

Inclusion--Not Segregation or Integration- Is Where a Student with Special Needs Belongs

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Katie has beautiful blue eyes and lovely blonde hair. Her laughter can fill a room. She has a strong, solid body that can jump high in the air and balance on narrow ledges. Katie finds pleasure in simple things. To her, a weed is as fascinating as a flower. Katie can entertain herself for long periods of time. She lets you know what she wants by taking your hand and leading you to the item. She can look you in the eye and give you a hug, and those moments are very special. Katie also has autism.

This paper will ask the question “where does Katie belong in the school system?” Should she be educated in a segregated or an integrated classroom? Or should Katie be included in a classroom of students, students with “typical” abilities as well as disabilities? What do we mean by segregation, integration, and inclusion? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each approach? Can one approach be justified for all students or should the severity of a student’s disability determine the approach? Other factors that have been cited when arguing in favour of one approach over another include costs, training, effect on “typical” students, and so forth. I will argue from a philosophical perspective that the underlying reason for choosing one approach over the others is a philosophical one, having to do with what it means to be human and to belong in a civilized society.

Conceptual Analysis of Segregation, Integration and Inclusion

Before presenting arguments concerning where a student with special needs belongs, it is important to clarify what we mean by segregated, integrated and inclusive classrooms. A segregated classroom is simply what the name implies a self-contained classroom filled with students who have a particular or any number of disabilities. These classrooms are typically referred to as “special ed” classes, or regarding segregated preschool classrooms in America, “PPI” classes (PPI standing for “pre-primary impaired”). Without making any normative comments on these titles, it will be sufficient to describe special ed or PPI classes as separate entities from regular school classes, segregated from the mainstream school program.

Integrated classrooms are also known as mainstreamed classrooms. Although the terms “integrated” and “mainstreamed” are synonymous, they are not the same as inclusive classrooms. “Inclusion is 100% placement in general education, whereas in mainstreaming, a student with special needs is educated partially in a special education program, but to the maximum extent possible is educated in the general education program” (Idol, 1997, p. 384-385). The history of integration/mainstreaming is significant in revealing underlying assumptions concerning students with disabilities.

First, *mainstreaming* and similar terms evolved from two parallel school systems, general education and special education, and there is an underlying assumption of inequity between the two systems. This assumption is simply a cultural practice in public education, whereby special education has become an important system but smaller than and separate from general education. Thus, *integration* involved members of the lesser system (special education) joining the majority and favored (mainstream)

system. The underlying assumption of mainstreaming is that participation in the majority group will be in accordance with the standards of the dominant system. In contrast, inclusion, according to Sage, implies the existence of only one unified education system that encompasses all members equitably. (Sage, 1993, p. 2 as referred to in Idol, 1997, p. 285)

Inclusive classrooms are what the name implies classrooms where all students are included, regardless of abilities or disabilities. This inclusion is not just a physical inclusion, i.e., students sharing the same physical space, but also a mindset. As Kathie Snow (2001), an inclusion advocate, points out: “Being included is not a privilege to be earned, nor a right that is given to individuals. Inclusion is first and foremost a state of mind. Do you *feel* you belong: in your home, at work, in a classroom, at church, in the PTA, or at a T-ball game?” (p. 391). The importance of feeling one *belongs* is an important distinction that can be made between an inclusive and integrated classroom. As the history of integration demonstrates, special education *joins* the mainstream system and functions in accordance of the standards of the dominant system. The experience of someone joining a group and having to conform to the standards of that group is a very different experience from that of belonging to a group where one is accepted as he/she is. In an inclusive setting, participants are not only accepted as equals, they also contribute as equals. Snow (2001) refers to this contribution when she states that “Inclusion is always reciprocal. Everyone in an inclusive setting contributes for the good of the whole. If a member receives (or takes) but does not give, he is not included. He’s a recipient of charity, a guest, or a thief” (p. 391). The suggestion that students would feel more of a sense of *belonging* in an inclusive rather than an integrated classroom brings us to a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of these various approaches.

Segregation

Advocates of segregated classrooms claim that students with special needs require teachers who are trained in the area of special education trained to work with students who have a variety of disabilities.

