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## INTEGRATION ONE TEACHER'S STORY

You will not believe what I am going to tell you. I still don't really believe all that has happened to me and my students this year. I am amazed at what my kids have done. I am amazed at the changes which have occurred in me as the year has gone on. I am amazed at the number of things which have been accomplished in spite of my fears and those expressed by people around me and elsewhere in the teaching business.

What follows here is not a formal research report. It is one teacher's record of a personal journey into the wonder of integrating "special" kids into a regular classroom.

Let me go back a bit and introduce myself. I am a teacher, have been for twenty years or so now. I'm probably a little hidebound. Having seen the educational pendulum swing back and forth a few times already, I'm rather cynical about the latest "new" ideas, "new" programs, "new" curricula. I'm also convinced that, for the most part, what comes out of our enormous education ministry manages often only to illustrate the rule that states that those in executive or managerial positions, in order to justify holding their office, must be seen to be doing something - to be in motion - no matter the direction.

I am not given to bandwagons!

Thus it was with a certain reserve, to say the least, in June 1987 that I shrugged and said, "Well, O.K." to the news that next school year we would have all the kids presently in our "Life Skills" class entered into the regular classes of the school. I was doubtful, even a bit pessimistic but my experience of the last few years operating with "regular" groups of kids alongside the TMR-EMR (Jargon = Trainable or Educable Mentally Retarded) classes had, I guess, laid the groundwork. The problem was that all the kids in the "regular" class watched the "Life Skills" kids trooping off here there and everywhere swimming, horseback riding, shopping, and generally having a good time and complained, often loudly, "Why can't we do all those things too?" We even had some integration albeit of the "half-hour three times a week visit" variety.

The "Life Skills" students stayed off in their own little world and did not partake of the real one. (The sad fact is, of course, that this world is much less real without them.) This was true even of recess times. The "Life Skills" kids stayed in their own little clique - matching those of the other classes it is true - and were not socialized at all except among themselves. I too looked upon the group of them as "those kids" even though I did deal with them individually in various ways, either in the choir or at the school computer centre which is part of my responsibility. (I am the local toy nut, being involved with computers, cameras, and any other devices which come my way.) They were not really a part of the school. They had their box and they stayed in it.

We started in late August with a day long meeting involving the staffs of the two schools who were a part of the project. St. Francis in Kitchener (my school) and St. Joseph in Cambridge. We met with Dr. Marsha Forest, and some of her friends, Rose Galati, Norman Kunc, and Judith Snow. Present also were George Flynn, our Director of Education and his Assistant Superintendent for Special Education which at least suggested how much support we might have.

I had heard Norman speak once before and his passionate plea to teachers on this occasion as before to desegregate our schools, to abandon labels, to cease pre-judging people, to treat all people as people no matter what their problem was affecting to all who heard him. It sounded good. All kids are people. All can be part of their age group. All kids deserve the chance to be with all other kids.

Marsha talked about support circles, "circles of friends", and showed us how kids, regular ordinary kids, would not only help but would also be critical to the success of the integration process. She showed us how a group of ordinary kids made an enormous difference in the life of a "special" girl in a high school; a difference in school and in her social life as well, teaching the girl's parents what it was like to have a real teen-ager around the house. Marsha's final lesson was. "Don't panic. Don't worry. For the first couple of weeks, just carry on and don't get all het up about program."

At a party that evening, we had a chance to socialize with Marsha, Norman, Judith, and Rose and to explore informally the ideas we had been exposed to. We had a chance to express our own doubts and fears. How can this work? How can we possibly get anything done in these circumstances? How can we program for these kids?

Was I concerned? Of course! Grade 7 is tough enough for lots of kids. The sheer amount of stuff to be done is daunting to those whose intelligence is normal and whose lives are calm.

I suppose the most serious lesson I have had to learn in teaching is that we teach kids. Not things. Not subjects. Not content. In these days of almost continuous bombardment of new "things" to teach and new demands for space in timetables from all the special interest groups that make up our Ministry of Education, it is easy to forget that we cannot teach anything to any kid who is so beset by personal problems that (s)he has no time for anything so mundane as school work. So it is that we spend time trying to help kids sort out their lives. We have to!

## AND SO WE STARTED

September arrived. Not knowing what else to do, I went ahead with my usual preparations for school opening. Classroom ready. Initial lessons considered. All the things teachers do before a new year begins. True, at the back of my mind - and of the others too, I'm sure - were the questions: How will this work? How can we do this?

The day came. Brian (Cullen - our principal) does all the usual principal's sorts of things; greetings, introductions of teachers and assistants. (We have a lot of assistants but then we do have 17 kids, previously labelled with all sorts of labels, being integrated into 8 regular classrooms.) Kids are called out in class groups beginning with Grade 1. They march off to a new class, a new teacher, and a new year at school. Kids all scrubbed and apprehensive. Teachers too. Finally Grade 7. 34 students - 3 of whom had been in "Life Skills" last year. Off we go to the classroom to choose desks and settle in. I do all the usual teacher's sorts of things as well; introduce myself, establish the first few ground rules, and begin the first lesson. We start by beginning the reading of a novel to everyone. It will be a vehicle for a number of things in time but for now it is a way to get off to a nice soft start.

For the first couple of days, one of our assistants is present much of the time and Jenn (George - Special Education teacher for my students) looks in occasionally as well. It soon became apparent that we were going to get along fine for the time being however and the assistants are detailed to other classes where their help is more needed.

For the first week or so, the three "special" students were simply there. They did what they could. It soon became apparent that, with the exception of the work in Math, and some parts of my Language program, they could continue to be there. I had them start notebooks along with the others knowing that I would have to modify expectations in notemaking for them but that they could take part in the class and would.

We muddled along. I went about the business of the school year, which is to say working through the courses and lessons while trying to learn who my kids were and what were their strengths and weaknesses. Those in the business realize of course that this is ultimately an unending task. Kids will surprise you somehow. Still we must begin to get at least an impression of each one and try to sort out where each can work and what his or her needs might be.

Typically, as in most elementary schools (those where the kids are not streamed) there is a wide range of ability: kids who are bright, able and who find schoolwork easy - who need their teacher to work hard just to keep them challenged, kids who are average in ability and who will learn given the right encouragement, kids who have trouble learning in particular areas or in particular ways, kids who are troubled and therefore have trouble learning, (it did not become immediately apparent just how many there were of these in this group) and kids who simply have difficulty learning and have to struggle for what little they get. In time they became sorted out. Some turned out to have learning problems at least as debilitating as those of the three who came with labels. Some also turned out to have personal problems as difficult to deal with as any of

the "special" three although for them the scars of their labelling showed up often enough. Still, as those early two and then three weeks rolled by, I began to find - just as Marsha Forest had said we would - that we were getting along quite nicely with all kids in the classroom.

