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Title :

The Logic of Snoezelen?

Abstract :

Are bright lights, perfumed air, coloured bubbles and soft music the answer to the “apartheid” that people who have been described as having physical/learning disabilities/difficulties have been subjected to in Education and Community Living?

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The Logic of Snoezelen?

Joe and John ask

“Can anyone help us to understand the Logic of Snoezelen?”

We take young children, we label them as having severe physical impairments or we label them as having severe learning disabilities. The labels can be many and varied, once they have been successfully attached, they provide a licence to have children removed from their local schools and communities.

Having done this we prevent them from developing friendships with other youngsters from their neighbourhood. We put them in separate schools where we surround them with a multitude of "experts" who succeed in restricting their curricular activities. We segregate them from learning environments within which their peers participate, we collect them together with other youngsters with similar labels and make "statements" about them having the same "special needs". Once this has been done we gather together another batch of professionals who will tell us why some children may get frustrated and angry and fail to respond positively to the "special environment" we have created just for them.

But the solution is at hand because we can now add to this special environment a new therapy - The Snoezelen!

"Jewel-bright lights", "perfumed air", "coloured bubbles" and "soft music", we are told, can "artificially" re-create many of the sensations and experiences we put so much time, money and energy into removing in the first instance.

The "Snoezelen Experience" will get people to respond in a way they never have before. Snoezelen is a Dutch word, meaning "sniffing and dozing" and the cost of getting learners to sniff up and doze off in such a specially designed room will cost around £50,000. We are, however, comforted by the financial consultants, who inform us, that if special schools seek to fund raise for this new wonder therapy they will find a sympathetic market of people just ready and waiting to hand over their cash for such a problem solver.

But the "dozing and sniffing" are really just a small part of its magic, because the hidden agenda, the professionals will have us believe, is that it can be used as a diagnostic tool enabling the

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Snoezelist (we will have to have a new group of therapists) to systematically gather together vital information on how the learner responds to the green and yellow flashing leads, wrapped around their necks or how their reaction to a blast of lavender up their noses and the stunned silence that follows the strings of Mantovani can reveal hidden information about the "real" person. Such observations will ensure that we can plan a more effective individual learning programme for future progress!

However, we are entitled to ask how such observations, made in such a bizarre and absurdly isolated place, can possibly be translated into any worthwhile assessment anyway?

Another Dutch word is "Apartheid" meaning segregation. While the world has condemned such a practice in South Africa and caused it to be dismantled, we continue to justify it on the grounds of disability. While we continue to separate children and adults from their local schools and communities, no amount of Mantovani, coloured bubbles or perfumed air will prevent the damage we continue to inflict on individuals and the loss to our communities of their many and varied contributions. Snoezelen may well be ok at the seaside or on the Easter Fair but don't allow them to camouflage the real issue which is more to do with a denial of human rights