A Journey in Their Shoes

Personal Perspectives as a Teacher and Advocate

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Misunderstood and Underestimated

- When I was a year old my parents thought I was deaf and was given a hearing test.

- At two I was severely cognitively delayed and was diagnosed as intellectually disabled.

- A year later I was taken out of a school for students with intellectual disabilities and put in a regular nursery school.

- At six I was diagnosed as severely learning disabled and would be lucky to hold a menial job.
O’Canada Land of Conformity

- Quite often in elementary school I was passed from grade to grade, regardless of my progress.
- The environment of the classroom was overwhelming to me.
- I had an inability to sit in one place for much time.
- Due to my talkative nature I was often put in the hallway instead of learning.
- Although I was quite immature my interests were more towards adult topics.
Bullied With No Reprieve

- Due to my idiosyncratic behavior and how I presented myself I was often bullied.

- Often the school did nothing to address the situation.

- I tried to hide the situation from my parents, but they figured what was occurring.

- I had my teeth smashed in pavement by a bully.

- Despite everything I never gave up.
Parental Life Preserver

- My parents always had my back.
- They helped me realize that I was not dumb.
- Although it was difficulty learning in school they created the conditions at home where it was an oasis of learning for me.
- I was expected to responsible.
- They didn’t self pity me and taught me to be a strong and resilient person.
Coming Into my Own

- Going to boarding help me develop both my self confidence and academic abilities.

- I was in smaller classes where I was actually able to learn.

- I was given classes in social skills training.

- Over time I became much more aware of my strengths and was more cognizant of my challenges.

- I graduated a year early.
A Journey Towards Autism Acceptance.

- As a child I would have been diagnosed as being classically autistic.
- In graduate school a professor told me I was likely on the autism spectrum.
- It put me into a depression and was very difficult to come to terms with.
- My father helped me come to terms with possibly being on autism spectrum.
- Ultimately my wife got me to confront and deal with the possibility of being on the spectrum.
Observations from the Classroom

- Less is more for the environment of a classroom for ASD students.

- When teaching students I use meta-cognition and adapt it to their learning styles.

- They are encouraged to be themselves and to believe in themselves.

- Social skills training is integrated into the environment of the class.

- Self-advocacy and self-esteem awareness is focused on.

- Student interests are often integrated into curriculum.
• Openness and expressing feelings is encouraged in class.

• Students are taught concepts in an incremental and proactive manner.

• My class is a safe space for students.

• They are encouraged to be themselves.

• In my class students are not allowed to use autism as an excuse.

• Open line of communication with parents and teachers is important.
A Person With Autism or Autistic: It’s Our Choice.

- One of the most important things is that people with autism define themselves.
- That we need to see ourselves as whole people.
- People need to look at the full person.
- An individual with autism should be celebrated for what they can do, not maligned for who they are.
- We must take an active role in changing societal perceptions.
Being Different is Just a Way of Declaring I’m Unique.

- Many people who were seen as different contributed to society in countless ways.
- Different is not being abnormal or atypical.
- Normality is subjective at best.
- People need to embrace not only what qualities we share, but what makes us different.
- Identities are not etched in stone, but can be changed.