For the past forty-five years the domain of special education has been differentiating itself, developing analytical techniques and methodological skills which have been designed to handle a large array of disabilities.

People in this domain of professional endeavor possess many knowledges and skills which are vitally necessary to those with mental, emotional and physical disabilities. To make an effort to destroy what has taken so long to develop challenges my comprehension. It would be downright short-sighted, if not entirely blind, to permit this to take place. (Bauer, 1994, p. 19)

Related to the body of knowledge and skills possessed by special educators, there is also the perception that special education provides more individualized attention for students with special needs. Once again, Norman Bauer (1994) suggests that:

Clearly these young people [special needs students] will be receiving treatment from a specialist, in an environment which is conducive to a small specialist-client relationship. Out of such a relationship one is much more likely to acquire a sense of belongness and significance than by being integrated into classrooms in which one has far fewer opportunities to have ones [sic] needs

attended to. Where, in reality, one is likely to feel the psychological impact of not being able to handle the demands in the

classroom with the same measure of ease as the regular students.

(pp. 22-23)

Bauer's last comment ushers in another advantage cited by advocates of segregation; that is, in segregated classrooms, students with disabilities are not pressured to "keep up" with typical students. Bauer (1994), who had a retarded [sic] foster brother, states that "it would have been immoral to have compelled him to associate with students who had so much more capacity to learn, to think, to make decisions than he had" (p. 20).

A final advantage of segregated classrooms has nothing to do with morality, but rather with the practical issue concerning the cost of integrating special needs students. According to some advocates of segregation, maintaining a segregated system is cheaper than integrating students with special needs into the regular classrooms.

There is little evidence in the literature that those who are advocating inclusion recognize the need to reduce class size considerably as children with disabilities are integrated into regular classrooms. Reducing class size, of course, would result in the need for larger and larger numbers of teachers; and the consequent expense which such numbers would entail. This is precisely what those who advocate inclusion would like to avoid. (Bauer, 1994, p. 23)

The advantages of segregated classrooms, i.e., specialized training of special ed teachers, more individualized attention, less pressure to keep up with typical students, and financial efficiency,

will be critiqued in a later section. We turn now to a discussion of the disadvantages of segregated classrooms.

Probably the most significant criticism of segregated classrooms is that they marginalize students with disabilities. Students' disabilities become the focus of their education they are placed in classrooms because they have autism, Downs, cerebral palsy, etc., rather than they attend neighbourhood schools because they are of school age.

Children with disabilities are diagnosed, labeled, and then whisked into one set of services or another. In general, these services remove children from the natural environments of childhood to segregated settings, where experts work on their bodies and brains, to the detriment of their hearts and souls. Interventions and treatments to "help children reach their full potential" are provided and, in the process, our children are dehumanized, reduced to defective body parts. They're known more by their labels than their names. (Snow, 2001, p. 12)

When the attention is focused on students' disabilities rather than who they are as people, the focus is usually on their deficits, not on their strengths. Returning to the example of my daughter Katie, she can be perceived as a little girl who doesn't speak, who doesn't usually initiate social interaction, and who exhibits odd behaviour fairly often. However, Katie has numerous strengths that typical children could learn from; i.e., her unabashed happiness (which is the flipside to the tantrums), her excitement over little things, her lack of concern for personal possessions, her novel way of pursuing many activities, and her lack of concern for the way things are usually done are qualities that if more people possessed, society would be the better for it.

A disadvantage of segregated classrooms then, is that not only do the students with disabilities lose out on many of the activities of childhood experienced by typical children, typical students lose out on what their fellow students with disabilities have to offer them. Not only do students with disabilities offer their individual strengths to students in regular education, having a diverse mix of students will better prepare all students for life in a diverse society. Granted, an advocate of segregated schooling could also advocate for segregated work placements, segregated housing, etc. for people with disabilities; hence, keeping this aspect of the diverse nature of society out of sight. However, as will be argued later in this paper, the diverse nature of society is part of what it means to be human and the differences as well as commonalities exhibited by all members of society should be respected.