Thus we worked along. We learned very early that it was not enough to simply have the kids there. We had to do more. With Jenn helping, I worked out initial modifications to the programs. There was no problem. Sure, May and Suzie had trouble reading and speaking clearly. Sure, Richard was generally quite slow in all his work and did not want to try very hard. Sure, Kurt had great difficulty in reading, spelling, writing, and Math. Sure, Anna had difficulty in reading and comprehending and Math as well. Sure, Jason could not sit still for a minute and did not write at all well although he read reasonably well. Sure, Tim had difficulty following rules.

There was no problem because this is merely the normal collection of problems you expect to see in any regular Grade 7 class. Any differences were merely in degree and those not great enough to be bothered about. You pick whom of that group were the three who came with the labels. As you will see below, there were in fact many cross-overs in abilities within the whole group and some of the most serious learning problems were not among the labelled group.

There was no problem because, after the first day or so, we were all able to relax and go about our work, secure in the knowledge that we were coping and that we would eventually be able to sort out who needed what assistance.

There was no problem too because all the kids, labelled and unlabelled, settled in and went to work about as well as most other classes I have had. We worked along and began to put into place the program needed for each student. The three kids stayed in the room almost full time, leaving only when they worked with Jenn in Math or reading. Later we would begin to do that work within the classroom as well.

Jenn co-ordinated her schedule to fit my timetable so that they worked in the same general area at the same time as the others - Math. at Math time and so on. Where we could not make the schedules fit, she made sure I had what they needed. (This may not seem a big deal but even in a small school, it takes a great amount of scheduling to co-ordinate just two intermediate level classes in order to have a small amount of rotary studies for the students. It would have been nearly impossible to take apart that schedule again.)

About our third week of school Judith Snow came to visit. For those who have met Judith, this part of the story will not seem surprising. Judith came rolling into the room in her motorized wheelchair and proceeded to enthrall 34 kids. She demonstrated her chair and its controls, the set of micro-switches on a ring toggled by her thumb, and told the kids why she needed such a device. She invited their questions and for an hour answered everything they asked about her physical disabilities, her chair, her helpers, her whole life. She answered with calm and grace and left a bunch of kids thoroughly fascinated by what they had learned.

A week or so later in came Dr. Marsha Forest. "My name's Marsha." Marsha came of course to build "circles of friends" around our three new kids. (She did arrange to have them absent during this session out of deference to their feelings since they would be under discussion.) Marsha talked with the kids for more than an hour. In that time, she drew from them the most amazing collection of information, insight, empathy, and downright common sense that I have ever seen come out of any group, let alone a group of kids. I did not really believe what I heard. I am thankful that I thought to make a tape of the proceedings and was thus able to make a transcript.

Marsha's style as a facilitator is a fine subject for study in itself. She established very quickly in her session that she would accept any attempt to answer a question or state an opinion as an honest attempt. The kids learned quickly that she was accepting them as real people with valuable and useful opinions and they responded by becoming just such people.

She began by reminding them of their visit with Judith Snow and gave them some further background on Judith as well as her own work as part of the Joshua Committee, Judith's circle of friends. She led the students step by step to describe for her what Judith's life must have been like in the hospital where she lived for a long time and how she must have felt. Marsha confirmed enthusiastically when the kids were on track and corrected very gently when they strayed. What was so fascinating was the strong empathy the kids had. They were on target most of the time with great depth of feeling and understanding of Judith and her situation.

Marsha then led them through a look at her friend Ed who had been a car accident and as a result had become a person in a wheel chair. (One of our new students had a serious head injury in a car accident.) As she went along, Marsha helped the students understand our previous theories of dealing with people and students with special needs, the "special boxes for special needs" model that segregated them. And then, "If you were him, where would you want to be; in the "special school" box, the "special class" box, or your class?" The students had heard, had understood, had empathized. Their answer was clear and strong, "Here!" "In our class!" "This is where I belong no matter what handicaps I might have!" Over and over again, "This is where I belong!"

It was at this point that one student, Randy, asked, "You know Richard. He's all right. He's a little slow, educationally I mean but he's all right. Why was he put in Life Skills?" ("Life Skills" was our special box.) Even Marsha, who expects kids to have this amount of realism, was nonplussed. She passed the question on to Brian who was watching with me from the sidelines but his only answer was, "I don't know." He did expand on that a bit but he had really said all there was to say at that point. While Randy's question was one of the more startling of the morning, the depth of his perception was not uncommon in the group by this point.

Marsha went on to lead the group through an exercise in drawing circles around themselves, identifying in successive concentric levels those who were closest to themselves, those who were friends of some closeness but not their nearest and dearest, and those who were acquaintances and/or colleagues. (She did not go on to the fourth circle, those we pay to help us.) They were invited to explain their reasons for their placing of people on their circles. She then went on to lead the students to look at the circles around an imaginary girl with multiple handicaps who had no-one in any circle except a paid assistant. She asked the children to explore how this person might feel in such a situation. Once again, their perceptions were startling to those of us looking on. We have forgotten too much of childhood I guess and dealt too much with children's overt behaviours. It is enough to say here that they clearly understood how badly those who are alone in the world must feel; their hurt and their anger.

The last step in the morning was Marsha asking for volunteers to form circles around our three new students. She made two things clear. Firstly, they were not locked in. They could drop out after a month if they really felt out of place but, and this was stressed, she was looking for commitment. Secondly, this was not an exercise in pity the handicapped or "goody-goody stuff". What she asked for were students who would be with each of the three kids, to help them become part of the class, and, "to work with Kerry and Jenn to help plan their day at school".

She had the volunteers, quite enough to start with. The session had run overtime and Marsha had to run off. She left behind a group of 31 kids who did not feel that they had done or said anything particularly extraordinary and one regular classroom teacher, tremendously uplifted by his kids and emotionally drained by an experience which was almost religious in its intensity. Marsha flew out the door and we were left to carry on.

We did not actually do anything in the next few days but watch and see. Things began to happen. By the end of the week, we could observe the kids beginning to draw May, Jason and Richard into their pastimes and, where possible, into their schoolwork. A couple of examples here may shed some light.

Our Grade 8 class had taken on the responsibility of helping at noon recess with the three kids in the primary classes who are confined to wheelchairs. Friday they came to us to ask for volunteers to cover them as they had to be away over noon. Some of those in my class who stay for lunch had commitments already and one of the first to volunteer was May. I must have looked troubled as I indeed was for very quietly up came Kelly's hand. She would come too. Kelly, of course was one of those who volunteered to be part of the circle around May. After lunch then, May went off to do her bit to help out the young people and Kelly went along to help as well. She did help too - me that is. May was all right and Kelly had the good sense to let her do the job with no obvious shepherding.

