Integration, Schools
and a
Sense of Community

A Study of the

"Summer-Get-Together,"

an Integrated Summer Education

and Recreation Program

NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON MENTAL RETARDATION

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Introduction

In 1981, two people together with several parents and several university students in Toronto decided to hold a weekly "Saturday-Get-Together" for children of public school age. It was their intention to integrate handicapped and non-handicapped children. The idea was successful and they created a "Summer-Get-Together" in July and again in August.

The program takes place on weekdays from 9:15 to 3:30 at York University. There are 26 children (in the July program) from 5 to 12 years old. Most are between 6 and 10. Several children have handicaps including mental retardation, cerebral palsy, and hearing impairments. The planners and staff have created an "alternative school", an open classroom using many real-life experiences. Essentially the program is education and recreation, although the teachers have an approach to teaching that uses all activities at least partially for learning purposes.

The founders, staff and some of the parents want to transfer it (or at least its underlying values such as integration) to a full year school program. There are several questions in their minds about this:

- We have created an "alternative school" where there are flexible approaches to learning and teaching. Could we transfer the complete Summer-Get-Together to an ordinary school, creating a school within a school? or now that we have demonstrated that integration benefits any child, should we push for integrated, conventional classrooms? or should we go about setting up our own alternative school, similar to other alternative schools in Toronto?

- Some of us are concerned about having broader impact on the way children are educated, especially handicapped children. Do we in fact have a model for others because of our particular teaching methods?

Underlying these questions is: "How good is the Summer-Get-Together, really?" Six of us were asked to visit the program, examine its quality, and provide feedback. This is our study.

Our overriding conclusion is that the Summer-Get-Together is important and significant. It has three main features - integration, adaptive education methods, and a sense of community - that are lacking in almost all schools, and especially in education to handicapped children. Its founders, children and parents, and staff should not let their innovation fade away, and they should receive the support of all concerned.

This study examines these significant aspects as well as current and potential weaknesses.

Our Perspective

Not the least of the founders' strengths, is their concern to build in mirrors that will allow them to see the program in new ways. The tint of our particular mirror is the principle of normalization (Wolfensberger 1972, Wolfensberger and Glenn 1975, Flynn and Nitsch 1980, Wolfensberger and Thomas, 1980). That is: "The use of culturally valued means to establish and/ or maintain, as much as possible, experiences, characteristics, personal behaviours, and roles and social images that are culturally normative or valued." (Wolfensberger, 1980).

For children, especially children who are (or are at risk of being) assigned roles of low worth and status in our society, normalization implies the following:

●Children should be present in their communities. That is, no child should ever have to be distant from his/her family, friends, and ordinary and varied community experiences. Children who have a different charactertistic are at risk of being segregated and isolated.

what about private schs, nat'l ballet, talented child etc.

●Children should take part in ordinary family and community life. Presence alone does not create an interesting and rewarding life. Children should be assisted, supported, and taught to be participating members of their families and communities. For children with very serious handicaps this means schooling with ordinary children; supports necessary to participate with other children in community life; and especially supports for themselves and their families to keep family life intact and enriching.

●Children should be presented, advertised, and/or interpreted to others as being worthy human beings, and as rightful members of their communities and families. Children with handicaps are usually advertised as having a bad reputation or as being somehow undesirable. This occurs whenever children are assisted or taught in ways that cause community members to meet them in bizarre or unusual settings; to associate them with images of charity, sickness, inability or just simply as not having ordinary children's needs; or to perceive them as handicapped rather than as children first.

●Children should be challenged and taught to grow and develop. Society takes this for granted for all children except children who have certain differences. Handicapped children often are, or are at risk of being served in ways where large parts of their day are spent doing nothing, or doing the same thing, at no greater level of challenge, for days, weeks, and sometimes years.

•<u>Children should be supported in their relationships with</u>
<u>peers, family members, and community members.</u> Handicapped
children are usually at risk of having significantly fewer
relationships with non-handicapped children if they are
not truly assisted to be present and participating in
their communities. Not infrequently, a child who has a
handicap will enter a whole life without any close personal,
long-term relationships with anyone, ever. Any handicapped
child is <u>at risk</u> of a future of isolation and segregation.
Therefore, usually the overriding need of a handicapped
child is to secure his/her presence in his/her family, or
in an alternative family if necessary. A child's next
overriding need is the support of relationships with non-
handicapped peers. If a service has a different purpose
than securing family life and relationships (such as
schooling), then it should at least design its program so
that it doesn't act as a barrier to family life or to
developing relationships. For example, a barrier is
created when a service is at considerable distance from a
child's neighbourhood.

In the following sections, we apply these standards of quality
to four aspects of the Summer-Get-Together: its integration, its
teaching methods, the way it organizes around children's needs,
and the imagery around the program. The final section goes beyond
normalization to three ideas that together offer a real chance of
continuity of the strengths: a sense of community, planning, and
accountability to children and their families.

Integration

The founders, staff, and parents of the program are justly proud of its integration, especially right at the level where it counts: the interactions between handicapped and non-handicapped children. It is sometimes claimed that integrated classrooms result in frustration and ridicule of the handicapped children. The Summer-Get-Together demonstrates that such views are statements about inappropriate program design rather than about integration.

idealistic

The Summer-Get-Together is a school/recreation program for 26 children, ages 5-12, the majority being 6-10. One child has a severe hearing impairment; two have cerebral palsy, and two have a mental handicap. Several others have acquired labels in the school system, from having a "behaviour problem", to learning disabilities.

When we spent a day in the program we saw the children participating actively with each other. We saw nothing that would indicate any distance, rejection or ridicule between the handicapped or "labelled" children and the other children.

The activities we observed included the following:

great section.

- During a half hour of learning dance movements, a nine-year old boy spontaneously went over to a five-year old boy with cerebral palsy, picked him up and re-stated the teacher's instructions. At one point the instruction was: "Sh-Sh - be perfectly still". The small boy broke out laughing, the other boy broke out laughing too and as he continued to say, "Sh-Sh", they were both grinning widely at each other.

