members of *People First* are speaking in public about their experiences, and to educate the community at large about the devastating effects of being called "retarded", and the demeaning results of being segregated. They report that separation from their siblings and neighbours into special schools and special classes has been very harmful to them. They speak very clearly about the need for full inclusion into ordinary schools and classrooms.

Although researchers and professionals have long concerned them-selves with serving people labelled "mentally retarded", the people with the label have rarely been consulted about what they want; on the contrary, their choices have been restricted and their voices repressed. Now, their voices can add new meaning to our concepts of research and service (Jackson, 1991; Lord, 1990). It is important that as researchers, educators, and policy makers, we listen carefully to what people with disabilities are telling us about the need to be included.

Ethical Perspectives: A Question of What's Right

When a single person, who has not broken any law, is excluded from the mainstream of school and community life, all of society becomes vulnerable. (Stainback & Stainback, 1990, p.7)

Whether a child with a mental disability or any other challenging need should be able to go to school with others is an important ethical and moral question. Biklen stated in 1985 that the issue of integration for students with disabilities is a question of morality, not science:

Science cannot offer a yes or no decision on integration. . . . At the time of the American Civil War, should Abraham Lincoln have asked to see the scientific evidence on the benefits of ending slavery? Should he have consulted with "the experts," perhaps a sociologist, an economist, a political scientist? Of course not. Slavery is not now and was not then an issue for science. It is a moral issue. (p.16)

Research on the effects of integrated education is essential, but should not be the only basis of judgment in this issue.

> Research cannot be expected to solve problems that are substan-
> tially moral in character. The fundamental choices we face, as a
> society, in our efforts to come to terms with extremes in indi-
> vidual differences, are not going to be resolved by research.
> Having decided what it is we must do, then research is one means
> available that may tell us how to do it; that is all we can promise,
> nothing more. That is why research needs public policy.
> (Baumeister, 1981, p. 456)

Many authors have likened the struggle for school integration for
children with disabilities to the civil rights struggle for racial integration in the
United States. In the case of *Brown vs. the Board of Education* (1954), Chief
Justice Earl Warren stated that separateness in education is inherently unequal,
and can cause irreparable damage. John W. Davis, the chief advocate for the
defense, argued that if segregation for black children was unconstitutional,
surely it would be found that segregation of children defined as disabled is also
unacceptable (Gilhool, 1976).

Parents, professionals, politicians, and community members who are
working for the full inclusion of students with disabilities into regular educa-
tion believe that it is simply unfair and morally wrong to segregate any students,
including those defined as disabled, from the mainstream of regular education.
The goal of fully including students with disabilities reflects an important
societal value, a value that includes maximizing student development, but goes
beyond it to creating a just society.

> The inclusion and participation of all people in the social and
> political life of the community is at once a fundamental value of
> democratic societies, and the principle means by which such
> societies are sustained. (Peck, 1991, p.5)

Legal Perspectives: Justice and Equality

The legal concepts of justice and equality provide a further rationale for
full educational integration. The idea that persons with intellectual disabilities
are people with human and legal rights is a fairly new concept. Until recently,
they were not considered to have rights, and "most courts simply would not
look into the area of mental health care or the treatment of the developmentally
disabled" (Martin, 1978, p.5). Recently, Stephen Lewis, noted Canadian
human rights advocate, commented on the fight that persons with a mental
disability have pursued to gain their full citizenship rights: "It is a struggle that
will never end. . . . But rights are not just the privilege of a few," he wrote. "They
belong equally to all of us" (Lewis, 1991, p.iii).

In the 1960s, growing interest in human rights increased consciousness
about the rights of people with disabilities. By 1975, the United Nations had
proclaimed the *Declaration on the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons*, and

the *Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons,* which included the rights to life, to community living, to education, to work, to vote, to marry, to become a parent, to enter into contracts, and to have representation in court.

By the 1970s and 1980s, advocates were working to entrench these human rights into legal rights. In 1977, the *Canadian Human Rights Act* stated that no one should be discriminated against for reasons of physical or mental disability; this Act only applies to matters under federal jurisdiction. The provisions of provincial human rights codes provide analogous protection for matters which fall under provincial jurisdiction. On April 17, 1985, Section 15 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* came into effect, prohibiting discrimination based on physical and mental disabilities for every level of government in Canada. Canada is the only country in the world that constitutionally guarantees the rights of persons with a mental disability to legal equality (Endicott, 1990).