Richard was the one who attracted the fewest volunteers, being bigger than many and having the largest chip on his shoulder. (His chip is there for good cause which need not be detailed here.) He had the reputation from last year for getting into trouble with another boy who had been part of the "Life Skills" box with him. The boys who had volunteered to be part of his group very quietly invited him into their games and persisted when he initially spurned them. Richard gradually began to take part in his classmates games and to draw away from his former companion. This would prove in time a major benefit to both boys.

I did not know how the circle of friends was to operate. We had had some brief information on it but were not really ready for all that was to follow. Marsha had had to rush off with almost no further talk and Jenn and I set out to see if we could help make the groups work. We sat down with each group in the next week and discussed how things were to operate. I was not burdened with a lot of preconceptions nor were the students. Thus we were able to trade ideas and thoughts bck and forth. I was reasonably sure that the circles were really to be "friend", that is helper, confidant, companion perhaps, and not "teacher" or "mother".

The students who were part of the groups have in fact proved to be what Marsha claimed they would be - sources of useful and realistic ideas for the integration of our three students. They have helped me and gently corrected me and the other teachers when we have not perceived what was plain to them. They have also accepted advice from me and from Jenn when we saw things they had not. It has been a most amazing and inspiring partnership.

## MAY

It seems appropriate here to review in some detail each of my three integrated students individually and comment on the operation of the groups around them. The reporting is subjective of course. It has to be I think. I am too close to this situation to be objective and we have no instruments with which to measure the sort of progress which we are sure has occurred.

Let me begin with May. May is the only child of the three who is clearly noticeable physically as "special". She has Down's Syndrome. She displays most of the physical attributes which characterize Down's people. This makes her the only one of the three who visitors to the class can spot. She is somewhat emotional, particularly at the onset of her menses. When she came to us she was a trifle dowdy and wearing large heavy boots. We learned later that the boots were necessary to help correct a foot problem. May's friends soon set to work on her clothing. More on that later.

I don't know the range of abilities of Down's people (which is probably just as well) but I carried, as did most of the students, the underlying perception of "retarded". May has in fact a wide range of abilities to go along with her disabilities. She can read, slowly and with difficulty, but with understanding. More to the point, she remembers a great deal. Much of what we discuss orally, she has caught and retained. She surprised us all by achieving a passing mark on my standard History test. She outscored several others in the class, some of whom felt rather grumpy about it but, as I assured them, the only help she had was me acting as her scribe. I took down her answers for her as her writing is extremely laborious but I had not prompted her other than to ask, "Is that all?" when she slowed down. She was very pleased. She does want to do well. She does in fact want very badly to be a part of this class.

May is a very lively girl. She seems to need to be independent and this comes out often as a stubborn streak or occasionally as a feeling of resentment when she has needed help or reminders about behaviour. She is able to stick up for herself - even to the point of reminding me sharply when I forget to print notes on the board that she was expected to copy along with the others. In time she learned to decipher my writing.

She is very much an adolescent, with her libido in full swing. She does not always handle her natural affectionate nature appropriately, being given to telling those males for whom she happens to develop an appreciation that they are cute or that she loves them. She has done it to me and to other adult males who have come to the room. It becomes necessary to remind her as gently as possible of appropriate behaviour on these occasions. She got a crush on one of the boys in the room who, to give him credit, tried hard several times to let her down easily. In the end that failed and May had to be reminded fairly severely by me that she could not continue to embarrass the lad. Her circle of friends tried to explain the facts of adolescent life to her but in that area as in some others she often refuses to listen. She seems to have led a too sheltered life up to now. What we really seem to be doing with her much of the time is helping her learn how to be a friend as well as to have friends.



May is one of those students, so dear to the hearts of teachers at this level, who just cannot stay organized. Left to her own devices, her notes would be a jumble of miscellaneous papers in her desk. She isn't alone of course. There are lots of students with the same general problem. Her circle of friends have helped a great deal here. They take her in hand regularly and help her sort out the mess in the desk and get her notes in order. They cry of course at the seeming unendingness of the chore. I laugh and remind them that I have been there before with all sorts of students and then thank them for persevering on such a frustrating chore. The point here is that they do try and have kept trying in the face of this frustration as well as May's occasional refusal to accept help. May does refuse their help sometimes, looking, I suspect, for her independence. She can be really nasty to them. A few times they have had some fairly severe shouting matches and tears while they all worked out hurt feelings. I have tried to let them work out as much of this on their own as I could and have joined the discussions either when they seemed to have reached an impasse or they have come to me for help.

The circle of friends has helped May in much of her life at school. In addition to the note-keeping mentioned above, they have helped in the formation of the notes. May does not write with enough facility to keep all of the notes that I need kids to have. Some of the things we work on of course are the skills of making useful notes for record and study purposes. For May and the others to cope, we needed to simplify the procedure somewhat. Jenn and I worked out an idea whereby May would be required to record the main ideas of a lesson as her note. The class would assist by telling me what were those points which needed recording. The benefits are obvious. May gets her note in a form she can handle and the class, many of whom need nearly as much help in sorting out the very same ideas, get a review and underlining of the important parts of the lesson.

In the general sorts of things like P.E., Art, Music and so on, May carries on quite normally. She needs occasional assistance but it is rare for me to have to pay any special attention to her. For the most part, whoever of her group is handy will give her what help is needed. If we have had any difficulty here it has been when May has refused help.

When it came time for May's MAP, November 18, 1987, the circle really helped a great deal. The idea of the MAP (originally McGill Action Planning session) is to have all those people concerned in the life of a person meet together to help figure out what is the best way for that person to use their day. The person concerned is very much a part of the meeting of course. In May's case those present were May, Cathy and Howard Russel, her mom and dad, her sister Jennifer, Kerry, her teacher, Jenn, her special education teacher acting as illustrator for the meeting, Brian, her school principal, Cheryl, our other special education teacher acting as facilitator, and her circle of friends, Amy, Kelly, Tina, Stacy, Becky, Pam, and Fatima.

First the History of the person is sketched - in this case by mom and dad. All members of the group are then asked five major questions: 1. What are your dreams for her? (No problems allowed here - just what would you really want if there were no limits) 2. What are your nightmares for her? 3. Who is May? (Brief descriptions as each person sees her - a

brainstorming session. 4. What are her strengths? 5. What are May's needs?

Input comes from all members of the group for each question. The students who were part of the circle of friends for May were very much a part of the meeting and provided solid, useful ideas all along the way. A plan for May's day is then discussed and laid out in detail using the classroom schedule and noting where the regular program needed to be modified or adapted for May's needs. Once again, the kids were very much a part, providing useful and workable ideas. May took part as well and contributed to her own MAP.

May's circle of friends has helped her a great deal at school. They have drawn her into their pastimes and recess activities with fair success. There have been steps forward and back of course. They have forgotten her at times but on the whole have been true to the commitment they made.

