



Definitions of Curriculum that Foster Inclusion

Dr. Carmen Shields has been an important member of the committee developing the Toronto Catholic District School Board pilot project “A Place of Belonging.” She is the past Chair of Graduate Studies in Education at Nipissing University and has helped to situate the project in terms of curriculum theory.

She notes,

“Unfortunately most of the school definitions of curriculum these days leave out the specific individuals we are talking about in this project. Curriculum is defined today in Ontario as subject matter -- literacy and numeracy at the moment--but there are many definitions of curriculum. Two that are dear to my heart and are very inclusive are

- 1) Connelly and Clandinin’s definition from back in 1988, that “curriculum is all of life’s experience.” When you think of curriculum in that way, and you think about the experiential piece of having individuals with developmental delays working in schools, gathering their skills so they can go on and contribute to the world—it makes perfect sense. Teachers can understand that kind of view. I know because I teach so many teachers. And,
- 2) Joseph Schwab’s definition of curriculum as comprised of 4 elements: first the student; then the teacher; third, the milieu that we put together for people to learn in; and fourth, the subject matter. In that equation, when subject matter is only one quarter of the whole notion, you see the powerful piece of the relationship and interaction between teacher and student coming to the fore. And the milieu is so very important. As Parker Palmer says, as teachers we have the power to shine a light and we also have power to cast a shadow, and the milieu is a really critical piece to pay attention to so that students have the best opportunity to bring their best to their learning.

These 2 definitions of curriculum make great sense in a project focused on the individuals that we are hoping to support:



The objective is to sustain the students' book learning while bearing in mind Dewey's notion of the practical being where the learning actually takes place. Mind you, I feel this is the best way to think about all students.

So the notion of inclusion for me doesn't distinguish between students that have developmental delays and other students. Students are students, and each person should have the best brought to them in a milieu of care and enrichment, so that they can then go out into the world and be the best citizens they can be.

I think everybody has a contribution to make. I have learned from my own extremely handicapped sister so many lessons that I would not have had an opportunity to learn anywhere else. It just involves slowing down and paying careful attention, monitoring your own learning, to learn from somebody who often in the past was thought to be impossible to teach.

I'm thrilled to be a part of a project that is about inclusive education, and to see these young people have the chance to participate in their school culture and then to go on to contribute as volunteers or as paid individuals in their community."