- While all the children sat in a circle to hear and discuss a pirate story, and together solve the problem of recovering the treasure, one of the children put her arm around another child with cerebral palsy to help him sit upright.

- During the "circle" one child with cerebral palsy began to crawl across the circle. Two other children immediately helped him and brought him back in as a participating member.

- One of the children is not yet toilet-trained, but this was not an issue with either the children or staff (except, of course, that toilet training was a goal for her).

- One 12-year old boy travels to and from the program on public transit with a younger boy who has cerebral palsy.

•During periods when the children choose their own
activities, the groups that formed spontaneously
included the handicapped children.

Some aspects of the Summer-Get-Together undermine the potential
benefits of integration. These aspects are the sheer number of
handicapped or "labelled" students, and certain "images of different-
ness" in the program. They are addressed in the sections
"Organization around Individual Needs" and "Imagery".

The Summer-Get-Together has four teachers and organizes a day
in a flexible manner (see the next section, "Adaptive Teaching").
If integration is to be implemented in ordinary school classrooms,
then those schools will also need additional teachers (or volunteers)
and re-organization of teaching methods. (It is not clear
whether or not four teachers are needed). We feel they are not.

in most cases or *in all too many cases.*

Adaptive Teaching

It is the belief of the founders and staff of the Summer-Get-Together that children are not taught well. The program is intended partially to demonstrate another way of teaching. Our observations follow. The items below are "curriculum" areas. The first three are the major ones.

- education, including the 3 r's, geography, history, art, science, and music.

- recreation, especially swimming 3 times a week. Recreation activities are used as teaching and learning opportunities.

- relationship-building. Interactions between children were supported. Also, at least two particular relationships between children were actively encouraged and supported.

- socialization, covering aspects such as listening, and appropriate behaviour.

- problem-solving. For example, planning for a day-trip included solving the "problem" of what to take, etc.

- identity-building, especially including discussions of individual differences, various backgrounds of children, male/female roles, etc.

- values clarification, especially about prejudice against handicapped people.

This "curriculum" was delivered in a variety of ways. The summary statements of these methods are:

- discussion. Frequently during the day there is discussion about various things such as planning a trip, the day's activities, show-and-tell, discussion with a visitor, etc.

- modelling. Being integrated, behaviour is modelled by children. Also, the staff model "equality" by activities such as eating with children at lunch hour, sitting with the children on the floor at "circle", and modelling both men and women in leadership roles.

- integration. A major method is through the integration of handicapped and non-handicapped children. The children are together for whole-class activities and sub-grouped in groups of 4-8 for specific learning and teaching activities. For example, we saw a group of children, none of whom could read, who were grouped for 3/4 of an hour for reading instruction.

multiple use of activities and phenomenon. There is a conscious deliberate attempt to use every ounce of learning value out of an activity. For example, a new song is used to learn to sing, read, and write. Also, these activities can be initiated by the children.

real-life experiences. There is considerable effort to avoid "artificial" contexts for learning and to take advantage of the real world. For example, there are a number of field trips. Planning these, going on the trip and analysis afterwards are viewed as opportunities to teach the children.

a classroom in a University setting. Although this setting allows the use of many of the resources at a university (library, pool, computer centre, stores, volunteers, etc.) it is a considerably less than optimal setting, especially because it creates an image of the children as "different". This interferes with their integration, (addressed in the "Imagery" section) and reduces the ability to create lasting relationships among the children because they come from many neighbourhoods (addressed in the "Organization around Individual Needs" section).

{i have mixed feelings on this point.}

prob. cause of my own ed.

a classroom in July. When one encounters a child in school in July, one is more likely to perceive that child as different from ordinary children and is less likely to interact with that child. Also, being outdoors in July is a more desirable "teaching method" than being indoors.

agreed!

The above are summary statements of the methods. To provide the reader with a better sense of "how", specific observations are listed below.

·using the library · building word banks · reading to children · listening to the children · kids talking to other kids · everyone eating lunch together · talking about upcoming field trips · discussing things · using a visitor taking a picture to teach saying "camera" · using records, tapes, piano · going to concerts · 1:1 teaching · sub-group teaching · whole group teaching · using films and videotapes · visiting a dance class · using swimming pool · using music as a learning tool · asking kids questions · growing mold · having a fish, hamsters and rabbit · kids making lunch with staff · kids writing newsletters to parents · 2 kids talking about the program to a university class · hugs and kisses between staff and children · kids helping each other · going for walks · kids making rules · kids choosing program name · using weigh scales, charts, and maps · teaching voting · many field trips · many visitors.

We thought that the methods admirably fit the "curriculum" (except for being at a university and being in a classroom in July). That is, the content of education, recreation, relationship-building, problem-solving, socialization, identity-building, and values clarification are well delivered. The founders and staff call this an "alternative school" and indeed it does match the methods of "alternative" or "open" schools.

We were impressed the most with the methods themselves. Educators could learn a great deal from the Summer-Get-Together. However, while these methods fit the curriculum, we question whether the curriculum itself is best suited to the children's needs especially in the summer. This issue is addressed under "Organization around Individual Needs".

Organization around Individual Needs

The fundamental question that any human service should ask is: "Are we organized in a way that meets the needs of each individual?". In this section, we draw attention to areas that prevent <u>optimally</u> meeting each child's needs.

Any child has major, overriding needs that require intensive assistance and learning. For example, among the children we met, the two boys with cerebral palsy require intensive exercise, physical therapy, practice speaking clearly, and teaching relevant to any specific educational deficits. One girl primarily needs intensive fine-motor practice that will help her learn to print. One boy needs intensive love and support and leadership opportunities that earn him genuine respect. For each of these needs there were only some relevant activities and for many specific needs there were only a few minutes a day of relevant, intensive learning opportunities, assistance or teaching. Each major need probably requires hours of <u>intensive</u> attention if it is to be optimally met. *This could be met w/ time for supervision (me.) & in a long term programme.*

agreed

This is a question of how one organizes a program, nor of needing additional staff and resources. That is, intensive attention to specific needs does not necessarily imply one-to-one teaching; it does imply organizing so that the curriculum and methods are precisely relevant to specific needs.

