Modification and Accommodation Belief Statement

Craig Beckett

My wife works in an art gallery as a professional fundraiser. In this job she does not often encounter people with intellectual or developmental disability—which is a stark contrast to me who works with children with various developmental disabilities, delays, and autism on a fairly regular basis. Last week when a group of children from with developmental delays came into her gallery and afterwards she asked me: “how do you not cry all the time with those kids?” My response was that they don’t want pity or sympathy. They want to be treated as fully human—and we don’t cry about people who ‘whole’ and just as human as we are. I’m sure my wife’s emotions were not overtly meant to belittle or dehumanize the kids visiting the gallery. She just felt sad that for the fact that young kids could face great challenges while others are ungrateful at how lucky they are. I really liked the way this document laid out the way professionals and people in general should interact with people with disabilities—with respect and as fully human.

In the area of inclusion the study that is referenced on page seven (Rea, McLaughlin, and Walther Thomas,) is very interesting in that it suggests that inclusion actually leads to kids that do better on standardized tests than those in a pullout model. For schools that are clinging to the self contained classes this flies in the face of what they are so desperately holding on to. This is also reflected in the factors associated with successful inclusion like teacher beliefs held about students with disabilities. In my experience as the former teacher of a partial withdrawal program (Destination Employability Program for students with a MID) I found that the students in my class became ‘my kids’. That is to say that I would have to make any special arrangements for the students in my class if they wanted to go on a field trip (like organizing an EA to go. Clearly the teachers believed that I as a special education teacher had a kind of special responsibility beyond the classroom that they did not. This is not to say that I didn’t enjoy or care for my kids—I felt a huge connection with these students. But as a young teacher, with less then five years experience, it was isolating. If kids in my class got into trouble at lunch it was I was somehow more responsible that the teacher in the typical classroom with typical students. I think that if integration is going to work in school, students with disabilities cannot be the responsibility of one teacher. Instead they are the responsibility of all. This likely means less withdrawal and fewer self contained classes at all—instead provide support in the regular classes. While this change of attitude is happening increasingly in the board I work for and in others, teachers still feel uncomfortable (and unfortunately sometimes hostile) toward kids with exceptional challenges. The culture of ‘We Teach ‘Em All’ needs to be fostered and inculcated across the system and in wider society.