

The difference between the educational experiences of Peter and Samuel are perhaps best described by the titles of the documentaries themselves.

Including Samuel: This film about Samuel Habib is focused on creating an inclusive atmosphere for Samuel. Samuel has Cerebral Palsy. He attends a local, inclusive elementary school, and has from Kindergarten. His classmates are members of his community, some even live in his neighborhood and play with him often. Samuel's teachers are well-trained and feel capable of including Samuel. In the Congressional address we watched, Dan Habib (Samuel's father), spoke about the importance of inclusion for all students. Inclusion tells all students that they belong. This is in keeping with the article, "The Need to Belong," written by Norman Kunc. In this article, Kunc addresses Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Maslow felt that people need to feel they belong before they can develop confidence and demonstrate mastery. Isaiah, Samuel's older brother, told the Congressional hearing that all of the students in Samuel's class, including Samuel, benefitted from the social interactions they had as a result of an inclusive classroom. He expressed his dreams for his brother, and his own disappointment that all students were not included in his own classroom. Samuel's future looks bright, as he and his family and community support each other.

Educating Peter follows the experiences of Peter, a student with Down Syndrome, as he is included in a general education classroom for the first time as a third grader. Peter's teacher expresses her desire to teach all students, as well as her concern that everyone will be successful. When Peter enters the classroom, the other students express curiosity and fear. Peter quickly learns that he can easily get attention from his peers and teacher when he is physically aggressive. For the first few months of the school year, Peter's behavior alienates him from the rest of the class. Peter's teacher, and in particular other teachers, express their concerns about their abilities to teach all students. They express helplessness and hopelessness. These feelings are not due to their lack of desire, but more due to the lack of training and support. In this way, the teachers are experiencing "dumping", leaving a student in a classroom without providing the tools and support needed for success. This differs so much from Samuel's teacher's experience. She was well trained, experienced, and well supported by the administration as well as the community. Peter begins to demonstrate more success in the classroom as the work is adapted and modified for him. Towards the end of the school year, Peter's classmates eagerly call Peter a friend and his teacher expresses her joy in his success.

Although the experiences of Peter and Samuel, as well as their teachers, are so different, what really struck me was the similarities in the way their classmates reacted. Peter's classmates had never met a child with Down Syndrome before, and were frightened of his aggressive behavior. But by the end of the school year, they loved and accepted him. Peter's classmate said, "He changed because we changed. He changed because we changed our minds about him." I can't help but think that their attitude toward and relationship with Peter could have resembled Samuel's classmates' if they had only been provided the opportunity. In both cases, I am amazed by the capacity of children to love and accept each other. It made me consider my role as a teacher. Am I promoting that natural inclination? Is the layout of my classroom, the grouping of students for lessons, and the social experiences and instruction supporting them, or creating an unnecessary divide?

Classroom notes on videos:

Video- Including Samuel

Honoring diversity

What does a school that is a model for inclusion look like?

Is a separate school ever more appropriate? Ever for the child's safety? Mental health? Suicidal? Is the situation of the school conducive for learning? What adaptations could be made to make it appropriate?

Homebound services? Residential treatment facilities? Spectrum of services.

Fresh opportunities to change schools when there is improvement after serious behaviors

School district needs to make sure there is a "fit" within the district

System fails them!

Civil rights issues Brown vs. Board of Ed.

Avoidance- the worst thing you can do is allow the student to continue to avoid- cheating them out of the services you owe them!!

Congressional briefing- Habib family from including Samuel

Isaiah:

Need for social skills that come from inclusion for ALL students

Future dreams for Samuel

Lack of inclusion is stating to the community- these people don't belong

Dan (dad):

Educating Peter:

Peter entering gen. ed . classroom

3rd grade

Other students not prepared- scared of him, stared at him, babysat him

Behaviors- screaming/yelling in class

Teacher is afraid- what happens if it doesn't work

Clear expectations

Students not standing up for themselves- afraid of him

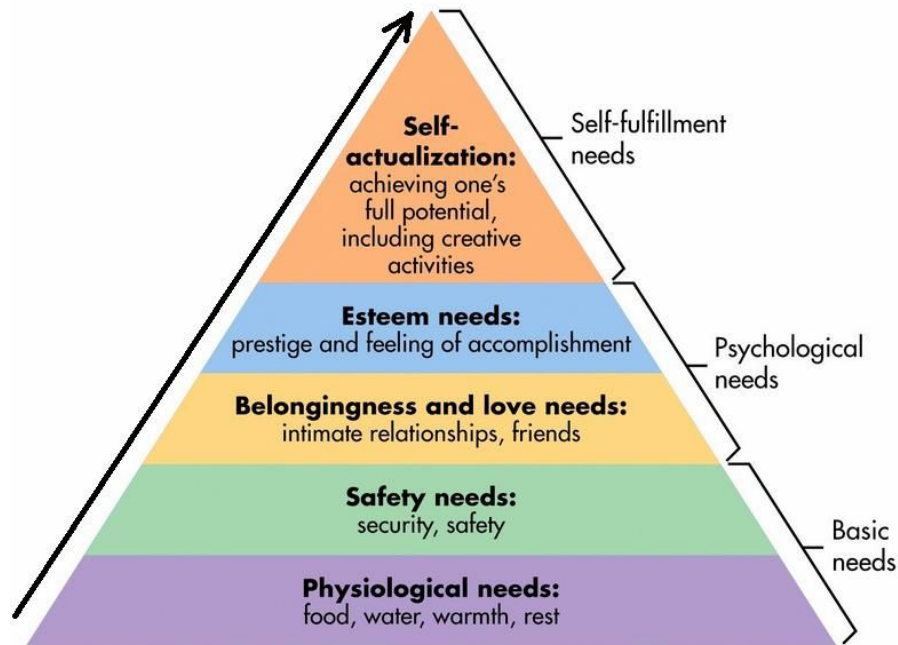
Dumping vs. inclusion

Teacher is always on guard- students must be too

Behavior brings attention

Needing social skills lessons

Doesn't belong



Teacher attempting to modify work

Peter knew that he wasn't fitting in- not doing the things that others could do

Give him opportunities to help

As time progresses- Peter becomes more independent in his work, and participates

more

Girls take on mothering role

All students celebrate successes- but still with pejorative elements

Extinction burst- renewal of behaviors after some time has lapsed (months in this case)

"He changed because we changed. He changed because we changed our minds about him." (Peter's classmate)

Peter is teaching his peers

Parents report that Peter is very happy when he comes home from school

The children want to love him- forgive quickly, seek him out.

The capacity of children to accept and love- are we as teachers supporting that or crushing it?!