Integration

Integrated classrooms might be considered a happy medium between segregated and inclusive classrooms; that is, students with disabilities spend some time with typical students but part of the day is still spent in special ed (i.e., segregated environments). “Mainstreaming removes students who are not functioning well in general education classes and returns them when they are able to function academically and socially” (Snyder, Garriott, & Taylor, 2001, p. 199). Advocates of integration would argue that including students with disabilities when they are “academically and socially ready” is advantageous for the students with disabilities as well as their typical peers. Waiting until students with disabilities are “ready” will avoid the disadvantage of these students feeling pressured to keep up with their typical peers. When students with disabilities are removed until they are “ready”, the classroom teacher does not have

to “spread her/himself as thin” as she/he would if the students with disabilities were in his/her class 100% of the time.

Teaching that recognizes the needs of learners who have disabilities is sound instruction for all children. That is the theory we all know. In reality, even our best trained and most willing teachers have difficulty meeting the diverse needs of their heterogeneously grouped classes, let alone the special requirements of students with moderate to severe disabilities. “I have twenty-five children in my second grade class, and you can’t expect me to take on more students with special needs,” has become the oft-heard plea in school after school. This sentiment carries some grain of truth to even the most hard-core supporters of inclusion and clearly illustrates one of the legitimate road blocks to a full inclusionary program. (Chesley & Calaluce, Jr., 1997, p. 489)

Integrated, or “less than full inclusion”, programs could be considered as having the strengths of segregated programs but not the weaknesses. That is, students with disabilities still have the expertise and individualized attention of the special ed teacher for part of their school day but they don’t experience the marginalization of being in a segregated setting full-time. Also, the theory is that within an integrated setting, typical students experience the strengths of the students with disabilities as well as a greater understanding of what it means to live in a diverse society. However, it may be questioned whether integrated settings actually deliver the goods when it comes to typical students increasing their understanding of students with disabilities.

Perhaps the biggest disadvantage of integrated classrooms is that students with disabilities do not truly “belong”. Roberta Schnorr (1990) conducted an interesting study where she interviewed students in a grade one class, where a student named Peter was mainstreamed. Peter joined the class every morning from 8:30 until 9:00 and for all “specials” [referring to physical education, music and art]. When the researcher asked a student “who’s desk is this?” (pointing to Peter’s desk), the student gave a telling response:

Oh, that’s Peter’s desk.

(Who’s Peter?)

He comes here in the morning. He’s not in our class. He doesn’t ever stay. He comes in the morning when we have seat work. Then he leaves to go back to his room. (Schnorr, 1990, p. 231)

Another example that questions whether typical students feel that integrated students actually “belong” in their class, is provided by Snow (2001). In this example, Michael is physically present for most of the day, but he has a one-on-one aide assigned to him.

When the philosophy of a school or a classroom is that a student needs an aide, it’s assumed the aide is responsible for the student: academically, behaviorally, and in many other ways. The classroom teacher is responsible for the twenty-something other students in the classroom, but not that kid. He belongs to the aide. The message is clear to everyone, including Michael, his teachers, and his classmates: Michael is *in* the classroom, but he’s not part of it. This is not inclusion. We could call it integration or mainstreaming, perhaps, since the student is physically in the classroom. But he’s not included because he’s not really part of the class; he doesn’t belong. (Snow, 2001, p. 149)

These examples should give one pause in thinking that integrated classrooms give typical students the chance to truly get to know their peers who have disabilities.

The other strength mentioned, that of students with disabilities having a chance to spend time in a special ed room until “they are able to function academically and socially”, is problematic in that some students with disabilities will never reach that point. Snow (2001) gives a damning account of what she refers to as the “myth of readiness”:

Instead of preparing children with disabilities (“getting them ready”) for real life, special programs actually just prepare kids for the next level of special programs! “Prepare” is probably the wrong word; once in the system, children are simply propelled along the path of special services. . .

I’ve never met a parent who, at some point during a child’s twelve to fifteen year public school career, was told, “Jill doesn’t need special ed services anymore. She can take regular classes from now on.” (pp. 110-111)

Snow makes an important point when she states that “We must ask: why aren’t children with disabilities ‘OK’ the way they are? Why do they have to be ready for anything? Because they don’t meet the artificial standards for readiness or normalcy set by experts, professionals, parents, and society in general” (Snow, 2001, p. 111). This question will be looked at in more detail in the final section of this paper. We turn now to an examination of the advantages and disadvantages of inclusive classrooms.