The Summer-Get-Together has built its program primarily from the top down. That is, the founders and staff have certain curriculum areas and teaching methods that <u>they</u> want to implement, rather than ones that are built up from <u>specific</u> children's needs.

They believe (rightly, in our view) that children in general need education that is open and flexible; that uses many real-life experiences; that uses as many aspects as possible of events for their learning value; that avoids rigid classroom structures in favour of choice and exploration within and outside the classroom; that allows, as much as possible, for each child to learn at his/her own pace; that uses experiences that are interesting and challenging to children; and so on. While these methods are exciting and commendable, placing primary emphasis on this perspective results in many specific needs going unmet.

It is a reasonable assumption that almost any child has specific and major needs at any particular time of his/her life. Therefore, a program needs to ask itself some basic questions about those needs in order to design its curriculum and teaching methods. These questions are:

1. What <u>are</u> his/her overriding needs?
2. What curriculum content will meet that need in the very best way?
3. What methods will deliver that curriculum best to that particular child?
4. Repeat one through three for each child.)

excellent questions in our planning —

We will.

5. Now, how can we design our program as a whole and tomorrow's activities in a way that curriculum and methods are optimal for each major need of a child and still have a flexible, adaptive teaching approach?

useful

It may be helpful to think of this issue as a trade-off situation: a conflict between two approaches, both of which are good and valid. On one hand, the founders have good ideas about what constitutes quality teaching; and on the other hand, what is done and how it is done should follow directly from the specific needs of the children. It is not uncommon for good and valid approaches to be in conflict with each other. The conflict here is that organizing a whole program and a day's activities around specific needs reduces the possible flexibility and spontaneity of the teaching approach.

When such a trade-off situation occurs, the strategy should be to work for the best balance between the ideas. Neither idea can be implemented to its maximum but a balance will achieve the best possible situation. To achieve this balance, the Summer-Get-Together will need to:

- be selective about who enters the program so that there is a much more manageable range or variety of specific, overriding needs.

- be selective about who enters the program according to what "curriculum" the staff delivers best. (Some staff can be "jack-of-all trades", but others should be "master-of-some trades". The children should be selected accordingly, or more commonly staff should be selected according to the specific needs of the children.)

- be more rigorous in planning and record-keeping around individuals so that the main curriculum and teaching methods are chosen because the children have certain needs, and so that decisions can be made about whether or not those needs are being met.

- design the overall nature of the program so that it is matched to the needs that all children share. That is, any one child needs to be with at least several age-peers; the education/recreation balance is somewhat inappropriate to kid's needs in July; and the location is sub-optimal for certain common needs, especially to enable ongoing relationships, and to associate children with enhancing images.

If each of these recommendations is implemented, the Summer-Get-Together will have only slightly less flexibility and spontenaity in its teaching and be much more intensive and relevant around specific, overriding needs. Each of these recommendations is described in the following subsections. The entire section ends with three illustrations: "The Way it is Now", "The Way it Should Be in a Summer Program", and "The Way it Should Be in a Year-long School Program".

(1)   <u>Selection of children to create a more manageable range of</u>
<u>needs</u>. Question five in the previous section frames the problem:
"How can we design our program as a whole and tomorrow's
activities in a way that curriculum and methods are optimal for
each major need of a child <u>and</u> still have a flexible adaptive
teaching approach?" This question is frightening if one stands
in the shoes of the staff and is thinking about 26 children,
ages 5-12, some with very limiting handicaps requiring extra-
ordinary intensity and specific "curriculum". It is not
surprising that the Summer-Get-Together people don't ask them-
selves this question; it cannot be answered with so much diversity
of needs.

The first problem with the diversity is the age range.
Children of different ages have different abilities and interests.
For example, by age and other factors, children differ along the
dimensions of:

- the amount of supervision they require

- the amount of autonomy and choice they can exercise
  over the learning process

- <u>what</u> they should be learning

- the experiences and curriculum that are inherently
  interesting and challenging to them

- the way they act towards peers and adults (the way
  they show intimacy, the logic of their conversation,
  etc.)

- specific characteristics such as speech, physical
  abilities, mental abilities, etc.

It may be argued, and it is true, that many events and
experiences are relevant to any child. For example, going to a
concert is relevant to a 5 year old and a 12 year old. However,
the teaching around the experience must differ. The 12 year old
might use it to study music theory or the physics of sound waves.
The 5 year old might use it to trace out notes for fine-motor
control or to learn to play a few bars of the melody. These, of
course, are <u>different</u> curriculums and require different teaching
methods and <u>sub-groupings</u>.

The Summer-Get-Together <u>does</u> use different curriculums,
methods, and sub-groupings. However, the diversity of needs is
so great that any one child can only receive relevant intensive
challenges for a small part of each day. The question is "How
much diversity is too much?". We suggest that a two-or maximum
3-year age range is all that can be intensively taught in one
class of, say, 20 kids. To the extent that a summer program is
recreation rather than education, the age range could be larger
(simply <u>going</u> to the concert is the relevant activity) but 5 to
12 is too large.

*let's discuss.·I tend to
agree but there's one
dimension of this point~*

The second problem with the diversity of needs is the sheer number of handicapped children and others labelled with behaviour problems, learning disabilities, etc. Handicapped children almost always require above average teaching intensity and quality, frequently through considerable one-to-one attention. Thus, their learning needs require that they not have to compete with many other handicapped children, in addition to all the children, in order to have those needs met. Also, the whole point of integration (enabling participation between handicapped and non-handicapped people), is threatened as the number of handicapped children increases. (In addition, there are major and severe image problems when there are too many handicapped children. See: "Imagery".) Therefore, four handicapped or "labelled" children should probably be the maximum number in a class of 20 children. *the ideal.*

If the children are selected according to a much more narrow age range, and there are fewer handicapped children, then one can begin to achieve the best balance; specific needs can be more intensively met and most of the flexible, adaptive teaching methods can be maintained.

