



Down Syndrome Assoc. of Ontario

DRAFT #1

RESPONSE

OF THE

DOWN SYNDROME ASSOC.

OF ONTARIO

TO THE

CONSULTATION PAPER

ON THE

INTEGRATION OF

EXCEPTIONAL PUPILS

MARCH 28, 1992

SCHOOL INTEGRATION FOR STUDENTS WITH DOWN SYNDROME (D.S.)

The terms "integration", "mainstreaming" and "inclusion" are currently used by different people and groups to mean different things. The Down's Syndrome Assoc. of Ontario tends to favour the word "integration", however, we consider the terms "mainstreaming" and "inclusion" to be synonymous.

SCHOOL INTEGRATION IS DEFINED AS:

- full-time placement in a regular, chronologically age appropriate class, in the neighbourhood school (the school the student would be attending if s/he were not labelled "exceptional") with whatever programme modifications and support services are required to meet the student's needs. (Programme modification may include short periods of withdrawal from the classroom to meet individual needs, but it most emphatically does not include placement in a special education class for students currently labelled Educable Mentally Retarded (Slow Learner), Trainable Mentally Retarded, or Multi-handicapped.)

THE GOALS OF SCHOOL INTEGRATION ARE:

- to ensure that students with D.S. receive a quality education to help them develop to their fullest potential academically, socially, spiritually, physically and emotionally.
- to ensure that students with D.S. are part of a community in which each student is valued as an integral member, and experiences a sense of belonging.
- to provide the foundation for equality of opportunity for people with D.S. as they enter adulthood.

SCHOOL INTEGRATION WORKS WHEN IT INCORPORATES THE FOLLOWING CONCEPTS AND ACTIONS:

- the belief, set in law, enforced in attitude and action, that students with D.S. are entitled to integrated education, ensured by due-process protections, as an equal benefit under the law.
- Boards of Education actively support integration by consulting meaningfully with the Special Education Advisory Committees and provide training in integration for school personnel and monitor the process.
- the school staff, from the principal to the caretaker, work to support the integration of the student into the social fabric of the school.

- the teacher takes responsibility for all of the students in his/her classroom, modelling respect for diversity and the principle that all students are equally valuable to the group.
- the programming for students with D.S. is based on a strengths and needs assessment rather than on traditional testing and labelling.
- teachers receive appropriate training, support and help to meet their students' needs.
- parents collaborate as respected members of a team working for the best interests of their child.

In the words of George Flynn, Director of Education for the Waterloo Region Roman Catholic Separate School Board, "Integration then means the process of making whole - of uniting different parts in a new totality - in this case a new community".

Down's Syndrome Assoc. Of Ontario
January 04, 1991

RESPONSE

In March 1991, the Down Syndrome Association of Ontario agreed to be involved in a consultation process on "how to" best implement quality integration not a "whether to" consultation process which is the underlying message of this document.

This document:

1. proposes a definition of integration which is in no way related to any acceptable definition nor related to integration as it is successfully practised by Boards of Education committed to integration.
2. enlarges the scope of this document to include all students labelled exceptional. This paper has tried to obscure the fact that there are over 10,000 children in this Province completely segregated from their peers. Many of these children have Down syndrome. It is this group of children labelled developmentally disabled who are the true focus of the drive for equity.
3. proposes a Range of Placements which adheres to the Cascade Model implying children have to earn the right or somehow qualify for integration. Range of Placements cannot be discussed until legislation is in place guaranteeing children the right to integration.
4. still refuses to grant parents the right to challenge their child's program. Once integration is in place, the focus of the IPRC should be on programming. It does not take a strong proactive stand on the right of children to integration. Parental Choice has no meaning unless children have the right to integration.
5. uses the phrase, "meets the needs of the child." This continues to leave the power in the hands of the school boards who have always used this slight of hand argument to keep our children out of regular classes. Integration - Equality by its very definition meets the needs of all children. The task is how to develop and deliver a program which meets the educational needs of the child, not where to deliver it.
6. pushes back, yet again, the implementation date to September 1993. Our children have waited long enough and have no more time to lose. Our implementation date remains September 1992 and we will be demanding that school boards behave accordingly.

This Consultation Paper has weakened the momentum of Integration. Integration as the norm is not the issue - the right to equality is the issue.