Inclusion

Advocates of inclusive classrooms argue that inclusion is not just the placement of students with disabilities into regular classrooms, but rather a philosophy that is advantageous for all students.

Inclusion should be a guiding philosophy that embraces all children, not just those with handicaps. An inclusive school is one where all children belong the athletic girl, the gifted boy, the class clown, the recent immigrant who knows no English, the quiet one, and the “normal” middle-of-the-road student. The school is a place where all can learn. (Rallis & Anderson, 1994, pp. 5-6)

It is not enough to include students within the same physical spaces. Inclusion is more concerned with the arrangement of social spaces and the opportunities for students to explore and develop within these. The interests of all students also need to be represented within schools, not just the dominant of society. (Gale, 2001, p. 271)

As mentioned in the section on integration, an advantage of having students with disabilities with typical students is that both groups of students learn from each other. However, advocates of inclusion as opposed to integration would argue that this learning is more “genuine” when students simply attend school together, rather than when students with disabilities “visit” regular classrooms. All students have a variety of abilities and disabilities and an inclusive classroom allows students to experience and accept the differences and commonalities that make up our diverse society.

. . . today’s classrooms are representative of society and contain a cornucopia of differences. Those children who appear to be “normal” have varying abilities. They

bring a complex assortment of experiences, cultures, languages, and resources, and many of them feel just as excluded as any child with a physical or mental handicap. Any discussion and action about inclusion must recognize and include all the differences in all children. (Rallis & Anderson, 1994, p. 8)

A successful inclusive learning community fosters collaboration, problem-solving, self-directed learning, and critical discourse. It also allows (a) students with extraordinary gifts and talents to move at their natural learning rate, (b) students who progress slower than the average to move at the best of their ability (gaining learning strategies as well as remaining part of the exciting content of the themes and lessons), and (c) students with specific learning challenges to receive creative and effective supports to maximize their success. A successful inclusive learning community is a successful democratic school. (Skrtic, Sailor, & Gee, 1996, p. 150)

As well as the broader advantage of all students benefiting from inclusive classrooms, there are specific things learned by students with and without disabilities. Students with disabilities, particularly social deficit disabilities like autism, will learn by observing and interacting with competent peers. Even students with physical disabilities may be motivated by their “abled” peers, as evident in the following example:

Emily attended a preschool for students with disabilities. When she entered a regular grade 1 classroom her mother, Carol, noticed dramatic changes: “She had never shown a desire to walk, communicate or even hold her head up. . . Once she started regular classes, all those things started to happen”. (Chisholm, 1995 as quoted in Barth, 1996, p. 38)

Students without particular disabilities will develop more accepting attitudes towards disabilities. In fact, if students with disabilities are included in the neighbourhood school from preschool onward, disabilities will just be accepted as part of life. Eugenie Gatens-Robinson (1992) gives an interesting example where she had been in a card store when she noticed a woman in a wheelchair limited to selecting cards from the bottom few rows. Gatens-Robinson (1992) did not know how to deal with the situation:

Essentially, I was unskilled and lacked appropriate social experience. I would have had such experience and the poise that comes with it if I had grown up and been educated within an environment that incorporated people with disabilities. In a social sense, I was the one with a disability. I was in several senses graceless. She was a person who had to negotiate a world filled, not only with curbs, but with ineptitude. (p. 10)

Typically it is the person with a disability that is seen as “less than whole” but, as the preceding example illustrates, it is often the non-disabled who are lacking understanding. Jean Vanier, who spent years working with people with disabilities, made this point eloquently: “Those who have been put aside and so often despised, or not seen as whole, when one becomes their friend, in some mysterious way, they heal us” (Vanier as cited in Hughes, 2003, p. 5). Advocates of inclusion would argue that the inclusive classroom is the most conducive setting for facilitating such friendships.

When students grow up together, sharing school experiences and activities, they learn to see beyond superficial differences and disabilities and to connect as human beings. This applies to differences in race, religion, economic status, and skill and ability, as well as physical, emotional, and learning differences. It is vital that all students feel safe and

welcome in the world, and inclusion provides us with an excellent way to model and insist on a set of beliefs about how people treat one another with respect and dignity.