May is a bit excitable. She also gets wrapped up in what she is doing and forgets her body's needs, elimination and so forth. The first time there was an accident, I had six excited girls descending upon me in a rush frantic over a minor accident in elimination. They were concerned and a bit flustered. It isn't appropriate for me to deal with May for these sorts of things of course, and I sent one of them off to look for Jenn while one other went with May into the washroom. Once that particular flap was resolved, we organized things a bit. The group would send one person for Jenn and one with May while the rest would just carry on with whatever was going on. They learned to cope well. In time, with the girls helping May to be more aware, the problem seemed to disappear. We haven't had an accident in some time.

It is in May's social life that the group has had a considerable effect. This is not part of the school's mandate in any official way of course but there have been some opportunities and we have taken advantage of them. Our parish runs a monthly Saturday evening social for the students in Grades 7 & 8 in the three schools. May's friends have taken care of making sure she gets there and is appropriately dressed. Early in the year they all walked home with May so that mother could get to know them. This was mainly Jenn's idea but the kids took to it and behaved well. May's mother got to meet the people who were helping May.

After the first dance, May's mother was still concerned over the whole idea. May had had a good time at the dance or so she had reported. From the little I saw when I went over, she appeared to be enjoying herself. I wrote back that I had been just as concerned for my son attending the same dance for his first time and I figured that we were both being typical parents worrying over things that our kids were taking entirely in stride. I suggested too that, if things went for May as they did for many of the others, there would be some bad times as well as good and that I, for one, felt that she should also face her share of disappointments.

She has great hopes for the boys of course as have all the girls and is doomed to some disappointments in that regard. In time, as she learns more appropriate ways of behaving among her contemporaries, we may see more progress here too although she has a lot to learn about social cues and customs.

For the second dance, several of May's friends arranged to go out with her and her mother to help choose appropriate clothing for May as a proper young adolescent. The expedition was succesful and May was pleased with her new clothes.

Several things have come out of the dances. With the support of her circle of friends, May has had at least a reasonably good time at them. There have been problems of course. May is rather over-weight and wants to eat more than her mother would wish. She fell into the habit of scooping up unprotected pop cans and finishing off the contents. The kids were not pleased of course and told her so - loudly. This same behaviour has turned up on other occasions as well and will likely continue to be a concern for some time. It is not of earth-shaking importance and the kids have done well it seems to me in telling her how they feel about her doing things like that. They have in fact been very good indeed in their choices of reaction when May's actions have been inappropriate or hurtful. They can get strident but have accepted well my suggestion that they shouldn't all gang up on her at once.

As the year has gone on, it has become apparent that most of our gains for May have been in the area of socialization. She has certainly progressed in school work but what seems more important now, looking back upon the year, is the gains she has made in social skills. She has a long way to go yet in learning to be a friend but her circle of friends has done a great deal to foster her growth in many ways. They have helped me and Jenn sort out impressions and ideas about May and her behaviour. They have exhibited real concern for her welfare. Some have put up with considerable abuse from May who developed a habit of telling Stacy and Kim that she didn't want them to help, she wanted Becky or Amy or Kelly. This hurt them and they told her so. Both girls were given the chance to resign in the face of this behaviour. I told them that I felt they had every right to resign if they wanted to. Both chose to keep at it. Their comments were similar, "I don't want to give up!" I told them how beautiful I thought they were.

This particular group has met regularly. We gradually established a pattern of meeting for lunch every Monday and discussing what was going on and whatever seemed to need sorting out. Any one of the group has been able to raise their concerns. This includes May of course. She has been a member of her group all along and joins in the discussion. The meeting have varied considerably. Some have been quite heated, particularly if there have been hurt feelings to be sorted out. Some have been calm chats about ideas or concerns. Some have had no focus at all if neither I nor the kids had anything that needed discussing. Then the kids have just gone on being kids and fooled around or gone out to play.

The kids have been partners in the enterprise. I could not have carried on without them I don't believe. Their ideas have been valuable, often more to the point than mine and their concern for their friend has been real. There have been occasions where I felt I had to correct them but I have to admit also that there have been occasions when they have done the leading and I have followed, when their perceptions of the problem at hand have been clearer than mine.

The kids work in this area has not all been sweetness and light. They have had bad times and good. They have forgotten about May on occasion or have left her out of activities. They have not done so deliberately to my knowledge and when they have realized a particular error, they have been contrite. Most times, I have allowed the group to take its course. It seemed to me that there might be a danger in reminding the kids of their chosen responsibility too often. On the whole, this course of action seems to have worked out well. The lapses have been rare enough and of little consequence. It seemed to me too that there were times when the kids needed to relax from their commitment. They have never really forgotten May and have maintained almost constant concern for her welfare but they have occasionally needed a break from actual contact. Thus, when they seemed to have forgotten her, I tended most times to wait and see assuming that this was a needed break. Indeed this seems to have been the case as invariably the group has reformed as soon as needed.

One of the neater things to have come out of the working of this group arose from the kids and Jenn's concern over May's complexion. She has the beginnings of a fairly severe case of adolescent acne plus some extra irritation on her face.

Susan Hunt (our Vice Principal and Grade 8 teacher) saw this as an opportunity to do some very interesting work. She arranged for a friend who was expert in the field to come in to talk to the girls of Grade 7 and 8 about basic skin care and make-up. The whole group of them met for several noon hours over a period of weeks. May drank it all in. She took part in the whole series of lessons. Susan's friend did a beautiful job of answering all questions including May's. Jenn took care to follow up with May and her mother. She arranged to take May shopping with a couple of her friends to get the supplies recommended. They laid in a stock for school and for home and May learned to take care of her own skin and face. A little later, Jenn helped arrange a permanent for May and did some further work with her on hair care and regular washing. For a while, to help her get her habits established, May came in a bit early in the morning for refresher lessons from Jenn. She is now at the point where she can take care of her own needs. She doesn't always remember to but that will come in time I expect.

May has, in most senses, disappeared as a "special" student. She is a regular member of her class in school. She has her differences but we all have differences and hers are now little more noticeable than those of anyone else in the class. She is a person in her own right and no longer a "special" addition to the group. She takes part as an equal in class discussions and her classmates listen to her about as well as they do to anyone else. As I noted before, she still has many things to learn about being a teen-ager, about social cues, about having friends, and about being a friend. She will learn these. Her friends don't know it all yet either and, as we often use class time to help kids sort out social problems, she will learn about feelings along with them. She will learn along with them that the feelings and fears of adolescence are normal. She is gaining in independence as well and slowly shrugging off the scars of segregation although there is a long way to go there as well.