This government has committed itself to Integration. This document is "for all times" not only for recessionary times. In trying to placate everyone, this document has victimized our children again. It is perpetuating the myth that a different set of rules apply to our children - get beyond the stigma and see the child.

Integration is mainstreaming. It calls for equal distribution of resources in special education, equal access to educational opportunities, and equality of outcome for all students.

The time for talking is over - it is time for implementation.

Our children don't need more words. They need Integration NOW!

MEMORANDUM

TO: Lynda Langdon, President
Louise Bailey, Chairperson of Integration Committee
Down's Syndrome Association of Ontario

FROM: David Baker

RE: Amendments to the Education Act to Give Parents the
Option of an Integration Placement for their Child

Background

As you are aware the Education Act imposes an obligation upon the Minister of Education to ensure every exceptional child has an "appropriate education". Unfortunately school boards differ widely on the appropriateness of offering integrated placements to their pupils. Thus one board may integrate a child with a particular exceptionality, and the other board would segregate a child with a comparable exceptionality. Parents are aware of this and are therefore sceptical when advised by a board that there is only one appropriate placement for their child.

The current structure of the Education Act gives parents who are seeking a segregated placement for their child effective appeal rights. The right of appeal is limited to issues of the identification of the child's exceptionality and placement of the child in a particular class. Tribunals under the Act have held that the appeal cannot deal with the programs and services in the classroom. As a result parents who want a segregated placement have often been successful. A specialized program designed for the exceptional child is always offered in such placements. Parents seeking an integrated placement have been unsuccessful because tribunals have been unwilling to order a child placed in a regular classroom, without any assurance that needed programs and services will be provided.

Regulation 262 prescribes class sizes, teacher qualifications and other guarantees for segregated placements. No comparable guarantees exist for integrated placements.

In short the Education Act provides many rights and guarantees for parents seeking segregated placements for their children. No comparable guarantees exist for parents seeking an integrated placement for their child.

Proposed Amendment

Add 2 new subsections to section 31 of the Act:

- (3) An exceptional person has the right to attend any school which he or she would have the right to attend, but for the child's exceptionality, in a classroom appropriate to the child's chronological age, with appropriate program modifications and appropriate special education programs and services.

- (4) A board may apply to the Minister and be granted a temporary exemption from the obligation contained in subsection (3).

Rationale

The Minister of Education has indicated support for integration as "the preferred option", and that "parental choice" should be determinative. She then states the "integration option" will be in place for the beginning of the school year in September, 1992. She then makes this a practical impossibility by failing to include the "integration option" in her package of amendments. It is generally accepted that unless the option is enacted by January, 1992, boards will be unable to implement by September 1992. It would be impossible to conduct a consultation of any significance and meet the deadline the "integration option" must be added to the Bill currently before the legislature.

The draft amendment would operate separately from the appeal process mandated under s. 10 (1) (6). Assuming the placement available through the appeal process is not the integrated placement which would be available under s. 31 (3) the parents of the child would have a choice between 2 options.

While s. 31 (3) speaks of appropriate modifications, programs and services there would be no appeal available to parents who disagreed with the boards' opinion on this issue. It could therefore still be argued that the integration option would enjoy less protection than the segregation option. This should ease acceptance of the amendment by boards which are hesitant about integration.

S. 31 (4) grants the Minister discretion to grant temporary exemptions to boards which require them. The Minister has argued that consultation is necessary to enable discussion of the human and financial resources needed to make integration a reality. While most integration will involve no additional costs, making schools wheelchair accessible and making some specialized services available will take time. This should be acknowledged. The consultation should be about the criteria and process to be used by the Minister when considering applications for an exemption.

In the case of Hysert v. Carleton Board of Education et. al. the Hysert family successfully asserted a s. 15 Charter right to an integrated placement. Numerous other cases are pending before the Courts and the Human Rights Commission. The Ministry was unprepared to oppose the Hysert's application thereby acknowledging that the status quo violates the equality guarantees in the Charter. The draft amendments represent what is necessary at a minimum to bring the law into compliance.

LEARNING FROM MARY

by Betty Fahie

This article has been selected for a Media Award Submission.

Mary came to our school in primary in 1988. There was an enrollment of 30 that year for primary, so the class was split into 2 primary classes of 15 each.

As the Grade 1 teacher, I was curious to see how Mary would progress that year, knowing she would be in my class for the up-coming year of 1989-90.