(Sapon-Shevin, 1996, p. 39)

Although helping students learn from each other and respect each other's differences and commonalities would seem to be a worthwhile goal, inclusive education has a number of critics. As stated in the section on segregation, advocates of segregation are fearful that inclusive classrooms herald the demise of special education with its specialized expertise and individualized teaching methods. However, this need not be the case. Rather than doing away with special education teachers:

inclusion will require that special educators reconceptualize their roles, acting more often as coteachers or resources than as primary sources of instruction or services. Conceiving of special education as a set of services rather than as a place allows us to conceive of special educators as educators with special skills, rather than as educators who work with "special" children. (Sapon-Shevin, 1996, p. 38)

Many of the special services provided by special educators can be provided in the regular classroom. For example, if a student needs occupational therapy to work on fine motor skills, the occupational therapist can help the student during handwriting exercises with the rest of the class. Not only is the student receiving needed services, these services are taking place in a "natural" setting where such skills will "make sense". "Inclusion does not mean abandoning the special help and support that students with disabilities truly need. Rather, it means providing those services within more normalized settings and without the isolation and stigma often associated with special education services" (Sapon-Shevin, 1996, p. 39).

In the section on “Integration,” the concern was raised regarding whether regular ed teachers, who already have a classroom full of diverse needs, can also meet the special requirements of students with disabilities. This is a very legitimate criticism but not a fatal one. Inclusion does not mean placing students with disabilities into regular classrooms without support. Support is critical if inclusion is going to work. Sometimes this support will be in the form of full-time aides, but there are other options as well.

Although many general education classroom teachers initially say, “If I take that kid, I’ll need a full-time aide,” more experienced inclusion teachers identify many kinds of support as important (sometimes eliminating the need for a full-time aide), including: planning and collaboration time with other teachers, modified curriculum and resources, administrative support, and ongoing emotional support. (Sapon-Shevin, 1996, p. 38)

It is important to recognize that many of the requirements of students with disabilities can be met using strategies that are already being used by effective regular ed teachers.

The instructional strategies that are most often reported by teachers and administrators as important to the success of inclusive education programs are those strategies that experienced and qualified teachers use for all children. Among these are cooperative learning, curricular modifications, “hands-on” teaching, whole language instruction, use of peers and “buddies,” thematic and multi-disciplinary curriculum, use of paraprofessionals/classroom aides, and the use of instructional technology. (NCERI, 1995, p. 3)

Providing support for teachers in inclusive classrooms ties into the criticism raised in the section on “Segregation” concerning the financial cost of inclusion. To truly address this concern would require an empirical study looking at the cost of segregated programs versus

inclusive programs. However, the logic behind combining two systems into one does not seem to automatically require greater financial costs.

School districts report that effectively to implement inclusive education the money should follow the child; that is, funds saved from ending the separate systems are used to support an integrated system, one that benefits all of the children. There is substantial evidence that the dual system is profligate of resources in administrative duplication, in ineffective practices, and in wasteful subsidies of private school placements. Indeed, it is anticipated that over time school districts will save money and better serve all of the children, thereby spending public money more prudently and effectively. (NCERI, 1995, p.5)

Even if combining the special ed system with the regular system does not actually save money or even if it costs more than maintaining two separate systems, it could be argued that the gains made by students with disabilities by being in inclusive classrooms will make the system cost-effective in the long run. That is, if students in inclusive classrooms are able to eventually function in society with fewer supports, e.g., able to find employment rather than needing to be supported by the state, acquiring the skills needed to achieve such employment would be worth the short-term expenditure of inclusive education.

The goal of “acquiring the skills needed to find employment” raises an additional concern regarding inclusive education; that being the question of whether the focus of education should be on vocational/functional and/or social skills or whether the focus of education should be on academic skills. Gary Chesley and Paul Calaluce, Jr. (1997) suggest that regular ed cannot meet the needs of students with disabilities because of the general education curriculum’s lack of focus on vocational/functional skills. The problem with this concern is that it dichotomizes

vocational/functional and academic skills and places academic skills in the domain of education to the exclusion of vocational/functional skills. An additional problem with an exclusive focus on academic skills is that some typical students, not only students with disabilities, also require the acquisition of vocational/functional skills. Although all students need to be exposed to academic challenges, not all students have the desire to pursue higher education. Thus, it would seem prudent to offer vocational/functional training for all students, not only those with disabilities.