(2)   Selection of children to match specific competencies and identities of staff. One could begin with the staff, and select children whose needs match the skills of staff, or more commonly, one would choose staff after one knows about the needs of the particular children. The point is that service designers must see to it that needs match competencies.

In the summer, (as addressed below in subsection (4)) it would be more consistent with the children's needs to have recreation staff and one or two teachers, rather than to have only teachers. In a year-long school program, there are certain needs such as physical exercise or therapy for which "teacher" is not the best identity. There should at least be continuous advice available from consultants around such needs.

(3)   Planning around individuals. If one thinks of the 1,2 or 3 overriding needs that each of 26 children have, then it is difficult to see how specific needs can be intensively met without fairly rigorous individual planning.

In the Summer-Get-Together, the approach to the specific needs of the children is:

- First, we will accept a child into the program.
- Second, we will get to know him or her better. *could*
- Third, we will all discuss his/her needs in our daily staff *be improved.* meetings.
- Fourth, we will come to some consensus about his/her needs.
- Fifth, we will take these needs into account during our teaching day.

The needs or what is to be done are not written nor is progress systematically monitored. It is sort of an organic approach: staff simply try to be aware of individuals and to address needs within the context of the day's program. *need to tighten up on this.*

From the point of view of flexible, adaptive teaching this approach is fine. However, if one also thinks about intensity and appropriateness to specific, overriding needs, it is insufficient.

Another approach that would help achieve the best balance between meeting specific needs and flexible teaching would be:

- <u>First</u>, we have already set some limits on the range of needs of children we will accept into the program.

- <u>Second</u>, we will get to know each child better and talk <u>at length</u> with his/her parents about what he/she needs and what are the two or three most compelling needs.

- <u>Third</u>, we will meet and make some decisions about: (a) what "curriculum", or activities can best meet that child's needs, (b) what, if any, unique teaching techniques are required, (c) how much <u>time</u> during a day should be spent addressing a specific need; and (d) whether or not that time on that need must be very intensive (one-to-one for example) or can be addressed well somewhat less intensively.

- <u>Fourth</u>, we will make some decisions about what information must be collected to tell us if our decisions in step three were the right ones.

- <u>Fifth</u>, we will write down our decisions.

- <u>Sixth</u>, we will collect the decisions about all of the children, and see what discussion topics, real-life experiences, aspects of activities, etc., can be used.

This approach also requires that arranging a single day's activities will take more thought.

(4)   <u>Overall design around common needs</u>. The first issue is that some children are somewhat isolated from age peers. It is an ordinary kid's need to be with at least some others of one's own age. (This does not mean <u>only</u> others of one's age). It is important that a child experiences the range of interests, skills, and abilities of kids the same age. Also, "best" and ongoing friendships are more likely to occur. Besides, kids <u>like</u> to be with others the same age (as well as with kids of different ages). Probably there should be at least six or seven children of a given age.

The second issue with overall design around common needs is that the program "content" of the Summer-Get-Together is primarily general education. There is a substantial recreation component, but this is also perceived as primarily useful for its learning value. It would be more consistent with children's needs <u>in the summer</u>, if the content was primarily recreation such as <u>typical</u> day-camp activities, and secondarily specific, remedial education.

One mother told us that she re-arranges her family's evening schedule so that her daughter can have more time to run and play (especially outside) because she doesn't get enough of this in the program. We think that "running and playing", especially in the summer after a year in school and before the next year, is an ordinary kid's need. If a child has a specific education deficit, due to a handicap or any other reason, then it is legitimate and important to have education content and teaching around that specific deficit in the summer.

This criticism may seem unfair because the founders and staff intended to try out an open classroom/alternative school idea. However, there is a danger sign here: already a "tradition" has been established of not doing what children need done, but doing what the founders and staff want to do. This is a signal to step up the involvement of parents in planning.

The third issue about overall design is the location. Part of this has to do with the images associated with the children when they go to school at a university. This is addressed under the "Imagery" section. The other part has to do with enabling ongoing relationships, especially between handicapped and non-handicapped children.

Such relationships would be more likely to happen if the children all came from one neighbourhood, and their school (or day-camp in the summer) was located in that neighbourhood.

imp!

This is not a trivial issue. Most of the children will never again see many of the other children after the program ends (or in the evening). For a handicapped child, a close relationship with a non-handicapped person has the potential to reverse a whole future life-time of devaluation and segregation.

Again, enabling such relationships was not the intention of the founders and staff in trying out an alternative school idea. However, any program (and especially one that is intended as a model for others) must focus on what children need done.

In summary, it is useful to think about organizing around children's needs by considering five separate and distinct aspects of a program:

- the needs of the children

- the way the children are selected and grouped to receive the service (overall number, age range, range of abilities)

- what is done (the content of the program)

- how it is done (the process of the program)

- the identity of the staff (do they have the right abilities)

Each of these aspects should be aligned and made consistent with every other aspect. Below, there are three figures that list the major components of each area.

Figure I, The Way It is Now, lists general summary statements in each of the program areas that should be aligned with each other. The specific inconsistencies are in italics.

Figure II, The Way It Should Be (In the Summer), shows one way to make the major variables consistent with each other so that there is a good chance of optimally meeting each child's needs.

Figure III, The Way It Should Be (In a Year-long School Program), shows one way to make components consistent in a school context.