The Canadian Charter is having a dramatic effect on issues of full inclusion all across Canada (MacKay, 1987; Poirier & Goguen, 1986). Now the question of whether children with disabilities can go to school with others is not only a moral, pedagogical, or research question, but it is also a legal one. Do students with disabilities have the right to go to the same school as others and receive an appropriate education in that setting? Is it discriminatory to deny them access to education with others? What is considered fair treatment?

Since the Canadian Charter was passed, many important cases involving children with mental disabilities who have been denied access to integrated school situations have been prepared for court (Porter & Richler, 1991). These cases were settled before they got to court; the children were accepted into integrated schools with support for the children and the teachers. In 1991, in Quebec, in the first case brought before the newly created Québec Human Rights Tribunal (Re: *David M. and Commission scolaire Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu*), the tribunal ruled that David M., aged 9, was the victim of direct and indirect discrimination under the Québec Charter and ordered the school board to integrate him into a regular classroom, with necessary adaptation and support (Smith, 1991).

The question of whether a student with a mental disability, including a moderate or severe disability, has the right to go to school with everyone else is new. Until now, officials at each school board have placed students in the setting provided for the child's "category" of disability, usually one that was available in the existing system of services. The 1991 ruling in Quebec, which is being appealed, may change this practice significantly, requiring school boards to respect the rights of the individual child to have access to regular school programs, with modifications to meet their needs.

Developmental Perspectives: Benefits to Integrated Students

Do students with special needs benefit more from regular class or special class placements? Although there has been a variety of conflicting data that covers more than a thirty-year period, there is now consensus that students with a mental disability can develop maximally socially and academically when they are integrated in regular classes in which accommodations are made to meet their individual needs (Gottlieb, Alter, & Gottlieb, 1991; Halvorsen & Guess, 1991; Madden & Slavin, 1983).

Students with mild disabilities

During the 1960s and 1970s a series of "efficacy studies" was conducted to determine whether it was better for students defined as mildly mentally retarded to learn in regular or in special classes. The efficacy studies were a response to the proliferation of special classes for mildly disabled students, and to the disproportionately high percentage of minority students placed in special classes. Educators began to question whether these classes were doing more harm than good to the students in them (Dunn, 1968; Johnson, 1962).

Dozens of studies were published and their findings were mixed (Carlberg & Kavale, 1980; Corman & Gottlieb, 1978; Semmel, Gottlieb, & Robinson, 1979). Most researchers found that students in special classes did not have better outcomes than comparable students in regular classes. These findings shook the special education establishment and raised questions about the assumptions underlying special education. Why wouldn't these students do better in small, homogeneous classes, with specially trained teachers and special education methods and materials, than in regular classes? Researchers hypothesized that perhaps students did not learn more because there may have been lowered expectations, watered-down curriculum, and a lack of peer models in the special classes.

Other studies found that students in special classes had better academic outcomes and better self-concepts than those in regular classes; these authors suggested that students mainstreamed into regular classes were being deprived of the attention they could receive in special classes. Many authors noted that the differences in the findings from the efficacy studies may be due to a number of conceptual and methodological problems in the studies themselves.

In 1983, Madden and Slavin published a comprehensive review of the efficacy studies in the *Review of Educational Research*. Selecting only studies that had adequate methodological controls, they found that children with a mild mental disability performed better academically and socially when they were in regular classrooms with modified curriculum than when they were in special

classrooms. They found that several instructional and organizational processes enhanced social and academic outcomes for integrated students: individualizing curriculum, using cooperative learning methods, teaching social skills, and facilitating interaction among the children.

In 1987, Gartner and Lipsky outlined the negative effects of segregated schools and classes. They called for the creation of one unified system of education, with improved instructional practices, to replace the dual system of regular and special education. They stressed the need for appropriate support to regular educators and special-needs students to allow for adequate modification of the curriculum.