## RICHARD

The second of the three students is Richard, the student for whom the others had the greatest initial reserve. He is a tall boy, dark-haired, rather thin, generally a nice, ordinary, good-looking boy. He unfortunately tends rather often to be in need of a bath and fresh clothing. Richard came to us with a reputation for getting into trouble. In the first couple of weeks, he did get into a few scrapes with a friend from the old "Life Skills" class. The escapades were serious enough that they had to be dealt with by Brian in his official capacity as principal.

Richard does not learn easily. He did not really read at all when he came to us and had few number concepts. Yet he seems very quick with quips and comebacks with his friends and with me. He has a gentle sense of humour much of the time. He has a fairly well developed mechanical sense and takes apart various toys and reassembles them. He is very well co-ordinated and would do well at all forms of athletics if he weren't so shy of demonstrating his prowess.

He is quite shy and retiring, very sensitive to slights from others and easily hurt by remarks about his abilities. He seems to carry a fair-sized weight of resentment from past slights while he was a member of the "Life Skills" class. As is often the case, his resentment comes out in hurtful behaviours to others who are vulnerable, often to May. He carries some abiding ache from that old class group that seems to come out in this fashion.

Richard is usually cheerful and friendly but he can become resentful, argumentative, or hard to reason with on occasion. These occasions seem to be when things have gone wrong somehow, either in his work or in his behaviour. It seems to be this combination of shyness and pricklyness that gave rise to the class's initial reluctance to deal with him. Yet it was about him also that Randy asked his startling question in the "circle of friends" session with Marsha Forest.

It is for Richard that the circle of friends has worked most effectively at least as far as socialization is concerned. He has in fact simply disappeared for the most part. He is one of the guys. The boys who first volunteered to be part of Richard's group were quiet, steady people; Robbie, Serge, and Dion plus Danny, one of those boys - there is one in every group - who seem sent for the express purpose of keeping their teachers on their toes. Tim joined the group later. He too is a boy who has a certain amount of difficulty handling things like rules of behaviour. He asked to join the group although the people he usually associates with have not taken a great part in any of the groups.

None of these guys say much. In the early stages of the year when we were feeling our way along, I asked them whether Richard was joining in their games and things at recess. They said that he wasn't and wouldn't. Having said that, they proceeded with very little further suggestion to urge him to join their recess and noon

time rough-house soccer games. They persisted in this until he began to join in and ultimately became part of the crowd who played, shouted, argued, and played some more. He became able to take a full share in all the parts of boyhood school-yard games including the arguments, giving and taking with the rest. For a boy as shy and withdrawn as Richard was when he joined us, this has been a major achievement.

The major successes for Richard have been indeed in the social area. He has attended the parish dances as well. He has had at least one sleep-over at Danny's house and Danny has visited him. He gets along comfortably with his friends, joining in their antics when they are misbehaving. He takes his lumps with them as well when I have to reprimand them. He does not always react well to supply teachers requests for work or behaviour but most times takes whatever Jenn or I have to say to him about as well as most kids do. The best part of course is that, in this area as in most others, he is a full member of the class. The rest of the class is quite prepared to help him in any way they can but they need to be assured that he and the others are treated fairly, not specially, and that must include correction of behaviour when needed.

As the groups have met to discuss ideas and progress, Richard and his friends have rarely wanted to say much. The ideas we needed were there when we asked but, perhaps typically, the boys have not been comfortable with a large amount of introspection. They have been much better at simply getting the job done without a lot of chat.

Richard's friends have helped him with his school work. They have had some successes, not huge successes but at least visible progress in at least some of the areas he needed help with. Richard had no work habits when he arrived; little writing skill, little reading, some math, little organization, and, for that matter, little inclination. The circle of friends had not achieved miracles here, at least not on the surface, but Richard is changing. He now says he wants to read. Jenn has worked hard with him during the class's French time to get him started and interested and his friends have encouraged him and cheered him on with every small success he has had. He will listen to the work of the class in the regular work of Grade 7 and take some part although it is still difficult to get him to try to work on notes. Some of that is shyness, I think. Some is still inability to cope. Much is learned disinclination to work. He is next to Danny much of the time and gets to hear me push Danny for improvement in both quantity and quality of work. The neat part is that Danny has improved but I suspect not so much because I keep asking and pushing but because he realizes he is acting as a model for Richard.

We don't see or hear much from Richard's parents. This is part of his pattern apparently. Common wisdom has it that his home life is not particularly supportive. Mother did come in for the regular parent-teacher interview after the first-term report however. She went away saying she was pleased and surprised at what we had to say. Yet we had not really had anything particularly startling to

report. We discussed his work, saying that he was doing nicely at his reading and math and beginning to make sense of History, Geography, and Science. He was behaving well and staying out of trouble. We discussed concerns about his work, his personal hygiene, and some of the other things that get fitted into these hurried conferences. Mother really did seem elated. She was nearly in tears as she left saying that she had never heard such good things about her boy. We had not dressed him up at all.

It was interesting to note that, when school reconvened in January, after the Christmas holiday. Richard had reverted to the boy we knew in September. He was grey and tired, withdrawn, and uncommunicative. He wouldn't horse-play with his friends or with me. It took several days for him to recover and become again the cheerful fellow we had come to know. We don't know yet why he came back as he did.

In his previous years at this school, as a resident of the segregated classroom, Richard had been a rather unhappy boy, given to getting into scrapes of one sort or another rather often and absent from school a great deal. Even the slightest illness or home problem would result in his absence for several days at a stretch. This year, we can't keep him away. He has come in obviously feeling ill. His house burnt rather badly one evening and the family had to find other accommodations while the damage was repaired. Richard didn't miss a day.

As with May, Richard has largely disappeared into the general population. He has actually disappeared more completely partly because he does not have any recognizable physical characteristics that make him stand out and partly because he was able to make friends more easily. He is still shy of course except with his friends. With them he is just another guy getting what fun he can out of the day while teachers demand all sorts of strange things to interrupt the fun.

## JASON

The third student of our group of three is Jason. Of the two boys, he is the one the kids were more inclined to try and help. He is also the one who proved the most frustrating to deal with.

Jason is a slight, rather thin, boy with brownish hair. When he first came to us, his face was oddly shaped, with the left side rather curiously flattened and one eye permanently closed. He is the victim of a severe automobile accident which resulted in serious damage to his head. Most of his frontal lobes are gone as is his left eye and the olfactory nerve. His mother has said that he was almost lost twice on the operating table during the initial surgery following the accident. They were told then that Jason would always be a vegetable and require permanent institutional care.

He is not a vegetable. He is, in fact, a rather bright boy but one who has some fairly severe learning and behaviour problems. Jason does read fairly well but does not retain much of what he reads. His memory does not work all that well although some things seem to stick. I can't detect a pattern to the memory variations although I suspect that at least some stems from his not wanting to try to remember, not attending to what is going on. He does indulge in some fairly bizarre antics around the schoolyard and in the classroom. One of the students who knew him in his previous school before his accident has said that some of the odd behaviours are not new; that he had done things like that before. The accident, we assume, helped to lock some of them in place.