A related concern regarding the acquisition of academic skills is the fear noted earlier that students with disabilities will feel pressured to “keep up” with their typical peers or, in order to include all students, the curriculum would have to be “watered down.”

There is a fear that inclusion will force teachers to “dumb down” the curriculum, thus limiting the options for “typical students” and especially for “gifted and talented” students. The reality is that the curriculum in inclusive classrooms must be structured as multi-level, participatory and flexible.

For example, all the students might be working on the Civil War, but the range of books and projects undertaken and the ways in which learning is pursued can vary tremendously. Some students might be working on computer simulations, while others might write and perform skits or role plays. A wide range of books on the Civil War could allow students who read at a range of levels to find and share information. Inclusion invites, not a watered-down curriculum, but an enhanced one, full of options and creative possibilities. (Thousand, Villa, & Nevin as cited in Sapon-Shevin, 1996, p. 39)

A concern related to the “dumbing down” of curriculum is the criticism that inclusion advocates emphasize social interaction at the expense of educational objectives. Seamus Hegarty (2001) makes this point when he suggests that:

A mathematics teacher who is concerned primarily with promoting social awareness, regard for others and so on and only secondarily with mathematical learning is missing the point. Mathematics and every other school subject need to be taught in a context of values but they must first of all be *taught*. Unless that emphasis is maintained, schools will miss their core objectives and run the risk of producing young people who are ethically rounded but otherwise ill-educated and unequipped for adult life. (p. 246)

Once again, it should be counter-argued that presenting social interaction at the expense of educational objectives is presenting a false dichotomy. Inclusion advocates are not suggesting that educational objectives be sacrificed for social interaction; rather, social interaction is part and parcel of the educational enterprise. “In fact, all learning is social and all learning occurs in a social environment. Learning to talk, make friends, ask questions and respond, and work with others are all educational goals, important ones, and foundational ones for other learning” (Sapon-Shevin, 1996, p. 39).

A final criticism raised by skeptics of inclusion concerns the inclusion advocate’s “unquestioned belief that regular education can accommodate all children” (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1998, p. 313). Douglas Fuchs and Lynn Fuchs cite the example of Malcolm Shabazz who was a profoundly disturbed 12 year old who had a history of setting fires (including one that eventually killed his grandmother). Fuchs and Fuchs appear to have set up a straw person with this example. Even an avid inclusion advocate would question the wisdom of placing potentially dangerous individuals in inclusive classrooms. In fact, most people would suggest that

dangerous individuals should not be permitted to function freely in other societal institutions as well as schools. This, however, does not mean that such individuals should be segregated into settings with other dangerous individuals. On the contrary, people with disorders that put other people at risk need to be in settings where they can receive treatment and not be put in danger themselves.

Not including dangerous students in inclusive classrooms seems to be self-evident, but there may also be less extreme cases where including students with disabilities may not be in their best interest. One such situation concerns students whose cognitive disabilities may be so severe that they might not gain anything from being included in a class with their age-appropriate peers, e.g., a teenager with the mental capacity of a young child being included in an advanced high school class. However, even in such a situation, it does not necessarily follow that the teenager with an extreme cognitive disability should be segregated into a class with other students with disabilities. An inclusive high school would offer classes for students with a wide range of abilities and interests, since there may be typical students who are more interested in vocational type courses than high level academic courses, e.g., human ecology, keyboarding, etc. Though it may be difficult to include a student with a severe cognitive disability in an advanced political science course, it should be possible to adapt a cooking assignment or computer work for students with a variety of cognitive abilities. So although there may be classes where a student's disability is too great for the class to be beneficial, it is incumbent upon the school to seek alternative classes where the student can still receive the benefits of being included with typical students.