Gottlieb, Alter, and Gottlieb (1991) reiterated the extreme importance of considering instructional processes when assessing the outcomes of special *vs.* mainstreamed education. "The literature has shifted from research on mainstreaming as placement . . . to research on mainstreaming as an instructional program" (p.104). After reviewing research using this paradigm, they concluded that the data on mainstreaming are quite clear. When effective programming is in place, and when a variety of steps are taken by the school district to increase the chances for success, mainstreamed students have beneficial results. Placement in regular classes, in the absence of these processes, does not result in improved social or academic outcomes.

Skrtic (1991), in the *Harvard Educational Review*, added to the concept that special class placement had little to add to the improvement of education for students with special needs. He called for a rethinking of the process of education, recommending that educators move from a rigid, bureaucratic system to a more flexible, collaborative system of decision-making, in order to meet all students' educational needs in one unified system.

Students with severe disabilities

In the early part of this debate over special *vs.* regular class placement, no one seriously considered the integration of students who were labelled severely disabled. However, students with severe disabilities, including severe intellectual problems, have been integrated more and more frequently into ordinary schools and, often, into ordinary classrooms (Ford & Davern, 1989; Forest, 1984, 1987; Giangreco & Putnam, 1991; Sailor, 1989).

In 1991, Halvorsen and Sailor published a thorough review of studies concerned with school integration for students with severe disabilities and concluded: "Virtually all available research reviews indicate better educational outcomes associated with integrated placements as compared to their segregated counterparts" (1991, p.143). They cited the following summary of benefits of integrated education: improved social and affective development, improved interactive development, increased skill generalization, improved parental expectations for their child's future, increases in the proportion of

objectives obtained, improved attitudes of nondisabled students to peers with disabilities, improved future work earnings, improved proportion of normalized living arrangements.

In sum, researchers have found that students with a mental disability benefit socially and academically when integrated into regular classes in regular schools, keeping in mind that integration by definition includes adaptation of the curriculum and adequate support for students and teachers, not just physical placement.

Social Perspectives: Benefits to Nondisabled Students

May and Richard, who had been in a special class for students with moderate mental disabilities, are now part of a class at St. Francis School in Kitchener, Ontario. Their peers report:

> Ever since I became friends with Richard, we're always talking and fooling around. So like they're no different than. . . the rest of us; just maybe on the outside. May has feelings. . . . She's a lot smarter than I thought she was. . . . She's a person. . . . She can cope with her problems. . . If she gets hurt, she'll tell people. She won't just keep it bottled up inside. . . . And she's a person, not just a thing that you're supposed to be nice to, but an actual person like everyone else! (Meyer, Peck, & Brown, 1991, p.xvii)

Snow (1989) reminds us that all children are gifted, and when given the opportunity, they can bring their gifts to the community. When they are excluded, the community suffers the loss of their unique gifts.

Individuals with special needs, when given the opportunity, can play the valued social role of contributor (Lusthaus, 1986; Perske, 1988). A number of researchers have studied the positive contributions that people with disabilities make to their families and communities. Turnbull (1985) and Cunningham (1982) found that within the family system, children with disabilities often provide a source of joy, pride, and family strengthening. Perske (1980) discovered that adults with developmental disabilities who moved into well-run group homes enhanced their neighbourhoods by drawing neighbours closer together; and Vanier (1971) reported that communities with disabled people were enriched by their gifts of openness, love, and trust.

These same themes have emerged in many schools that have integrated students with challenging needs. Educators have stressed how the students' presence and participation have enriched the entire school (Brown, Ford, Nisbet, Sweet, Donnelan, & Gruenewald, 1983).

Researchers have identified a number of important social benefits for students attending ordinary schools where children are integrated (Bogden &

Taylor, 1989; Murray-Seegart, 1989; Snell, 1991; Voeltz, 1982). Benefits to nondisabled students include: improved self-concept; increased understanding, acceptance, and tolerance of differences; increased empathy toward others; and development of personal principles. Nondisabled students express feelings of reduced anxiety and fear towards others; they develop confidence in their own ability to act appropriately in interpersonal relationships; and they learn to understand and develop friendships with their disabled peers. For example, Peck, Donaldson, and Pezzoli (1988) found that high school students said that their experiences with severely disabled students played an important part in how they developed their personal values and principles of moral action.

