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Thesis Statement:

Are Teachers Ready for Special Needs Part III

Eng. 102

By Richie Heinlein

My thesis statement for part III of my research paper is as follows: I plan to argue the nation needs to fund more research on special education programs. This would include asking the students via interviews and parent conferences. Based on the findings of the research, the nation should fund the findings appropriately. This could mean cutting budgets on other less crucial programs. After the funding has been handed out, the nation should assess and do the same process over again. If cutting is not enough, the nation should ask for public support in the funding process. This could mean donations or higher taxes. The proceeds of such would be earmarked for just special education.

Research Paper

What Side Am I On? (Are Teachers Ready For Special Needs? Part III)

By Richie Heinlein

Eng.102

To: Reader's Digest

Outline

What Side Am I On? (Are Teachers Ready For Special Needs III)

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To: Reader's Digest

1. State my thesis and define it.
2. Explain the old “Education For All Handicapped Children Act” in more detailed account. Contrast with the 1997 “I.D.E.A.” law. This is to explain where we have come from and explain where we are now. In other words improvements in the quality of the law.
3. Answer the Questions of the prior papers in the chain (if needed). This needs to be done in my own opinion. Cite the sources that back my opinion.
4. Argue my point by citing the source(s) that agree with me.
5. Dismiss my opponents with my own opinions and sources of prior pieces of the research chain.
6. Conclusion(s)

The argument of whether teachers are prepared for special needs is, of course, a very big one. The way that I stand is that the nation needs to fund more research on special education programs. Based on the findings of the research, the nation should fund the findings appropriately. This could mean eliminating less needed or ineffective programs. Teacher preparedness is also an issue. This would consist of assessing the quality of said teachers and making improvements on skills.

To argue my point on the issue of preparedness for special needs I am using a report to the President of the U.S. done in 1989 called Education Of Students With Disabilities. This will provide historic law on the subject in more detail and give a good comparison to where we are now. As stated before in the second piece of my research chain, there was a law born in 1975 called the Education For All Handicapped Children Act. This is also called P.L 94-142. This law's purpose was "to make available the free and appropriate education for all children with disabilities" (United States). According to the above source, P.L. 94-142 took pieces of other federal legislation to make this law. This law strongly encourages parent involvement of the education of children by putting in a system that would be ready to handle the parents' questions and complaints. This law also provides resources for the identification of students with disabilities, one on one instruction, homebound programs, hospital programs, and funding in case private school is needed; in this case, the public school system would pay for it (United States).

As stated in my earlier research the Education For All Handicapped Children Act evolved over the years and became the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 or I.D.E.A. This act was passed to strengthen the above law of 1975.

Although, this time it was much stricter. There were stronger guidelines for Individual Education Plans (IEP's,) high costs for schools who did not comply and stronger parental involvement (idea practices).

Is there enough funding to go around? Are students getting the accommodations needed? Does the government need to do more? These are some of the questions brought up in previous pieces of my research chain. I would say yes and no. We are still a learning country. In my opinion we need to fund more research on special education. Dr. Stephen Chaikind of the Financial Task Force said the same thing when he said that sinking an increased amount of funds into special education was not as good as more research on the subject of special education (FTF Hearing-Chaikind). Mr. Freund, also of FTF, thinks that the funding should be increased to fit the "excess cost" of special education (FTF Hearing-Freund). Excess cost would probably cover administration. I think that Mr. Freund has a very good point. However, is this truly the way to go to make special education better? I think that more funding for special education would be great, but this may not be as effective as more research and making stricter mandates on teachers of special education to make teachers prepared for special needs children.

I was in grade school at a time when all of this legislation had just begun. I lived through the torture of a school system not ready for special needs. I agree whole-heartedly with Carola Seegert, author of Nasty Girls, Thugs and Humans Like Us, when she says that "due to heritage, literature focuses on the child not the needs. This could make an impairment a handicap" (Seegert-Preface). The students sometimes were not given a fair shake in life. This is especially true if a student has a

disability. I think this is partially due to the fact that some students do not fit in the disabilities category and others do. The ones that do not seem to have a lot of advantage compared to the ones who do fit the disabilities profile. Since I fit the disabilities profile, my actions have sometimes amazed people because of the fact that I am disabled. I play tennis (a very visual sport). Because of this, I am sometimes treated as normal, when actually; I am legally blind from birth. So, I fit the quote of Carola Seegert. My needs were underestimated.