Figure I

The Way it is Now

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│              Overriding Needs                │
│              (In the Summer)                 │
│                                              │
│  ·change from school                         │
│  ·recreation, play, fun                      │
│  ·being with your closest friends            │
│  ·remedial or "catch-up" education for       │
│   some                                       │
│  ·specific individual needs, especially      │
│   those stemming from a person's handicap    │
│   or social situation                        │
│                                              │
│    ·relationships that would carry           │
│     over into a school year or that          │
│     help secure a person's presence          │
│     in school or family                      │
│    ·physical, speech, etc. therapy           │
│     for some                                 │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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┌──────────────────────────┐          ┌────────────────────────────┐
│ What is Done             │          │ Grouping                   │
│    (Content)             │          │ ·26 children               │
│ *·primarily education    │          │ ·5 handicapped children    │
│                          │          │  plus 6-8 "labelled        │
│ ·recreation             │          │  children"                 │
│                          │          │ ·wide range of skills      │
│ ·relationships          │          │  and abilities             │
└──────────────────────────┘          │ ·ages 5-12                 │
                                       │ ·overall, grouped with     │
                                       │  adults (university people)│
                                       └────────────────────────────┘
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┌──────────────────────────┐
│ How it is Done           │
│    (Process)             │
│ ·integration             │          ┌────────────────────────────┐
│ ·real life experiences   │          │ Staff Identity             │
│ ·small group, 1:1 and    │          │ ·primarily teachers (4)    │
│  whole group teaching    │          │ ·many volunteers, including│
│ ·adaptive teaching methods│         │  parents                   │
│ ·not organized to address│          └────────────────────────────┘
│  specific needs          │
│ ·mostly indoors          │
│ ·at a university         │
└──────────────────────────┘
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*italics are inconsistencies

Figure II

The Way it Should Be

(In the Summer)

Overriding Needs
(In the Summer)

- change from school
- recreation, play, fun
- being with your closest friends
- remedial or "catch-up" education for some
- specific individual needs, especially those stemming from a person's handicap or social situation

  - relationships that would carry over into a school year or that help secure a person's presence in school or family

  - physical, speech, etc. therapy for some

What is Done
(Content)

- primarily recreation
- specific remedial education
- physical and speech therapy
- relationships

Grouping

- 20-40 children
- 4-6 handicapped or "labelled" children
- 2-5 year age range

How it is Done
(Process)

- integration
- real-life experiences
- 1:1, and some small group teaching and therapy
- organized to address specific needs
- mostly outdoors
- at a neighbourhood recreation centre

Staff Identity

- 1 teacher
- 2 recreation staff
- access to direct guidance from therapists
- many volunteers, especially parents

Figure III

The Way it Should Be

(In a year-long School Program)

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┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│            Overriding Needs          │
│  ·general education                  │
│  ·specific remedial education        │
│   for some children                  │
│  ·relationships, especially for      │
│   handicapped children               │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
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┌──────────────────────────────┐        ┌──────────────────────────────┐
│  What is Done                │        │  Grouping                    │
│    (Content)                 │        │  ·15-20 children             │
│  ·Primarily education        │        │  ·3 or 4 handicapped or      │
│  ·Specific remedial          │        │   "labelled" children        │
│   education for some children│        │  ·2 or 3 year age range      │
│  ·Relationships, especially  │        │  ·nearby children of other   │
│   for handicapped children   │        │   ages                       │
└──────────────────────────────┘        └──────────────────────────────┘
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┌──────────────────────────────┐        ┌──────────────────────────────┐
│  How it is Done              │        │  Staff Identity              │
│  ·integration                │        │  ·primarily teachers         │
│  ·real life experiences      │        │  ·some access to therapists  │
│  ·whole group, small group,  │        │  ·volunteers                 │
│   and 1:1 teaching           │        └──────────────────────────────┘
│  ·adaptive teaching methods  │
│  ·organized to address       │
│   specific needs             │
│  ·at a neighbourhood school  │
└──────────────────────────────┘
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Imagery

Being surrounded by images and symbols of competence and
worth is important for all of us, including all children. If
one is incompetent in some important way and thus (in our
society),approached, labelled, and responded to on the basis of
that difference, then it is crucial that the imagery be
symbolic of worth. Particularly important, attention should
not be drawn, in the eyes of others, to the fact of being handi-
capped. For example, for a handicapped person, nothing is
gained and much is lost by that fact being advertised by a
program name (eg. "Services for the Handicapped", etc.). Service
names are only one example of drawing attention to a person's
difference.

The issue of imagery is one of the most important issues in
human services, yet is the one to which the least attention is
paid. In fact, the common situation is not just one of neglect
of imagery, but handicapped people are typically surrounded with
imagery that advertises them as having low status, worth, or as
being somehow undesirable. This is rarely done deliberately
and consciously, yet is widespread and rampant, occurring much
more frequently than chance can account for. Therefore, it is
done unconsciously, but nevertheless systematically.

The amazing thing is that even after attention is drawn to
service managers about the imagery around their service and thus
their clients, the common reaction is "So what? What difference
does that make?". Yet, all of us are deeply aware of two things:
(a) the imagery that we surround ourselves with; and (b) the
fact that others more often react towards us based on those
images than on what we are really like. It is reasonable to
describe the social situation of handicapped people as essentially
due to inappropriate and negative perceptions and reactions on
the part of others. Perceptions and reactions are precisely
the things that images substantially control.

Consider the imagery in one's own life:

- We are very conscious of where we live. We are
  embarrassed if the grounds are not neat, or the
  inside is messy, etc. These things create images
  that others associate with us.

- We are aware of the imagery of the car we drive.
  We formerly used a car to image ourselves as
  wealthy and "sexy" (big cars). Today, the cultural
  value has changed: we use a car to image ourselves
  as cost-conscious and as concerned about the
  environment (small cars).

- We attend to our appearance to image ourselves in
  certain ways. In our culture we may try for an
  image of "competent", "conservative", "radical",
  or whatever.

•We are conscious of the image of where we work, and
what that says about us in the eyes of others.

•We are conscious of the image of those we associate
with and what that says about us. For example, we
generally like to associate with (and thus "borrow"
the image of) competent people in areas in which we
want to be perceived as competent.

Such a list is endless. The point is, we <u>are</u> conscious of
imagery. We act towards others based, partially, on our per-
ceptions of them, and these perceptions in turn are substantially
controlled by the images around people.

Imagery especially affects our perception of a person's role
- work role, family role, etc. We often base our judgement of
what that role is on images of the setting. For example, when we
meet someone in a service station (and wearing oily coveralls) we
expect that that person can tell us what is wrong with our car.
In a university, we expect people are students, teachers, or
support people, and scores of other smaller images allow us to
judge fairly accurately which role they have. The implication
is obvious about how to create an image of "competent student"
role for handicapped children: surround them with school images,
especially through their presence with non-handicapped students,
in a school setting.

