



Start Early on Inclusion – Break Down Steps

Transcript

Lauchie MacKinnon (teacher): We can't assume that inclusion is going to happen, but it's creating the environment. You can't assume that an inclusionary environment is going to happen because the student is there. It's about, as early as grade... as primary, saying, recognizing that this child is different because they do things that are different. I just find that it's creating it right from the start, saying, "Yes, we're different; but yes, we're all the same."

Josie MacEachern (parent): I agree 100% that the environment has to be created and as early as possible. You know, to start worrying about lifelong friendships for people with intellectual disabilities after they leave school and they're already 18 or 19, that's a bit late. The best time to start thinking about that is early on--incorporate it as they leave elementary school and sit down with the people the student was involved with in elementary school. Take those best practices on to junior high and take them on to high school, and then, if it's working and the atmosphere is created, it'll work in their adult life as well.

Lauchie (to Marigold, a classmate of Jonathan who continues to be one of Jonathan's friends): You guys had a dance in grade 7 and a group of you in the classroom came to me and asked if Jonathan could go to the dance. And Jonathan, well I knew Jonathan wasn't going to go to the dance, but Josephine (his mother)-- I called Josephine up and said, "The grade 7's have asked if Jonathan can go to the dance. They want him at the junior high sock hop." Sherry and Jerome had kind of organized it.

And what happened was that Jonathan did go to the dance but he didn't dance. He came and he worked the door that day. And she (indicates Josie) collected the money at the door, and Jonathan came. That was the level that he was ready to participate at, right? Sometimes we get the mindset of "all or nothing," when really we should be looking at pieces, you know. At the time, I didn't think of it that way, but I work with occupational therapists all the time and they'll tell you that the whole process is breaking the pieces down into small manageable pieces, so that you're always moving forward, but only one chunk at a time--rather than trying to look at this as, "Jonathan needs to be at the dance, and he needs to dance with somebody, and..." The first step is get to the dance!



And, not every parent is willing to give up their Friday nights to collect money at the dance hall, but you (Jonathan's parents) were always willing to find that space for him to be a part, and that was important. And a lot of times now when the kids hang out...you (indicates Josie) thought of this long ago, they would sit in their house and they would hang out and they would watch TV and they'd be playing with their computers and they'd be playing with their iPods, and that's what they did, right? And so, who are the best teachers for the children? Their peers.

Because...I remember what it was like to be a child in the 1970s and the '80s; you (indicates Marigold, Jonathan's classmate friend) were a child in the '90s, and now if you try to go back and try to tell kids how to *be* in 2010, it's hard. It's like (as teachers), we have ideas and we can be helpful, but the best guides are their own peers. You (indicates Josie) took the initiative in including them (Jonathan's peers) in a variety of ways and I think that is commendable, and you took risks and that's really commendable.

(With thanks to L'Arche Cape Breton for videotaping this conversation.)

