

# Research Highlights

## Topic: Disability Policy

Zuna, N., & Turnbull, R. (2004). "Imagine all the people, sharing..." or a (not so) modest proposal made on the eve of IDEA reauthorization. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 29(3) 210-213.

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### BOTTOM LINE

The authors analyze the increasing division between general education and special education. They speak to the unequal treatment of students. The authors also describe the socio-psychological effects of categorizing students. They conclude with a vision of combining special education and general education into one educational system for all students.

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### KEY FINDINGS

- The 1975 legal predecessor of IDEA was a powerful victory for children with disabilities and their families. The law, however, produced the dividing line between special and general education.
- General education and special education teachers do not jointly take responsibility for teaching children with disabilities. The law of 1975 set in motion separate systems.
- The advocates of the 1975 law did not have the foresight to plan for the professional practices needed to educate all children together.
- The 1975 law was passed because early civil rights rulings supported equal protection for children with disabilities. A powerful notion of these civil rights rulings, however, was the fact that separation teaches "the separated" that they are not worthy of being included. This argument was not used robustly enough to ensure equal opportunity and protection for all children in the 1975 law.
- Do we rob individuals with disabilities of their liberty by labeling them with a disability? Arguably, yes. Children get IDEA-guaranteed special services only after being "saddled" with a label of a disability.

## KEY FINDINGS cont.

- Labeling a child as a “person with a disability” prevents them from obtaining an identity of being simply a child, simply a person.
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- The advocates of the 1975 law did not have the foresight to plan for the professional practices needed to educate all children together.
- The 1975 law was passed because early civil rights rulings supported equal protection for children with disabilities. A powerful notion of these civil rights rulings, however, was the fact that separation teaches “the separated” that they are not worthy of being included. This argument was not used robustly enough to ensure equal opportunity and protection for all children in the 1975 law.
- Do we rob individuals with disabilities of their liberty by labeling them with a disability? Arguably, yes. Children get IDEA-guaranteed special services only after being “saddled” with a label of a disability.
- Labeling a child as a “person with a disability” prevents them from obtaining an identity of being simply a child, simply a person.
- ADA proclaims that disability is a natural part of the human experience. Imagine if Congress would have also said that disability is a natural part of being human which is to be accepted and even welcomed and those that are “different enough” are to be welcomed, not simply accepted.
- Imagine curricula that adopt universal design. Imagine teachers working together with each other to serve all students. Imagine we stop dividing teachers and services by labeling them as “general” or “special.”
- Imagine “special” funding streams blending with universalistic ones and “resource rooms” that serve the continuum of needs for all students.
- Disability is a natural part of life, and how we embrace the concept of disability reflects our social values and shapes our societal quality of life.

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## METHOD

- The article reflects the expert opinion of the authors, gathered through their historical research and educational experience.

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## RELATED PUBLICATIONS

ADA (1990). 42 U.S.C. 12101 et seq. *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

Disability Policies in Sweden. (2000). Retrieved June 15, 2004, from "[http://www.socialeurope.com/onfile/country-profiles/swedish\\_disabili\\_policy.htm](http://www.socialeurope.com/onfile/country-profiles/swedish_disabili_policy.htm)"

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (1997). Public Law 105-17, 20 U.S.C. Secs. 1400 et seq.

*Mills v. D.C. Board of Education*, 348 F. Supp. 866 (D.D.C.1972).

*No Child Left Behind Act. (2001)*. Pub. Law. No. 107-110, 115 Stat. 1425.

*PARC v. Commonwealth*, 334 F. Supp. 1257 (E.D. Pa. 1971).343 F. Supp. 279 (E.D. Pa. 1972).

Swift, J. (1729). A modest proposal. In M. H. Abrams (Ed.), *The Norton anthology of English literature, Vol. 1* (5th ed., pp. 2174-2181). New York: W. W. Norton, 1986.

Trilling, L., quoted in Rothman, D. (1980). *Convenience and conscience: The asylum and its alternatives in progressive America*. Boston: Little, Brown.

Turnbull, H. R., & Turnbull, A. P. (2000). *Free appropriate public education: The law and children with disabilities* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). Denver: Love Publishing.

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