



CdLS Foundation

Cornelia de Lange Syndrome Foundation, Inc.
Reaching Out, Providing Help, Giving Hope

Dr. Lou Brown Advises Parents to Prepare Their Children for Adulthood

An article from Reaching Out (July/August 1994)

"Help them live in an integrated world"

Where is your child going to be at age 21," asked Lou Brown. Dr. Brown, a professor of education at the University of Wisconsin, repeatedly posed that question to his audience at the 1998 CdLS Conference in Minnesota.

"What is your child going to be doing at age 21?" he continued. "Who will be your child's friends at age 21?" This teacher of future teachers is a cheerleader for inclusion - the password that means to learn, to live, to work and to play in an integrated society.

A Lesson in Special Education History

Offering a brief history lesson, Brown chronicled the educational road for students with disabilities beginning in pre-World War II days when they were completely excluded from public school settings. Then on to the 70's and 80's when these children were cloistered in special education wings with special education specialists and special services hovering close by. And now to the 90's and a new choice -- the non-special education option.

A federal law passed in 1976 said that all children with disabilities have a right to a tax-supported education in the least restrictive environment teaching them to the highest point of their abilities. According to Lou Brown this law, buoyed by tax dollars, although good in its intent, segregated children with disabilities from the real world of respect, dignity and choices.

Choosing the Non-special Education Alternative

Now, he announced, parents have an alternative. They can say, "I do not want my child to grow up independent of relationships with regular children." He then spent the remainder of his lecture defending that position and offering ammunition for those who want their children to travel this relatively uncharted path.

Pacing back and forth in front of the group, Brown, no longer the amiable professor, declared that the purpose for public school is to prepare your child to live, work and play in an integrated society. "And, unless it does that, it's not any good."



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A Life-Space Analysis

Displaying a life-space analysis, the speaker asked how much time a person with significant disabilities should spend in regular settings with non-disabled people and how much should be spent elsewhere?

He defended their need to build relationships with people who are not disabled. For instance, mealtime should be spent with people who are not paid to eat with them. He poohpoohed the proverbial "retarded bus" and pushed for regular school bus transportation or neighborhood car pools. He pressed for children with disabilities to be full members of regular classrooms with their prime tutors being non-disabled peers.

Then Brown stopped. "We have no manual for friendships. All we can hope is that by building other relationships, those relationships will into a friendship." He concluded that any education plan for a student with disabilities that does not include developing "a wide array of social relationships with non-disabled people is unacceptable."

What Makes Learning Meaningful for a Person with Disabilities?

Why do this? Professor Brown reminded his audience that, according to law, what children with disabilities learn should be meaningful to them. What is meaningful? Lou Brown recited, "[When].. they earn respect because of what they learn, [when].. their parents shed tears of pride, [when].. they feel better about themselves, [when].. they learn to do things for themselves, [when].. they realize the privilege of privacy, [when].. they make choices, [when].. they gain dignity and [when].. the government becomes less involved in their lives." All along the audience was reminded that their task is to prepare their child with disabilities to live, work, learn and play in an integrated world - to teach a child to function as an individual with non-disabled people by age 21.

Some listeners said that many parents of children without disabilities don't want children with CdLS in regular classrooms. Lou Brown reminded them that the law was on their side. The better answer, he added, is that time was on their side. Attitudes are changing. "It's going to be different from now on."

There are no evidences that the achievement of disabled children interferes with the learning of the non-disabled. Brown cited his experience in Madison, Wisconsin, where "the brightest, most effective people in our community will have grown up touching people with disabilities." Throughout his lecture he gave examples and showed slides of classrooms where inclusion is working.

Other listeners warned that some teachers don't want children with CdLS in their classrooms. "Of course not," said Brown, "if they're dumped." He promised that if teachers are trained to make modifications in curriculum, if they are given support and taught rehearsal strategies, they, too, will change. He explained that he no longer speaks to special



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education groups but concentrates on the regular classroom teachers. "They are responsive to what I'm saying. They will adapt."

Professor Brown reminded parents that after age 21 there are no legal entitlements, only discretionary services. "The fewer services your child needs at 21, the better. The more relationships with people without disabilities your child has at 21, the better."

"Remember, your child is seven, going on 21."