Jason has little affect, which is to say that he shows almost no emotion of any sort and apparently does not feel any or very little. This is a result of the loss of the frontal lobes of the brain. Even here however, we have seen some changes over the course of the year. He does express some feelings. He was pleased to hear from his classmates when he was in hospital in Toronto for reconstructive surgery. He was apparently eager to get back to school after his operations. He seems to express cheerfulness quite readily and to my eye at least there seems to be genuine emotion there.

Jason's mother and step-father are very concerned for him and for his schooling. They want what is best for him. Typical of parents in their situation, they have had to invest enormous amounts of time and energy (physical, psychic, and emotional) in helping their child. He is, it must be admitted, rather a handful. Of the three students who were labelled as having "special needs", it was Jason's parents who most questioned the wisdom of what we were attempting to do and most wanted to modify our vision, to substitute their own ideas. (They really wanted Jason to have most of his schooling on a "one on one" basis with his own tutor.) Unfortunately, when it came time for the Mapping session for Jason, they "forgot" to come to the meeting and it had to be cancelled. We had been entertaining great hopes for that meeting and we all, including Jason's circle of friends, were very disappointed to have to forgo it. We planned another attempt early in the new year but it also had to be cancelled as Jason was absent for his surgery. You will recall that it is very important to have Jason present at his own MAP session. We had to go ahead to plan Jason's work and day without the MAP to help us but with the help of his circle of friends.



Jason's behaviour has been the most difficult to deal with of any of the students. He doesn't do anything particularly mean or bad. He just "bugs" people. He has a wide range of simple devices which he uses repeatedly to draw other kid's attention to himself. He will poke at them, burp loudly into their faces, talk to them (but a little too loudly and off the topic at hand), and simply fidget with things in his desk. No pencil survives more than an hour with Jason. He will also pick up garbage, used gum, or other things off the schoolyard or floor and pop them into his mouth. This of course makes the kids around him revolted and they tell him so. The kids of course try to help him by telling him to cut it out, to quit being a jerk, and sometimes by shouting in frustration. We worked out fairly early in the game a system whereby the student who was being pestered was to try twice to get the behaviour stopped. If the student's protests did no good, he or she merely had to holler louder the next time and I would take over. With some forgetfulness on both sides (but mostly mine - I would often forget the arrangement in the middle of a lesson and first reprimand the student doing the protesting who then had to remind me why he or she was talking out) the idea worked out to some extent. Jason often does not respond to his classmates' protests and most often it seems to need my rather stronger voice to settle whatever was going on. Jason's typical behaviour following a reprimand is to present a very apologetic, contrite manner, to say he is sorry, and to forget about it and go back to the same or similar antics in a few minutes.

Oddly enough, none of his antics have been a great bother. When a student who has been sitting next to Jason reaches the point where he or she has had enough for a while (and they did of course) they get to move away the next time we rearrange the seating. It seems strange but the whole class simply never worries much about Jason's behaviours. They holler at him as necessary and forget it and, for almost all of them, go on regarding him as likable and a friend. I get no feeling from Jason that he is trying to hurt anyone and the kids seem to feel the same way. It is also true that many of the very bizarre things have toned down a great deal. The kids have gotten him to stop the horrid eating habits and many of the most exasperating antics. He has calmed down a lot. He has a long way to go but the improvement is clearly there and the future bodes well.

For the kids who are in Jason's circle this has given rise to the part of this process which has the greatest potential for error. For Jason more than the others (although the same error crept into May's group as I have told) there was always the problem of his friends beginning to act as teacher or mother. Anna particularly, who tends to be a bit bossy anyway, has the greatest difficulty refraining from trying to manage Jason completely. Left to her own devices, she fell into the habit of giving him punishments for misbehaviours and assigning homework. The rest of the students tried to get her to ease off and eventually really gave her hell but I finally had to step in and insist she back off. She did fall back into this pattern again and again and each time I had to slow her down. The danger here is obvious. Most of the kids saw clearly that they could not be me or Jenn. They could help in many ways but they could not be both friend and teacher.

In later discussion with Marsha, this problem came up and we learned that there were places where people had deliberately prostituted the circles into this sort of model. I can't stress enough the destructiveness of this. The kids who formed the circles helped their friends in all sorts of ways and that included helping them to learn to behave as normal young teen-age kids do. Sometimes that included examples of misbehaviour as well but I guess we have to accept the rough with the smooth. Kids would not be kids without getting into a few scrapes and I want them to have their childhood as well. It is simply beautiful to see their idealism at work also.

I did take a great deal of time with the groups helping them to sort out what their roles were. We all learned in the process but the big lesson was that we had to be aware constantly of the danger of falling into that trap and to watch ourselves carefully. In this area as in the other areas we had to discuss, the students were quite clear-headed. They could see the dangers. They did not want to be surrogate anythings. They would not all become truly friends in the very close sense of the word but they would certainly be school friends and chums (to use an old word). They could see how destructive it would be to any sort of friendship to have them set onto their friends as an authority figure.

## THE CLASS

What of the class? I have said enough along the way to suggest that there are many special kids and many ways of being special. A few years back I heard a man who should have known better declare that teachers are not social workers and should not be dealing with the problems kids have outside school. This is nonsense of course! In my group of 35 kids there are nearly half who are from single parent families. One lost his mother last year. Another lost his father the year before. Several live in the aftermath of divorces, either with a single parent or step-parents. Whether we like it or not they bring these problems to school with them.

Typically, the kids in the divorce situation blame themselves for the breakup of their families, "It's my fault my parents are divorced." Many seem to grieve just they might over a death of the parent. Some seem to grieve even more in the sense that they never quite give up hoping that somehow they will bring their wandering parents back together again. Typically too, many are highly stressed by the problems in their lives over which they have no control. They react, sometimes with erratic behaviour, sometimes with poor work habits, sometimes with tears. I have become more and more convinced that there is nothing we can do to teach a kid who has not been able to come to grips with his or her own personal problems. We can't ignore their problems. We have to help them deal with whatever raw deal life has handed them before we can even begin to try to teach. We have at least to give them something to hold on to, a chance to hope for help.

One thing that seems to have come out of this year's experience so far is that the students in the class have become much more open with each other and with me. They have been able to articulate some of their problems and strains. They have begun to help each other with ideas for coping with their situations. After all, what do I, the product of a normal, loving, two-parent family of the 40's and 50's, know of divorce as seen by the children of a broken family. They know however and they have helped each other work through some of their bad times. And this in a group which has, it must be said, some fairly severe interpersonal strains.

