

LETTERS

Advozealots

To the Editor:

Your superb warning about the Advozealots should be enshrined somewhere as a great indictment of the present treatment of the mentally handicapped. It is a clarion call to those who have watched with anguish the takeover of special education by ideologues who seek to deny the handicapped their differences and their needs.

Amy Lettick
Tempe, AZ

To the Editor:

Three cheers for Bernard Rimland's last "Editor's Notebook" (ARRI 7/4), denouncing the vacuous and sometimes harmful pronouncements of certain "experts" regarding disabilities. When I announce that my 25-year-old son lives in an institution, people's reaction is often shocked, as if I were a child molester or a serial killer.

My son has autism, is mentally retarded and has severe behavior problems that cannot be dealt with at home. He has run the gamut of [treatments]. We have done everything we can, except laying on hands and swimming with dolphins, and he is still autistic and retarded and still needs round-the-clock care....

And now the winds of change are upon us in New Jersey, where more than 5,000 people are on waiting lists for "residential care." Some people will always need a shelter and the kindness of strangers, yet there is talk of closing the institution he is in. When pressed to define alternative solutions, the authorities can only demur in the vaguest terms. I fear this special ed "new speak" will leave us, parents and children, high and dry with no place to go.

Micheline Miller
Blairstown, NJ

To the Editor:

Your "Advozealots" was magnificent. It needs to be distributed worldwide.

My husband and I started a home and school for 176 mentally and physically handicapped boys and girls. That was in 1966. We swam upstream then, and now we battle the State for our stand.

When Governor Thornburgh was Pennsylvania's governor, his wife came to visit. After touring our most severely and profoundly retarded living area, she commented, "Oh, what a shame that they cannot be in public school."

Mildred E. Krentel
Berwyn, PA

To the Editor:

I appreciate your newsletter but I must take issue with your editorial "Beware the Advozealots." In particular I take issue with your characterization of the mentally ill and the closing of the institutions. Psychiatric institutions were not closed due to ideology but as a method to save money. The money...seldom followed the patients into the com-

munity. Homelessness among the mentally ill was not a case of "ideology overruling common sense," but a case of utilizing ideology to save money.

Individuals with mental illness can and do live successfully in the community. The key to this success is [programs that offer] an adequate level of support. Statistics indicate that [such] programs have been extremely successful at reducing hospitalization and increasing independence and the quality of life in the community. Unfortunately programs designed to deliver the needed support are constantly having budgets reduced and do not have the resources necessary to serve all those in need. The solution is to fund what does work and not return to a system of keeping the mentally ill sequestered in psychiatric hospitals.

Randall Wolbert, MSW
Kalamazoo, MI

Editor's Note: You say individuals with mental illness can live successfully in the community. If you put a "some" at the beginning of that sentence, I would agree with you. Closing down the institutions does not provide for those people who are not included under "some."

To the Editor:

[The idea of] educational and community inclusion for people with disabilities, proposes that people with disabilities can be educated in regular classrooms and live in the community with the necessary supports; they do need help, but they do not need to be segregated to receive it. This critical issue of supports is the piece always deliberately left out of the equation by reactionary thinkers attempting to gloss over their lack of vision by misrepresenting the inclusionist philosophy.

As parents of a young child with autism who is fully included in a regular first grade class, we do know that with a lot of work, it can be done and it is worth it.

Carolyn and Les Reed
Denver, Colorado

Editor's note: Let me repeat: we are not opposed to inclusion WHEN IT'S APPROPRIATE. We are glad it works for the Reeds—but should it be forced on the thousands of children for whom it ISN'T working? Should their parents have a right to programs that work for their children, or should their views be dismissed condescendingly as merely a "lack of vision?"

To the Editor:

When I first started reading about your PC controversy it made me smile and say to myself: Americans are lucky to have time to waste on such trivia as *how* to say things instead of living in my world where just getting to be able to talk seriously about autism is a never-ending battle.

My world is France. French grammar is backwards. (Here, we say English grammar is backwards; that depends on your point of view.) In French, adjectives come after nouns. There's nothing political about it, it's just the way our syntax works. So an autistic child is "un enfant autiste." Automatically.

Therefore, if PC terminology was the key to understanding and tolerance, we should be living in paradise. The French autistic world is more like a briar patch where you have not only to tackle the problems of a baffling handicap in itself, but also are scratched on all sides by distrusting professionals and...outdated psychoanalytic ideas that point you out as a dangerous alien.

As far as I can see, the key to understanding would not be to use some politically correct euphemisms so as to hide from reality. Biology *does* affect thought and every human being is biologically different from his neighbor. Denying this is what is behind the psychogenic theory, behind the current cure-all view of F/C, behind a lot of pain and a lot of time wasted not doing research about important things.

Virginie Schaefer
Loire Valley, France

To the Editor:

If we must say *children with autism*, rather than *autistic children*, and if *children with disabilities* should replace *handicapped children*, then, using the formula, let's ask those advozealots to describe themselves as *man with handsomeness* or *woman with beauty* instead of *handsome man* or *beautiful woman*, and their *cute, charming son and daughter* should be *boy with cuteness* and *girl with charm*...

Melody Lin
Northridge, CA

More on F/C

To the Editor:

Claims that autistic people cannot teach themselves to read without step-by-step confirmed instruction by a non-autistic person are so hypocritical when the same people would put up no opposition to accepting the automatic mathematical, musical, impressionistic or artistic "savant" skills of autistic people. [Editor's note: A small minority of autistic children *can* learn to read on their own, just as a small minority are mathematical or musical savants—but the vast majority are neither self-taught readers nor savants.]

My book, *Nobody Nowhere*, was not thought about and then written. I could not have grasped those thoughts and connections mentally nor articulated those thoughts verbally—my brain doesn't work that way because it is broken. But when I put my fingers on the keys they were the written version of the video in my head that I merely set to play. My typing spoke for me without effort and I saw my thoughts appear only after they hit the paper—enough that I was shocked by the awareness I was not aware I had. The action was automatic and awareness and intention would have blocked the whole mechanics as it had in life.

So think of this in the context of how they test F/C—a testing that assumes awareness of one's own self-awareness. Think of this in the context of typing being like a video being triggered rather than a person poised with waiting self and the flexibility of expression required by your techniques of

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