In June 1989, I was told the classes would be combined for Grade 1. All summer I wondered just how I would handle a class of 30, one of whom was a Down Syndrome child, Mary.

My main concern was, "What did I have to give this child?" I had no special training, nor previous experience to offer. I worried about how much to expect; would I push too hard or not hard enough? To what degree could Mary learn? Should I even attempt to teach her to read or do math? What was my role here as a teacher?

Then that word teacher hit me. Yes, I am a teacher and I have been for 20 years. It was time to look at the plus side of things. I had Mary's older sisters in school, so I knew her parents to be very supportive and extremely reasonable to work with. I had my 20 years of experience behind me. I had always dealt with my classes, based on equality and this was no time nor reason not to. Gut-feeling has worked well for me throughout my years of teaching; why should it fail me now?

September, 1989 arrived. Two children had moved over the summer, but were replaced by two new arrivals, one of whom was a little boy, believed to have autistic traits. Regardless of the plus points I had given myself, the doubts were creeping back.

I was blessed with a program assistant, Anna Conrad, who I realized in a very short time, would prove invaluable to me and the class. Patricia, Mary's mother, also kept very close contact with me, keeping me going in reading materials on Down Syndrome, and always there to answer whatever question I came up with. I discovered the true meaning and the value of teamwork.

I decided to put Mary in the regular Grade 1 program and go from there. Mary's attention span was short, but with Anna there to get her back on task and the support coming from home, things were going better than I had expected. Mary was holding her own. She soon showed she could handle the workload, and was producing slow, yet visible progress. The skills she was picking up were

starting to show in her journal writing. Mary was getting a lot of help, but what she was learning she was retaining. I started becoming comfortable as Mary's teacher.

As the year went on, the other children in the class were starting to read. Doubts again: do I expect this of Mary? do I risk the chance of frustration? I went to Patricia with my concerns. Patricia had so much faith in Mary, and in myself as her teacher, that it left me with the feeling that anything and everything was possible.

To give a little extra support, I went to Mary's home one day a week after school. Teamwork proved it's value again. We had a fun, relaxed time reading, playing games, and doing work sheets. I have achieved so much satisfaction from this experience that I want to continue working with Mary as a support person.

This has been a year I'll always remember. I feel good as a teacher. Mary is learning to read; as a matter of fact, she has shown more improvement than some of her classmates. She has done well in the math program and is even achieving the abstract skills of telling time and dealing with money. She has given a lot of valuable information to our Health, Science and Social Studies classes.

The high point of the year is not what I have taught Mary, but what Mary has taught me. She has given new meaning to common-place terms. Through her own determination to achieve, she has renewed by own self-confidence in my teaching ability. She has renewed my belief in equality. She has shown me the value of teamwork. She has given me an unconditional love that has left me with a sense of wholeness. I have learned that, as a teacher, not only will I get amazing results from expecting, but I can also give more than I thought I had to give, when an amazing little girl expects it from me.

Mary's success is not mine. It's the success of a team consisting of Mary's family, a wonderful, caring program assistant, and most of all, Mary.

Thank you, Mary.

Ms. Betty Fahie
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LIFESTYLES: PEOPLE WITH DOWN SYNDROME IN THE 1990's

Historically, there have been major barriers to equality of opportunity and inclusion of people with Down syndrome in all aspects of community life. Institutionalization, segregated schools and classes, discrimination in housing and employment have reflected inequality of opportunity and lack of civil rights for people with Down syndrome. As these barriers are gradually being broken down, expectations for people with Down syndrome increasingly equate with expectations for the rest of the population.

Parents today expect that their offspring with Down syndrome will:

- attend the local daycare centre and receive an early intervention (stimulation) programme.
- belong to a regular class in the local school with their friends and siblings.
- benefit from adaptations to the regular curriculum and occasional resource room assistance.
- participate in community sports, leisure and religious activities (Brownies, Scouts, swimming, soccer, music / dancing lessons, concerts, visits to the zoo etc).
- proceed to college or employment on completion of high school.
- move out of their homes into a variety of living situations (with friends, relatives, spouses)
- as adults, participate in and contribute to all aspects of community life, and be as self-sufficient and independent as possible.

Wolf Wofensberger called it "normalization"; parents call it inclusion.