To examine the imagery around the Summer-Get-Together children,
it may be helpful to imagine oneself as a member of the university
community and as someone who, like most people, has rarely met a
handicapped child and is thus picking up cues on whether to
interact with a child from the images.

The images that we observed are the following:

•A group of children in a university setting where we
expect to find adults. An observer is surprised and
looks closely for something different about a child -
a situation exactly opposite to the one that should
be created for any child, especially handicapped
children. The power and "bizarreness" of this imagery
is such that it overwhelms the benefits of the added
resources at a university setting.·

•The classroom itself has appointments and furnishings
that create an image of younger children. In fact,
one parent told us that when she first brought her
child, he said: "Oh no, you've put me in a kinder-
garten". This is a particularly destructive image
for handicapped children because they are already
frequently perceived by others to be younger or more
"childish" than they actually are.

•The presence of too many handicapped children and
other "labelled" or potentially devalued children
creates an "image of handicap" or simply an image
that there is something different about the children.
This is the last possible image that one wants to

[handwritten margin notes:] This is where i question - a Univ. is a valued place. etc. but i see your point. Very true. we're changing this for Sat.

associate with a child who <u>does</u> have a handicap, and is
not helpful to the non-handicapped children.

Of course, there is tremendous positive imagery for
the handicapped children by being integrated. The
question is: "How many is too many?".

- The classroom was formerly the setting for a service
  to hearing-impaired children. Children, especially
  those with other handicaps, and most especially the
  child who <u>is</u> hearing-impaired do not benefit from
  being associated with this image.

  [handwritten: reality was our guide not ideality.]

- When a handicapped child is associated with a child who
  has a different handicap there is image transfer. A
  physically handicapped child doesn't benefit (image-wise)
  from the association with a mentally handicapped child
  and vice versa. This image association is almost
  entirely overcome by the presence of the ordinary
  children and <u>that</u> image transfer. Thus, in an integrated
  program there is no particular issue here <u>providing</u> the
  overall number of handicapped children is <u>not too large</u>.

- When one sees a child in a classroom in July, one
  immediately wonders what limitation that child has.

- There have been several visitors who are handicapped,
  contributing to a "these children are different, perhaps
  bizarre" image.

  [handwritten: (question) I think this is a good.]

- One staff member is handicapped, compounding the images from
  too many handicapped children, and the number of handi-
  capped visitors. (This issue is explained further,
  below).

  [handwritten: i also think this is contentious.]

- Although not widely known, the association of the program
  with the Canadian Association for the Mentally Retarded
  and the National Institute on Mental Retardation is
  unfortunate image-wise.

  [handwritten: true, but also imp on policy level.]

If the program was a continuous or a year-long one, these
images taken together would create a very serious barrier to
social integration - to interactions with others outside the
program. If it wasn't for the presence of ordinary children,
the effect would be devastating for either a short-term or long-
term program. The saving grace is the presence of the other
children and that the program is short-term.

Not all of the images above have the same weight or power.
The ones that are the most important to change are:

- <u>the location</u>. For all the children (but especially the
  handicapped children), their participation with others
  outside (and probably within) the program will be greatly
  enhanced if they are encountered in a setting that is
  associated in the eyes of others with valued children. In

our culture, that is an ordinary school classroom in an ordinary school in an ordinary neighbourhood. This image outweighs the value of resources at a university and the somewhat greater ease with which one can find volunteers and invite people in.

● the number of handicapped and "labelled" children. If this is reduced to maximum four in a group of 20, (and the location is changed), then the powerful, enhancing imagery will outweigh all the other negative images. In particular, the image from a handicapped staff person would be outweighed: he/she would primarily be perceived as a teacher of valued children, and the handicapped children would be perceived as valued, because of the presence of so many ordinary children.

The issue of a handicapped staff person deserves special mention, because it is apt to be misunderstood. It is often argued that it is important to model handicapped people through placing them in competent and enhancing roles. This is true. For this reason, it is much more enhancing and important to cast handicapped staff into the role of teaching ordinary children. When s/he teaches handicapped children, no one gains (in imagery). Note, that the Summer-Get-Together being an integrated program considerably reduces the negative imagery. Thus, the more it is integrated, (that is, the more the group is composed of non-handicapped and non-labelled children), the greater the "image-benefit" and the greater the "competent roles" of both the handicapped children in the program and a handicapped staff person.

If our central conclusion about grouping - not more than 4 labelled or handicapped children in a group of 20 - is implemented, then the presence of one handicapped staff member would be per-fectly okay, would be enhancing for the staff person, would be an adaptive role model for the non-handicapped children, and would not be any particular image-issue for the children already at risk of being negatively perceived. Such is the image-power of integrated programs.

This whole issue of imagery only makes sense if: (a) one first reflects on the importance of imagery in one's own life; (b) tries to imagine oneself as handicapped, and thus at risk of bizarre and negative responses from others; and (c) applies the standard of quality of - not what staff want to do or intend to do - but of what is and should be received image-wise, by the children in a program. Clearly, if one only focuses on the children, and especially on the handicapped children, they should receive the most competent and worthy imagery it is possible to imagine, and especially, attention should not be drawn in the eyes of others to their handicap. In this way, the chances are greatly increased of them being treated with the same challenge and respect as are ordinary children.

A Sense of Community, Planning, and Accountability

One of the interesting things to be learned from the Summer-Get-Together is the way that three desirable aspects of any program interact with and depend on each other. These aspects are: a sense of community, a planning process, and the idea of accountability to children and their families. Each of these is present in the Summer-Get-Together - a rare occurrence in human service programs. However, there are limitations in the way each aspect unfolds in the program. The answer to a limitation in one (planning, for example) has to do with upgrading the attention to the other two aspects.