In order not to deny special education students of a free and proper education, this nation needs to do a better job of handing out funds. This could mean weakening or eliminating budgets of programs less proficient or effective. The state of Wisconsin is a state having problems with funding issues. However, Wisconsin is trying. A recent biennial budget report given out by Disabilities Advocacy Wisconsin Network (DAWN) states that funding for special education is inadequate in Wisconsin. A March 25, 2004 update to this site states that Wisconsin passed a budget that eliminated driver's education and then used the funds to help out special education. This is to the tune of 4.3 million dollars (Wisconsin). Driver's Education may not be as needed as special education. Therefore, Wisconsin is trying to sacrifice a program that may be less needed by weakening or eliminating an otherwise well merited program, which is one of the points in my main argument. I am further backed by the position taken by the National Education Association (NEA). One of NEA's articles that is entitled "NEA's Position on IDEA: Funding" states that "this country in 1975 promised funding of 40 percent of the average per student cost for every special education student, but never has made good on this commitment. Even

though substantial improvements have been made, the current government is still only funding 18 percent” (NEA). This is how bad the picture is: According to this article, the average cost of education for a special needs student is \$16,921. (NEA) (I am thinking this means per year). With the government paying so little of the promised 40 percent, there is a 10.6 billion dollar shortfall for the states and their respective schools to fund. Because of what I went through in school in the 1980’s, I would not doubt it one bit!

What about the issue of teacher preparedness? In the second piece of my research paper, I talked about my interview with Debbie Britton who is a former special education teacher. In the interview, she was saddened that some people are not caught in time. She said that early intervention is needed for children so they don’t fall through the cracks of the school system. I whole heartedly agree with Ms. Britton as this is the only way of serving special needs students effectively. She herself was not prepared for special needs students, as stated in the interview. She also stated that legal red tape was partially to blame for her quitting her career. Does legal red tape hurt high quality teachers? I would say yes, because the paperwork involved sure does not sound simple to me, especially the way Ms. Britton described it. Ms. Britton described this legal red tape as “being caught in the middle of the school’s IEP and parents who had a big problem with the IEP.” (Britton Interview) In my opinion however, even though this would seem to be tiring and a lose-lose situation, disagreements will happen and need to be dealt with in a compromise situation. This may not be possible in some situations. Some students in the above case may need to be asked some questions if possible. This way the young student

can get the best accommodations possible. Sometimes the accommodations clearly needed might be too expensive for the school to readily afford and therefore will balk at the thought of providing this kind of an accommodation (Britton Interview).

The Quality Counts poll, in my opinion further justified my thought patterns when it stated that “More than eight out of ten teachers believe that most special education students need to be held under a different standard” (Quality Counts 4). Statistics like this one are truly alarming because I think that disabled people should not be cheated out of their potential fulfillment.

In conclusion, this question still remains: Are teachers ready for special needs? In my opinion, this is a country that is learning to take care of its special education children. The country is not fully ready for special needs. This country’s government, in my opinion, needs to fund more research. However, what the U.S has already is grossly under funded because of what I have seen in my past experiences mostly, but also the promise stated in NEA’s website.

We are making leaps and bounds though. In present day, there seems to be a lot more in life for special needs students. The teachers are constantly evolving in skills, not just because of new legislation, but because of the compassion needed in the human heart for the special education student. In my opinion, teachers themselves are more ready than they used to be, however there is always room for improvement in any teacher. Some students will seem to always fall through the cracks of the school system, however for each failure to help one student, there will always be a learning process to not let that happen again. Thousands, maybe millions of students with the same problem as the one who flew under the state or federal radar

the first time, perhaps will not have to endure the pain of a lack of readiness, simply because this wonderful country and its teachers are constantly improving and evolving to higher and higher qualities of teaching.

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