

Inclusion in the Schools: A parent/teacher/researcher perspective

[Editors' Note: The following is an interview conducted by Ted Myerscough in two sessions in the spring of 2010 and edited in collaboration with the interviewee. It is conversational and informal, intended to draw upon the observations and experiences of the individual who is in the unique situation of being a parent of a child with Asperger's syndrome, a teacher in special education, and a researcher in disability issues.

The interviewee wishes to remain anonymous in order to avoid any potential for an appearance of conflict of interest, and to protect the identities of people involved in situations that are discussed.

In the article, "S." denotes the interviewee, and "R." refers to the child.]

Ted Myerscough: *Part of the impetus, for me, in putting together an issue for the JoDD about "falling through the cracks" was hearing, sometime ago now, about some of your experiences in the community and the schools regarding your child who has Asperger's syndrome. You also have a unique perspective as you are also a teacher in a special education classroom, and a researcher in disability issues.*

From our conversations, it seemed to me that provisions of any kind for kids with id/dd in the schools was ad hoc and dependent upon factors at the individual school, such as the knowledge of the principal and teachers, and that the means were not always provided to successfully create an inclusive environment. Is that a fair observation?

S: Yes. If I talk as a teacher, over the last five or six years, the one thing that is true about Special Education is that it changes every year. So it is kind of ad hoc. It's constantly re-creating itself; you never really get a chance to find out if something is working. Or to give the schools long enough to figure out how they're going to make it workable. Because, like you say, it depends on who's there, how much knowledge they have and what their priorities are. So it changes every year. There's a huge push right now towards inclusion and kind of crossing t's and dotting i's because of the AODA [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (Province of Ontario, 2005)], the schools are supposed to be accessible for every kind of person by 2012—so there's training going on for teachers and administrators—but inclusion, (a lot of my academic work so far is around inclusion), inclusion in the schools, so far, has meant you can be physically present in the school unless you have a severe physical disability or a severe intellectual developmental disability, and then you're put in separate spaces and places.

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Keywords

inclusion,
disability issues,
Asperger's syndrome,
special education,
intellectual and
developmental disabilities

TM: *Outside the school system?*

S: No, within, say, a public school that is just for kids with multiple exceptionalities. It's not integrated. Right? Never mind being inclusive, because inclusion, to me, implies that you're not just in the school, you're in classes with other kids, with the kinds of supports that you need and the way that you, ah, are in the world is incorporated into the way that the class is operating, so whether it's the way in which the teacher teaches, the patterns in the classroom, the kinds of transitions, the content, instructional strategies—all of that to me is what inclusion is about. It's a transformative relationship between people with differences. So, whether that's disability or gender or race or whatever, inclusion to me implies that there's some kind of transformative learning that takes place both ways. And that doesn't happen for the most part. For the most part, it's still addressed as an individualized problem, and if the individualized problem creates too much problem within mainstream classrooms or regular classrooms, then we still separate out into places like home school program¹ or intensive support programs, and the face of those changes from year to year. For example, next year they're phasing out learning disability, intensive supports, special education programs, and they're making something called "communication classrooms" that become a sort of catch all for autism, learning disability, language impairments, and that kind of thing.

TM: *Is that guided by the local school board?*

Local school boards have some discretion as to how they're going to implement. The ministry says you must service all students, and then the local school board has discretion as to how they're going to do that. And they have to write a special education plan. So, something like that would probably be from the [local school board's] initiative as they're trying to figure out financially what works for them and politically what works for them—which seem to be the two primary motivations, not what works for

the kids. Although, I have to say, they are tightening up the criteria for admission to the home school program. The home school program for many years was a catch all for those kids, and it was a way of being inclusive, in quotes, which wasn't really inclusive. It was a separate classroom in the school, each school has one, and it's for those kids whose families don't want to send them to another place, to an extent. There are criteria to get into the home school program; you have to be two years behind in math and English but you couldn't, for example, have multiple exceptionalities where you need physical attendant care or you need somebody with you at all times, in terms of adaptive functioning needs or something like that, but they are streamlining it more and making it work better, which is great. For example, in my home school program this year, I have just four kids and I have an assistant and I have the technology and I have everything I need in order to make that classroom work and to give those kids individualized support and to cater and tailor the program to that. But that's not inclusion. I mean they're in the school. But they're not in the math and English classes. So the math and English classes are still running on the premise that you need to operate a particular way. There's been no transformation of pedagogy or content or anything in the larger classrooms; classrooms are big and fast and pretty overwhelming. There have been improvements, but I think the motivation is *not* to really be inclusive and work with inclusive community as a kind of model for education.

TM: *That it's not that?*

No it's not.