Some of those strains have been severe enough that I have had to stop the normal routine to help the group work through their conflicts. Just as much as May and to a lesser extent Richard, a few others need help in learning how to be a friend and how to have a friend. These occasions have been fairly strenuous emotionally. I did not however seriously consider removing anyone from the situation. Here again, it seemed to me that May, Richard, and Jason belonged there, with their classmates. They need, it seems to me, the chance to learn how people get along, how they don't get along, and how they learn to sort out their differences. Their lives up to now have been too sheltered, too removed from the world they will have to inhabit.

At the beginning of this piece I tried to point out that this is a quite normal class. By that I mean that they are no better and no worse in behaviour than any other group of this time. We have our regulation complement of class clowns, angry young men (or women) and talkers. As individuals, they are reasonable people, . As a class they are subject to

all the group behaviours and strains that you expect these days in a classroom. They can be so beautiful that they make you cry and they can be so cruel to each other that they make you cry again.

They can work their hearts out fulfilling the commitments they made to the circles of friends and some have even volunteered to do double duty in order to help another classmate who is fairly severely learning disabled in reading and needs support while he learns to cope with his problem and regains some of the confidence in his own ability that he has lost over the years.

Not all have helped of course. Some have merely looked on and done little. A few, a very rare few, have hindered the work either by getting in the way or by doing or saying things to hurt others.

They can also, it must be said indulge in all the classroom behaviours that do so much to keep their teacher busy. They can do and have done a thorough job of baiting a supply teacher when I had to be away for a week with another class. They will get silly on occasion. In short again, they are quite normal. This means that they are amenable to regular discipline with no more than the usual grumbling. They respond reasonably well to calm discussion of misbehaviours and also, when it seems necessary, to very loud demands for correcting whatever is wrong at the moment. I can get noisily irritated with them when necessary. We get along. It is not necessary too often and we can get back to work with no lingering strain.

Here again, all students are present in the class. Anyone who needs correction gets it although with 35 kids, some surely slip through the cracks. No matter. If I can keep the slips more or less even, we won't have too many problems.

It seems to me that it is these kids who have benefitted the most from this work. For them, the project has given them a real chance to see how the world really works, to become aware of the sorts of things others have to cope with. They have developed a strong sense of community among themselves and have begun to extend that feeling to the broader world. They have progressed further and further toward becoming people who are truly aware of the need for justice for all peoples and have practical experience in providing that justice.

They have benefitted too in their personal lives. Many have experienced frustration in their work with their friends. In has not all been sweetness and light. There have been bad times. But they have stuck to their commitments. They have done so willingly. I have begun to interview each one to ask their views on the idea of integration and their part in the project as we have gone about it. They see clearly the problems and frustrations but almost without exception they are positive about their experiences. They will go on with it.

They make me proud to be associated with them.

## WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

It is now the end of the school year. We have added one more student to the class. It is now 35. The groups have continued to work along.

It has not all been sweetness and light. May has managed to hurt and anger many of the people in her circle on several occasions; so much so that some were almost ready to give up entirely. The basic problem seems to be her lack of experience in having friends. She has often indulged in the sort of things seen in younger girls who tend to blackmail each other into friendships. The schoolyard cry that goes, "If you play with her, I won't be your friend any more." which, in various forms, is heard fairly often in Primary age girls (not nearly as commonly in boys it seems) has been used by May rather often. Her friends have tried to tell her that these things hurt but she has had trouble learning that she can hurt people. To give the group credit, they have come to us with their hurts and worked through them as a group with May. The sessions have often been fairly highly charged. They have really tried to make the thing work, have been able to understand May's problem as something which is potentially fixable, and to go back at it.

They too have needed help in their relationships with May and each other. There was an early tendency to be "mother" and "teacher" rather than "friend". They would almost gang up on May when she did things which were wrong or hurt one of them. We had to help them to sort out their roles, to be helper, assistant, confidant (if possible) and friend (in time). I still do not see any true friendships developing here. True, there have been some out of school visitings as described above, but May is not yet operating on the same wavelength as the others although they remain quite willing to include her in their activities. I have not decreed friendship. We have told the circle as clearly as we could that we do not demand they become May's best friends. If someone in the group develops a real friendship for her, that will be a real bonus. May too has been present for these sorts of discussions. May's mother too had hopes for far reaching outcomes of the circle of friends. Will some of those hopes be realized? I don't know. The potential is there and might develop.

Richard's circle has probably worked the best of the lot. He has been the most thoroughly assimilated into the group. He remains quite slow as far as schoolwork goes of course but he has become quite thoroughly a regular member of the class and with his friends looking on and helping has taken what part he can in the regular work of the class. He has been able to indulge in some of this age group's normal pastimes even to staying over at one of the boy's houses on a couple of occasions. He has left behind some of the more hurtful of his previous behaviours. He has begun to come out of his shell although he remains quite shy. He has I believe come a long way this year.

Where will Richard wind up. Again, I do not know. He has next year in the same group still to come and I believe I can see him continuing to progress in his social development.

Jason's circle has faced the most difficult task. He has the most severe behaviour difficulties. He has been the least affected by his contact with the class although there has been definite improvements. .

And yet, while he was off getting his head reconstructed, he apparently missed the class and received with joy their greetings. The members of his circle have worked hard to help him although it was difficult to keep them from becoming "mother" and "teacher" again. One girl in particular still can't quite let go and simply be a friend. She too has needs, some of which are served by being a part of this circle. In her case, I had to question the wisdom of accepting her help knowing that she does not readily hear instructions that run counter to what she wants to do. In her case, several of the other students have severely chastized her when they felt she wasa being too rough on Jason. She doesn't hear them either. Jason, it must be said, seems to like having her there, even if she does seem to boss him around rather thoroughly.

Have we made mistakes? We must have. The whole concept was new to me. We have had to work out things as we went along praying for guidance all the while. We must have missed opportunities to further the work of the circles. We must have misdirected the kids on occasion but somehow the thing continues to work, perhaps even in spite of the fumbings of their teacher.

Have we been busy? Most certainly. I don't remember so full a year. It has been tiring but at the same time the most exhilarating experience of my career. I wouldn't have missed it.

I titled this part, "Where do we go from here?". I do not clearly know yet where this particular group will go from here. They will go on to Grade 8 , continue to have their own problems and keep on trying to help their friends.

But they are changed. Of that I am sure. They have grown tremendously. They have given of themselves generously. With any kind of support at all, they will carry on the job they started this year. They are not going to perform any miracles in the abilities of May, or Jason, or Richard. They have already performed miracle in their lives however. Jason, Richard, and May have come a long way. Certainly, they have a long way to go yet but there can't be a turning back now. Their gains are too great. What is at least as important is the growth of the students who became part of the circles of friends. They have gained a great deal more in the long run. Their experiences can only have done them good.