Having considered the advantages and disadvantages of segregation, integration, and inclusion, it would appear that advocates of inclusion can respond to the criticisms levied against

their position. Furthermore, inclusive classrooms do not suffer the disadvantages of the marginalization of students with disabilities experienced in segregated classrooms or the situation of not truly “belonging” that still exists in integrated classrooms. To fully defend the position of inclusion, however, an argument must be given concerning why marginalizing students or not providing settings where all students truly “belong” is indefensible. This argument will require a discussion of what it means to be human.

Respect as Humans

One of the main advantages of inclusive classrooms is that students learn from each other as well as learn to respect each other’s differences and commonalities. It is this notion of differences that is a sticky point for those who are skeptical about inclusion. Robin Barrow (2001) argues that:

. . . at least in cases where the distinguishing characteristics are fairly straightforward, such as deafness or blindness (distinctions which are not helped by patronisingly understated and inaccurate euphemisms such as “aurally challenged” or “hearing impaired”), there is no clear evidence of an advantage to them or anyone else of a policy of educational inclusion. . . On the contrary, on the face of it, it is in itself an unfair policy, involving a refusal to discriminate on seemingly relevant criteria. (p. 240)

By “seemingly relevant criteria”, Barrow would be referring to differences that make a difference as to where students should be educated. Something like race or gender would not be relevant criteria and hence analogies between inclusion of people with disabilities and the civil rights or women’s movement break down. But are the differences involved between students

with disabilities and typical students relevant? Barrow would obviously argue that the loss of one's hearing or sight would be relevant for educating students who are deaf or blind in non-inclusive settings. However, are these differences between those with impaired senses and those without ones of degree or kind? If we take the example of loss of sight, many people have less than perfect vision. However, we would never think of segregating people who wear glasses into a classroom for people who wear glasses. A critic might suggest that when one's eyesight becomes so bad that he/she requires supports such as Braille texts, etc., then the student should be in a class with other students who need Braille texts. However, why is the "support" of eyeglasses any different than the "support" of Braille texts? The answer would be that the need for eyeglasses is "socially acceptable" and not even considered to be alleviating a disability while requiring Braille texts is considered a disability. This analogy raises the issue of the social construction of disability.

Disability studies scholars make a distinction between the medical model and the social model of disabilities.

The medical model posits disabilities and illnesses requiring medical treatment that exist independently from how they are viewed and classified by medical discourses. The social model of disability also agrees that impairments and illnesses exist in the world, but acknowledges that how these illnesses and impairments are classified, treated and interpreted is socially constructed. (Molloy & Vasil, 2002, p. 662)

Harvey Molloy and Latika Vasil (2002) describe a child with Asperger's when they question whether the social impairment is located solely within the child:

To speak of a social impairment in this way implies that there is a clearly demarcated spectrum of normal social behaviour into which all childhood

behaviour confidently falls and that a failure to correspond to this norm constitutes an impairment. A parent of a child obsessed with Thomas the Tank Engine, bus timetables or astronomy would agree that such obsessions are tiresome but if the child matures into a world expert on the Kuiper Belt then it is difficult to see how an obsessive interest is in itself a disability. (pp. 664-665)

The notion of what is normal may be fuzzy when “disabilities” such as Asperger’s is considered, but what about more severe cognitive disabilities such as classic autism or physical disabilities such as those requiring a wheelchair? Disability scholars would once again suggest that the “disability” is the result of a world constructed for people who walk, hear, see, etc. Thus, people in wheelchairs are disabled as a result of stairs, curbs, narrow doorways, etc. that have to be navigated, not by the fact that they cannot use their legs. If every building had elevators and wide doorways and streets had sloping curbs, people in wheelchairs would not be disabled from getting to where they want to go. Although having Asperger’s or not being able to use one’s legs is different from the “norm”, advocates of inclusion would argue that these differences are irrelevant for one to function in a world where accommodations are made for people with varying abilities. The case of severe cognitive disabilities may be an exception in that a severe cognitive impairment does make it objectively difficult to function in the world, no matter how many accommodations are made. However, a change to more understanding and accepting attitudes towards people with cognitive impairments would make the world a less hostile place for people with severe cognitive disabilities. Snow (2001) shares this vision: “My hope is that one day, recognizing and accepting differences in each others’ bodies will be common practice. Measuring and comparing abilities will no longer be seen as important. As some point in the future, disability will no longer be a relevant or useful concept within society” (p. 221). Making

accommodations to our regular classrooms that make it possible for students of various abilities and disabilities to function would fall in line with this vision. Critics might posit that making such accommodations is just too much trouble. However, there is a foundational moral argument for “going to the trouble” of making necessary accommodations that being the argument of respect for what it means to be human.