The three aspects are defined below:

A Sense of Community

A mutual sense of support, excitment, belonging, and personal responsibility towards each other, among all the people associated with a program. A sense of community can exist anywhere (in a marriage, among people at work, or within a human service). Perhaps it occurs most often among people who group together around a new idea or project. We all know when we share a sense of community, and when it is missing in our lives.

(Adapted from Sarason, 1974)

A Planning Process

A systematic, continuous evolution of plans and actions. A planning process is a sequence of thinking about what to do, writing and disseminating ideas, implementing, re-thinking, etc. - a never-ending cycle of activities. (Adapted from Wolfensberger and Glenn, 1975)

Accountability to Children and Their Families

All actions flow towards the wishes and needs of people who receive a service and their families. Accountability involves relentlessly asking oneself: "Does this reflect the needs of the children or does it reflect my own ideals and beliefs?". (Adapted from Dowker thinking out loud)

We need to ask this more.

Thinking about these 3 aspects helps to resolve several issues about the Summer-Get-Together:

 • The children and parents should be full partners in the overall planning process. That is, the sense of community the founders and staff enjoy as they think about the future should be extended to the children and parents.

 • In an important way, the planning process is not (yet) accountable to children and their parents. Accountability is most noticeable when the staff step out of their teacher roles and directly assist a child or family with some important issue. (The best example is the arrangement for the two boys to travel together to and from the program). The planning process revolves less around such natural supports than it does around the founders' and staffs' dream of promoting new models of education.

 • The future holds a fundamental dilemma about the kind of "community" that will be built. The more the program stays as a unique school with the benefits of an internal sense of community among the children and staff, the greater the risk of a "sense of apartness" between the children and other children in their neighbourhood.

Each of these issues is described below.

(1)   The children and parents should be full partners in the overall planning process. The planning process around the Summer-Get-Together is elegant and a model for others in many ways. It's weakness is that it doesn't yet fully involve the children and their parents. It has the following features:

 • The plan evolves and is applied. It is unusual to see planning efforts that lead to actual implementation, and implementation that generates new planning. The Summer-Get-Together is a step in a sequence of planning that started with a few parents thinking about better futures for their children, and student teachers and others thinking about better schooling. This led to the Saturday-Get-Together which led to more planning, which in turn led to the Summer-Get-Together. Currently, there is planning around a proposal for a year-long school program.

 • The plan adapts flexibly to new situations. Often planning is nothing more than the production of rigid proposals. The Summer-Get-Together process takes immediate advantage of circumstances, such as the availability of a location.

● There is active search for new input, especially ideological and value-laden input. The request for our own study is an example. Another is the presence of a researcher who is attached to the program.

● The planning is continuous. Often human service planning is a process of furious short-term proposal generation followed by little action. The history of the Summer-Get-Together has been a more or less constant process of thinking, implementing, and more thinking.

● There is substantial input from various people connected with the program. The staff have a vision of an "alternative school", the key founder wants to plan better teacher-training, and others are thinking about ways to have an impact on the whole school system, including provincial and national impact. Each of these groups of actors are influencing the planning.

● Plans are disseminated when a stage is reached for writing proposals, and these are viewed and used as vehicles for stimulating further thought rather than as end products.

● There is a fixed point of responsibility for planning – one person has accepted responsibility for keeping the process active. He, himself, has had relatively little impact on the content of the plans or, for example, the nature of the Summer-Get-Together. However, he keeps the planning pot boiling.

Parents have been involved with the planning and they have been kept informed. For example, one parent wanted to see an educational component because extra learning opportunities were the things available to some children (for example in private schools) but not to her child in ordinary school. This was one consideration when the education/recreation balance was determined. Also, there are telephone contacts with parents; use of parent feedback forms; 4 newsletters to parents (written as much as possible by the children); and parent/staff meetings. Currently, there are attempts to involve the parents in future planning.

Nevertheless, the parents are not truly involved in the overall planning, at least not in the same intensive way that the founders and staff are, and the children themselves have no formal way of influencing the future. *True*

The idea of a sense of community is useful to perceive what should be done. The people who are currently involved with thinking about the future do share a sense of community around their project. They have a tremendous sense of excitement, a willingness to work together for their dream, and they support each other in many ways. In large part, this accounts for the effectiveness of the planning process

This sort of involvement - being part of the sense of community - is precisely the way that the children and parents should be involved. They should be part of the "inner circle" that is having so much fun with an innovative dream. The conventional ways of involving children and parents - individual planning meetings, feedback forms, parent/teacher meetings, etc. - are no substitute for sharing the planning process through extending the sense of community.

(2)   The planning process should be accountable to children and their parents. Accountability, should flow directly to the needs and wishes of the children and their parents. As it is now, actions and plans are primarily accountable to the founders' dream of better education models. That is, the discussions in the planning are more often: "How can we implement and extend our ideas?", than they are "How can we assist Johnny so and so and do it in a way that directly meets his needs as he and his family sees them?"

We need both!

Both of these questions are good ones to ask, but as it is now, the overall planning process is emphasizing the question about the founders' dreams.

The example of the natural supports that the staff have arranged around a few children is a way to examine this issue. We were very impressed with the efforts to step outside conventional teaching roles, and to directly assist and support individuals. The main example of this is the arrangement for one 5 year old physically handicappped boy to get to and from the program. He travels by taxi to a nearby 12 year old's home. The two of them take the subway and a bus to the program. Also, the staff have encouraged and supported the 12 year old to have high expectations for the other boy's physical movement and behaviour. Other examples are the efforts to help families deal with consultants such as speech therapists, and to help a family persuade a school that a child should be in an ordinary class.

Building natural supports should be an integral part of the program, and especially part of the planning process. Such supports can potentially make a huge difference in a child's life. They help secure a person's presence in his/her family and community; they may be the beginning of personal relationships; and they send a message to a child and a family that he or she is worthy of personal help that is more than a commodity to be trans-acted for money. A school should include such supports as much as possible.

Natural supports are an example of direct accountability to the needs and wishes of children and their families. We believe that the overall planning process should be accountable in just this way rather than being primarily accountable to the dream of education models.