I have tried to stress that, as much as I am enthralled by the things my students have done to help each other and their three "special" classmates, they are not a special class. They are special to me of course. As many of us do, I tend to want to keep the group I have, to become attached to them. I hate to give up a class for the new one coming. But these kids I will really not want to part with. We have done so much. They have taught me so much.

## WHAT ABOUT YOU?

What do I say to you who may be faced with the prospect of having a strange, possibly different in some way, student come into your class? Relax! This does work. Your students, given half a chance, will do wonders. They will rise to the challenge as people of quality always do. There will be struggle, work, and some pain but they will grow. And so will you. Your class will do for you what mine did for me.

I am not alone in this. Mine is not an isolated experience. I have seen kids all over our school helping other kids. I have seen them help anyone, not merely those who were handicapped in some way. I have seen them simply playing with their friends, handicapped and not, squabbling with them, generally getting along with them as all kids do. I have seen them in Grade 6 and Grade 5 and Grade 4 carrying along with the "special" kids in their classes in much the same way as mine have. I have seen those "special" kids gradually disappear into their classes until there are no longer "different" kids. We teach all kids. In the younger grades it was not even necessary to discuss things. The younger children simply accepted all kids without reservation.

I can hear you saying, "But that's all very well and easy for you but my kids are different. You can't do that with my kids."

No I can't. I don't know your kids. But you can! I'm not special. I'm just a teacher, lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time, to see this work. If I can do it, with my kids (and I insist, as much as I love them, that they are not special either), you can!

Marsha claims that it is because I am open or accepting or something like that, that I could accept my kids for what they are and work with them. I hope she's right. I would be pleased to think so. I don't believe however, that I am much different from most of us in this business who care for kids. I have learned over the years to roll with the punches, to avoid getting too upset at the inevitable delays and interruptions to the days. I'm a bit of a maverick, I suppose. I tend to go along on my own a good deal and to avoid at all costs any dealings with the upper levels of administration.

We have got along nicely just taking things as they came and dealing with them. If Jenn has to be away, we get along. If someone is having a bad day for some reason, we carry on and that person's friends will help and call me in if I am needed. I am talking here about all the kids, not just the three who are now just a part of the group.

In the same vein, we have had rather a busy year in terms of visitors so far. We have learned just to laugh and carry on as various visiting teachers and administrators float through. The kids have become used to finding unidentified people drifting in and out. They have questioned the wisdom or value of a five minute gawking session in learning anything about what goes on in our room and what they do. I agree with them and have told them so while explaining that very often I or someone else on staff will be talking with these people explaining what is going on. Still, I suspect they have more respect for the few visitors who have

actually stayed, joined in for a bit, and talked to them. I guess we have all learned to roll with the punches a bit.

Let me repeat. You can do what we did! Like me though, you can't do it alone. I get along with little assistance in the classroom. Jenn works alongside me for Math and part of the Language time barring the times she has to be elsewhere. We do have a high school student alternate afternoons who works under our direction with small groups or takes on other chores as needed.

There are other teachers whose groups need the presence of an aide either part or full time. For the most part, the assistants are not attached to a particular student although they might be labelled as such for budget purposes. They work in the classroom, with whatever group needs a hand or at whatever chore needs doing. Our paraprofessional assistants have become partners as well, sharing in planning and rejoicing in the gains our kids have made.

I had help however. If you are to do what we did, you need the sort of support I had. You need a principal like Brian who is committed to the ideal and supportive while remaining clear-headed about the direction of his school. It helps too if, like Brian, your principal is aware of his charges and able to spot potential problems that you may not, being too close sometimes to recognize a danger signal.

You need a support teacher like Jenn who also can roll with the punches, who has the wit and the grace to pick up the ball when you drop it and slip it back to you and who willingly assists you in what you are doing. Jenn made it easy for me to accept her help and that couldn't have been easy considering the number of years I have taught entirely on my own with nobody else around but the class. She took care of the "special" programming for May, Jason, and Richard in Math and Reading and later helped work out program for Kurt as we began to understand his difficulties more clearly. She discussed with me the methods of modifying things for the kids who needed it and helped me immeasurably in clarifying ideas and directions. In brief, she provided me a leaven of sanity in a busy time.

You need a sense of humour. You and the people around you must try not to take yourselves too seriously. Be human. You are embarking on a scary proposition. You need to be able to laugh. We would all have collapsed by now if we had not been able to laugh. Brian, for all his commitment and caring, is a joker. The various tricks he has played on Susan (Hunt - our Vice-Principal in Training) and she in return on him; both aided and abetted by others of us caught up in their games, have kept us sane and also have let the kids see us in our humanity. I am sure that the fact that we are comfortable with each other and supportive of each other has gone far in setting the tone for the kids.

Above all you need to accept your kids. See them clearly please but be ready for them to surprise you. Let them accept you as you are. I think I have said, "I don't know." more often this year than any other line. I don't mind kids knowing that I don't have all the answers. Let your kids know when you are puzzled or troubled. Laugh with them. Cry with them. Hold them when they need a hug. Pray with them. (If you are in a situation which allows that.) Pray for them if you aren't.



You still say, "But not with these kids! They need this or that or whatever.

O.K. Fine! But until you get them in with a bunch of everyday, ordinary, regular kids and let them live in the real world, you will be right for that is a self-fulfilling prophesy.

Yet they won't get the "this" or the "that" or the "whatever". Not until they are real people. And they can't be real people in isolation. They can't be real people and live segregated lives. It hurts too much! They must be let out of their boxes before it is too late and they can't get out.

We haven't turned May or Jason or Richard into brilliant scholars. I don't suppose we ever will. But they are starting to be happy now. They can laugh and have fun. They can cry and be comforted by their peers. They are not over all their hurts. Who of us are? Yet they are more able to cope with them. They have friends to help them, people their own age to cry with them.

Sure, I've had most of my class cry on my shoulder at one time or another this year. They have needed it. Sometimes I have wanted to cry with them and sometimes I have. But their friends have been there for them and they have supported each other and when those occasions have arisen, no-one has stopped to worry about just who is there. Richard, May and Jason are part of the class. They belong. And because they belong, they are beginning to learn. Richard reads a little now. He is less shy. Jason works sometimes and even tries. May writes now and is pleased with her own progress. They are growing.

Let your class or classes of students have a chance to understand the nature of integration and why it is so good and let them help. Don't be too astonished when some of your best volunteer circle members turn out to be those kids who have problems of their own. Out of their own great needs (and therefore understanding) may come the insights you need for your "special" kids. Some of mine did. Your kids are just as special as mine are. Or they will be when you let them.

We are at the place now where we don't talk much about integration. That's done. It is accomplished. We are a school, doing what schools do, providing the best education we can to our kids.