Loretta Kopelman (1984), in an article entitled “Respect and the Retarded”, distinguishes between four different senses of “respect”.

- (1) I respect the work of Richard Diebenkorn.
- (2) We ought to respect her ability to make her own plans.
- (3) I respect him in his capacity as a United States Senator.
- (4) We respect this disease enough to take precautions for prevention and to seek a cure. (p. 72)

Kopelman refers to these different senses as (1) esteem; (2) regard for agency; (3) regard for class membership; and (4) attention to limitations. Other philosophers, most notably Kant in his *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, have argued for respect for humans based on regard for agency. However, the requirement of agency becomes problematic when applied to people with severe cognitive disabilities. Something seems to have gone awry when we respect humans but only when what it means to be human involves the cognitive ability to express agency.

Rather than requiring a certain cognitive ability, Kopelman (1984) gives three reasons

which taken together justify the conviction as reasonable that all humans, even those profoundly retarded, are rights-bearers and individuals who are owed respect as fellow-beings. These three reasons, though interrelated, focus on different things about what we *share*. Each of these reasons is related to sense *three*

above, *regard for class membership or status*. First, they share a capacity to feel and their *sentience* should be respected. Second, as our discussion of labeling illustrated, how they are treated affects our institutions; this it is in our own *self-interests* to see that they are treated respectfully. Third, beyond the minimal requirements of sentience and self-interest, we share our communities and homes with them; we respect the *commitment, benevolent concern or affection that holds families and communities together*. (p.77)

Kopelman's third reason, that we share our communities and homes with people with disabilities is particularly relevant to the educational question under discussion. Although justifying inclusion based upon the argument that we must respect people with disabilities because they are part of our communities and then arguing that we must include them in our school communities may seem circular, I would argue that rather than a damaging circularity, we have an enlightening spiral. That is, as members of our communities, people with disabilities deserve the same consideration as any other human; hence, the presumption that they attend their neighbourhood school. When students with disabilities are part of their school communities, typical students have the opportunity to get to know them and come to realize that they share commonalities as members of the human race. This increased understanding of each other results in an increased acceptance of commonalities and differences, improving the lives of all students, who will then have an impact on the larger community as they leave school and take their place in society. This notion of our common humanity is expressed nicely in a song by folk singer Patricia Shih:

So yes, I am "disabled"

'cause I'm "able" to say "dis"

When you see me come

I'm a whole human
not parts that I may miss
And I won't hide all my shortcomings
if yours you'll also wear
For humanity, not ability,
is the handy cap we share (1986, "Leap of Faith")

Before concluding, I would reiterate that there may be the odd case where the differences resulting from a disability are so extreme that it is in the best interest of the student with the disability to be educated in an alternative setting. However, this should be the fall back choice. Students with disabilities are children first, children who happen to have a disability. Snow's personal experience as a mother of a son with a disability is evident in her words:

Regardless of the labels assigned to them, our children are blossoming and developing right before our eyes. Each is unique, each deserves every opportunity and privilege we can provide, and each has distinctive needs. Differences aside, all children with disabilities have the same basic needs as other children: to be unconditionally loved, valued, and respected for who they are; to love, value, and respect themselves as they are; and to grow up knowing they can and should participate in, and contribute to, the world around them. (Snow, 2001, p. 395)

The presumption then should be that children with disabilities should be educated with their neighbourhood peers, unless the differences are so great that even with supports, the regular classroom does not meet their needs. I would argue that, assuming proper supports are provided for the regular classroom teacher, the situation where the differences between the student with

the disability and those without are so great to merit a non-inclusive setting, would be rare. In conclusion, we have answered the question asked at the beginning of this paper. Katie belongs in her neighbourhood school with her peers (which will include typical children as well as children with disabilities), receiving all that our education system has to offer her and putting her in a situation where she can offer something to the society she is a part of.

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Biography

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