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EDITORIAL

Special needs and class distinction

A TRIP INTO a New Brunswick public school shows a more mixed clientele than would have been the case with the previous generation. Special needs children of various sorts are now a normal part of public school education. In some cases the degree of disability is quite severe. It is possible to find children with fairly extreme forms of, say, cerebral palsy — severe enough that the child may not be able to talk, walk, do the normal curriculum, or indeed any curriculum at all. At the other end, it is possible to find children who have mild learning disabilities which require them to have special tutors and take special tests. And there are all sorts of children whose needs fall in between the two extremes.

The open classroom has become a normal part of public school education, and this is a good thing. Although open classrooms do create certain mild problems, the alternative to inclusive classrooms is not one to which we should want to return.

Before all children were welcomed into the classroom, many fears were raised as to the harm such a system might inflict on the education of other students. The fear was that, what with the demands placed on the teacher to minister to those who required more supervision, there would be insufficient time left over to take care of the bulk of the class. Also, special needs children might prove unruly or disruptive, in effect distracting the rest of the classroom.

Like so many anxieties, the fear is worse than the thing itself. For one thing, special needs children constitute a very small percentage of the general population. Furthermore, the presence of a child with learning problems does not constitute an enormous extra burden, in some cases perhaps only slightly more than a regular child. And often now schools are graced with the presence of volunteer tutors, who are depended upon to guide the child through routines laid out by the teacher. As for being disruptive, few teachers who have taught in normal classrooms will find that challenged students are more difficult to handle than some "average" students.

When the alternatives to including special needs children in the classroom are considered, probably few teachers would decline to put in a little extra effort for a noble cause.

The most obvious objection to the closed classroom is segregation. Average children move through the school system having little or no contact with their special needs counterparts. When they come out of school, the average children may hold the common stereotypes about the handicapped — that they are not intelligent, that they have no personalities, desires, hopes, plans; that they are not much like themselves. This is not adequate preparation for life in a society that prides itself on tolerance and equal opportunity. The same may be said for the special needs students, who deserve the opportunity to discover that, in spite of disabilities, they are people of equal worth and dignity.

The open classroom also simplifies the onerous problem of deciding who goes in and who does not. It is not always clear who seems to have special needs and who does not. Many so-called average children have mild difficulties with the problems and routines encountered in normal public school curriculum, and sometimes problems that are not purely intellectual can put mountains of difficulty between a student and his work. In short, although from a distance there may seem to be a generally definable group of intellectually challenged students, from close up the clarity vanishes, and one is left with a perplexing grey area. Opening the classroom to all comers ensures that no one will be unfairly left out by a decision-making process that must perforce be arbitrary and full of unquestioned assumptions.

Add this to the fact that in rural areas, where numbers may not permit students with special needs to have formal schooling available to them at all, and the choice between open and closed classrooms should be clear.

School is an institution of learning, but not all the lessons taught can be put down on paper. It is a place where, along with facts and figures, a child learns how to belong to a group, to lead and to follow, to give, take and share. It is a kind of extended family, and as such a preparation for mature adult life. It would be a shame to deny this experience to a particular segment of the population.

More than a mercy on our part, the open classroom should be a valuable learning experience for all. *

Comp

It is my opinion that New Brunswick taxpayers over the next 50 years the road now, buying feasible. The exact amount increases will occur in traffic flow.

We have a few MPs cancelled. MP Bill C. bringing this issue to Commons.

Support is needed fax your MP. It would party leaders, federal Collette, the Prime Commissioner Howard.

The common address Commons, Ottawa, number is 613-992- his office address add the above address.

The New Brunswick Angela Vautour, M 1-800-838-1355. H 266, Wellington Boulevard Ottawa phone number

Crit

I am writing in response to misrepresentations process used for the in the Fredericton.

I was the president of New Brunswick should first state the principles (1) of the award of contract of these principles.

I find it amazing used has not been. At our recent annual Department of Transportation on the "request for proper recommendation" number of reports reporting of this project.

A significant number

Business

In response to contained in report Malik's Jan. 28 article the Credit Crunch Canadian Federation Independent Business recent survey, I was that the banks' loss of 88.9 per cent of the Canadian Bank own findings.

What the CFIB say, however, is that percentage of the declined are later

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Cloyd Hastings

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We need not justify this with research, for it is a statement of principle, not of science. It should become a moral imperative along with the beliefs that slavery is immoral and that all people are

Our individualism is a defining element of our membership in society; it should not exclude us. We must accept and celebrate diversity because we are all different. We must believe in the fundamental worth and dignity of each person.

For example, a bicycle company in Japan is filling orders for individualized bikes. In a nation that has established itself as a champion of mass production techniques, the Japanese have discovered a way to customize production on a mass

We need to stop standardizing expectations based upon aggregate data and begin to customize based upon disaggregated knowledge of the individual. Standardized testing, used for sorting, categorizing, and labeling must be ended. Accountability in terms of student progress can, and must, be maintained on an individual continuum and not on a group continuum. Difficult? Yes! Challenging? Yes! Impossible? No!

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