Many of the discussions of the planners do revolve around individuals. The issue here is that the planners define two kinds of problems: (1) how can we assist him or her; and (2) how can we organize a school. These are actually the same problem and if (1) is answered well and planned for continuously then (2) will take care of itself. If they are perceived as the same problem, then the planning process will be more accountable to children and their families.

(3)   The future holds a fundamental dilemma about the kind of "community" that will be built. The future, according to plans, could be a "school within a school". That is, transporting the whole program into an ordinary school, where the children and teachers would be together for most of the day in their own class-room. The idea would provide the teachers with enough control over the situation that they could maintain their adaptive teaching methods rather than accommodate to the routines of the school system. Alternatively, the planners are thinking of maintaining a separate school.

Part of the reason for keeping the program intact is that an internal sense of community has been created. There is a sense of mutual support and sharing among the children and between the staff and the children. This is partially what the staff mean when they talk about an "alternative school".

Thus, creating (or maintaining) a situation that creates internal "community" is one future option. This brings a dilemma. It runs the risk of isolating the children from other "communities": from children in other classes if the program was transported to a school setting, or from other children in one's neighbourhood if the program was kept totally separate.

This issue is addressed by Seymour Sarason in the quotation below. He is talking about the breakdown in the sense of community when there is a segregated special class in an ordinary school. Obviously the analogy is not perfect: the Summer-Get-Together planners are talking about an integrated school. Nevertheless, there may be similar problems.

> "The special class teacher rarely feels at home with regular class teachers in the sense of feeling part of a common enterprise. She feels "out of it," well aware that she is frequently not regarded as a "real" teacher... She feels neither understood nor valued. She may be respected as a person and she may even be made to feel that she is performing an important function... but she is not regarded as indispensable; one cannot eliminate first-grade classrooms, but one can eliminate the special class.
>
> What the special class children experience is much the same as that of their teacher. It could hardly be otherwise. Why he is in the special class, why he does not partake of many school activities, why other classrooms appear different, why he remains in the same physical location for a period of years, why his siblings or neighbourhood friends seem to have a different school experience -- these are puzzling questions to the child, and however he answers them, or others (parents, teachers) provide

him with answers, the result is that he feels different and apart ... from all other children in the school, and this is precisely how he is viewed by other children in the school. The psychological sense of apartness is no less a fact than that of physical apartness.

For the parents of the retarded child, special class is a mixed blessing. On the one hand, they welcome the opportunity for their child to be in a smaller class where he can receive more attention and help; on the other hand, they recognize that it is only another context where his difference sets him apart from others, an apartness they have usually grappled with before in the family and neighbourhood. As they have had to do before, they must explain to the child and others why he requires special treatment. From the standpoint of school personnel, the parents, like the children, are expected to be grateful for the special class that has been provided, and here again there is an insensitivity to the fact that special class frequently represents to the parents another reminder of their own feelings of social isolation and private grief. The poignancy of parental feelings stems not only from events in the past and present but from a concern for the future; when the parents are no longer alive who will care for their child in ways that will counter rather than reinforce his social isolation? The parents may be young, but the fact that they have a retarded child forces them to be concerned with the consequences of their death for that child. To the parents the question is not only who will take care of the child, but will it be done humanely? And humanely means being embedded in a social context that approximates family living in the community. It does not mean institutionalization, which like the special class isolates the child and drastically reduces the range of social experiences.

The special class teacher, the regular class teacher, the retarded pupil, the non-retarded pupils, the principal, the parents -- one of the major effects of the special class on each is to accentuate their sense of apartness and aloneness. Far from feeling a part of a mutually dependent and interactive community of people, they are aware that they are isolated from each other, despite their presence in the same building. And yet it all seems so "natural" that it rarely occurs to anyone to ask if the price being paid is not too high."

(Sarason, 1974).

This issue is another trade-off situation between valid but conflicting principles. On the one hand, a unique school permits teaching the way teaching should be conducted. On the other hand, children should be able to go to school with their neighbourhood friends, and not be at risk of being perceived as different than other children.

How can the issue be resolved? First, there must be accountability to the children and their parents. If the idea runs the risk of marginalizing children in the eyes of others (especially those children already at risk of devaluation), then there must be relentless questioning such as: "Does this action meet the needs of children, or is it "accountable" to some other ideal?".

Second, there probably can be no simple, one-shot answer to the dilemma. Thus, the planning process becomes important as an ongoing tool for thinking, proposing, implementing, and re-thinking. Parents must be part of this process because only they will be able to describe phenomena such as isolation, and assess what impact the proposals will have.

Third, making the planning process accountable to parents requires that the parents be true participants in the current sense of community around the program. This is a "We're all in this together" kind of approach rather than a "We're involved in exciting planning. Won't you please give us your input?" approach.

In summary, all of the ideas of a sense of community, a planning process, and accountability to children and their families, are necessary. If any aspect is optimal, then one would be able to describe it with reference to the other two. For example, an optimal planning process is characterized by a shared sense of community, especially with parents, and it revolves around direct accountability. Or, a sense of community is characterized by accountability to each other and by continuous reflections about what is happening and what the future should hold (planning).

Conclusion

The exciting things about the Summer-Get-Together are that it is a working example of integration; that the founders and staff have found a way to teach children that avoids the artificial routines of much conventional education; and that there is excitement - a sense of community - both within and around the program. These strengths should draw the interest and support of anyone involved in finding better ways to educate children.

However, the strengths are not enough. If there is a first thing to change, it is to break down the educator/parent split (that exists here less than in most education - but still does exist) and to create a sense of community between educators and parents. Not the least of the advantages of a shared sense of community is that staff and parents can help sustain each other as they try to do right by the children they know, and as they group together to resist the opposition that any innovation will bring.

Second, the Summer-Get-Together needs to find ways to greet each child as an individual and ways to directly derive what a day brings from the particular needs of particular children. This is the idea of accountability to children. If accountability truly exists, then many people who come in contact with the program will rush to duplicate what they have seen: ideas that make sense tend to spread. The hard part is not disseminating good ideas, but to actually make the idea a good one.

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