Snell (1991) summarized literature regarding the benefits to nondisabled students integrated with severely disabled students and indicated that the nondisabled had: (a) improved expectation for, and attitudes toward, students with disabilities; (b) enhanced capabilities at facing parenting due to being better informed and from having a positive base of experience; and (c) greater appreciation of human diversity and individual differences in achievement that are a part of life.

Furthermore, several studies have indicated that the academic outcomes of nondisabled children are not compromised by well-planned integration; in fact, in situations where teachers have applied the concept of individualization of instruction, nondisabled students have improved their academic outcomes (Madden & Slavin, 1983; Putnam, Rynders, Johnson, & Johnson, 1989).

In all, educating students with the label "disability" in ordinary classrooms may be providing all students with opportunities to grow in tolerance and acceptance of differences. Students may be learning a lesson in humanity that is difficult to teach. Almost all studies find that nondisabled students discover, to their surprise, that their classmates with disabilities are "just like us". The students' ability to grasp the profound essence of their sameness, with those they view as different, may be a crucial lesson for everyone's future.

Educational Perspectives: Is Full Inclusion Possible?

It is clear from the wealth of documentation that it is possible to achieve integrated education, at least in systems that plan and implement systemic change efforts to reach this goal. School boards throughout Canada, the United States, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand are implementing various models of inclusive education. They are not just attempting to include students with disabilities into regular schools, but are working on restructuring their educational systems to make them more responsive to a diverse student population in a multicultural society. As George Flynn, leading Canadian educator, states:

> In my view integration is probably the most important issue in education today because it provides for a focus for restructuring our schools. . . . It develops attitudes about how people work with

> other people. . . how people live in our society together, support
> one another, and develop community. (Flynn & Forest, 1987)

Educators and researchers have stressed that there is no single recipe for integration, no one way that is right. In schools that have restructured to implement an integrated system, many practices have been found effective. These include organizational processes, such as, unifying special and regular education, redefining professional roles and responsibilities, developing collaborative team structures, developing in-service models and coaching processes, and creating support networks for students and teachers. Effective instructional processes include: individualized and adapted instruction, cooperative learning, peer tutoring, friendship circles, transitional planning, and integrated support services (Giangreco & Putnam, 1991; Lipsky & Gartner, 1989; Porter & Richler, 1991; Stainback, Stainback, & Forest, 1989; Villa, Thousand, Stainback, & Stainback, 1992).

Some question the wisdom of pursuing this educational change without a great deal more research and analysis about its effectiveness and practicality (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1991; Kauffman, 1991). A number of concerned educators have indicated that full inclusion is too lofty an ideal, not sensible to work toward because it is unrealistic and unlikely to be achieved (Lieberman, 1985; Messinger, 1985).

In our opinion, given the moral, legal, and developmental evidence, the pursuit of educational integration, even with its attendant problems, is essential. "'Does mainstreaming work?' is a silly question. . . . Where it is not working, we should be asking what is preventing it from working and what can be done about it" (Bogden, 1983, p.427).

Conclusion

Although the actual practice of integrated education is still in its infancy, educators and researchers have shown it to be possible and beneficial, and there is a growing body of knowledge about how to implement this educational reform effectively.

To continue to ask whether integration is a good idea is to ask the wrong question; rather, the question to be asked when examining integrated environments is: How do we make integration work for all children?

In considering these questions, we as educators must think with our hearts as well as with our minds. Relegating students with special needs to a separate system of education is unfair and unnecessary. They can grow and develop optimally in ordinary classrooms when accommodations are made to meet their needs.

Furthermore, nondisabled students can benefit from the opportunity to grow and learn with a diversity of children. They need to learn that their differences are ordinary, not threatening; that within their differentness, they share a fundamental human sameness; and that they all have gifts, in their own unique ways. Children with disabilities must be allowed to bring their gifts and special needs to the ordinary classroom, enter into relationships with their classmates, and add to the quality of education for everybody.

Educating all students in the mainstream of regular education raises deeply provocative educational and social issues. What do we want our society and communities to look like? What life do we want for ourselves and our children? Welcoming children who have been left out may provide all students with the opportunity to build a bridge to a more humane future.

It is time to turn our energies to developing school communities in which all children can belong and share their gifts, and to make integrated education a way of life.

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