TM: *What about objections to fully integrating kids with a range of learning disabilities, the concerns some people have voiced about lowering the level of the classroom learning standards?*

Well, there are sets of concerns. Parents have concerns as well. Parents of typical kids, parents of atypical or, ah, kids with different needs, both sides, have concerns. So, like you say that, some families, teachers, or educators, worry that the level is going to be brought down; others worry that their children won't get the support they need unless they're in a sort of more segregated setting. I've seen a model in B.C.

1 Editors' Note: The "home school program" mentioned here refers to the designation of the school or schools within a student's community or region at which the student is guaranteed enrollment. It does not refer to home-schooling, which is mentioned later in this article.

[British Columbia] when I worked there, where any child who was in the neighbourhood went to their neighbourhood school and got the support that they needed, whatever that entailed, and it was fluid. The class sizes were smaller; in one classroom, for example, there was a young man with intellectual disabilities and physical disabilities, multiple exceptionalities, with his own attendant who also did instructional work with the child. That meant sometimes they would be part of the big classroom, sometimes they would take time out for attendant care or physiotherapy or working with his picture system, or whatever it was. And I think it provided the opportunity for some reciprocity in terms of learning to have a child like that in the larger group. There was no “downing” of the curriculum, right? I think the key thing is that the children in the class, whoever they are, have whatever they need. You’re dealing with multiple levels in the classroom whether or not we have—for example, in the grade one classroom in the school I’m in right now, there are kids who are way below level and there’s kids who are way above. So, you’re dealing with a huge variety anyway. But, I think that those are real concerns. Examples of models that are working—I don’t think it means that you can never have some sort of separated-out time. I don’t think that’s what inclusion implies either. But I do think it means that we need to welcome whoever is there in the neighbourhood and provide the supports and, and be fluid with it.

TM: *There’s no “one size fits all” solution.*

Yeah, and I mean, ironically, it happens within special education, too. Special education is fragmented into these separated, segregated classes whether they’re gifted, learning disabilities, developmental disabilities, whatever it is, and within those classes themselves there’s great variety and problems, right? So, it doesn’t matter how you parse it out, or categorize it out, and identify kids and place kids, there will always be a great amount of variety that you’re dealing with, so I think what it begins to teach us, if we think about inclusion of kids with difference, with physical or intellectual difference, it begins to teach us that that’s already present in our learning communities and it begins to offer a critique of that “one size fits all” model.

TM: *Adaptability and remaining fluid are key elements to making it work on any level.*

And it involves, I think it needs to involve, a different kind of teacher training where we’re thinking about this, not as separate things—we have regular kids and we have special kids. You know? I think that right from teacher training days—because teachers I talk to, teacher candidates who come through my classroom, they’re very worried about “how do I deal with special education. kids?” Really good practices would incorporate—you wouldn’t be separating out regular versus special kids. They’re just good practices. There are trends now within the education system that the ministry is putting through, which are good. Universal design for learning, for example, taken from architecture, where you’re adapting the environment to suit the needs of who’s there. Differentiated instruction where you’re meeting the needs of your learners in terms of who they are and where they are and what they need. Great ideas. Some solid theory behind it. But, it doesn’t work in practice because, first of all, we’re not given the resources in the schools and still—so you have differentiated instruction and universal design for learning and a really big push from the ministry in terms of inclusive education, but on the other hand you have a special education system that categorizes, identifies, and places according to difference. It’s almost contradictory to that philosophy that they’re trying to push down the pipe too. So, you’re not given the resources, you’re balancing all of these contradictory things, and it’s an impossible situation. I do think there have been improvements. I do think there’s people thinking about this stuff and trying to figure it out. But the system is very clunky and slow moving.

TM: *And that’s dependent more upon individual initiative?*

How well it works?

TM: *Yes. And the development of the initiatives and the changes.*

Yeah. And in terms of how it’s working in a different school, you know, you’re allocated for example, a certain number of teachers for a home school program, a certain number of teachers for an intensive support program and, depending on your administrator and the model in your

school, that could be very static. If it were in my school, if it were according to the model that was given to us, I should have about 25 students in my home school program and the intensive support should have about 3. But instead we integrated the programs and used a more fluid model and a more sort of integrative model, I guess, where there's groups of kids going back with support into the regular classroom. And, you know, that works. But I know that, at other schools, administrators want to go right by the book and right by the rules and it doesn't work.

TM: *What about the concern that the kids who are learning through this system of supports, become support dependent?*

I guess it would depend on which kids we're talking about and which programs because the push right now in Special Education is to get as many kids as possible off supports and to push towards independence. There's a big push towards that right now and I think it's financially and ideologically motivated. Right now, we value this productive independent, autonomous citizen more than ever. If you read the rhetoric in ministry documents, it's all over the place. I'm thinking of the kids I'm working with right now in this home school program—the push is towards short term intervention. So, even programs like reading clinic that used to address kids' needs for two years, has been changed to early reading intervention which is an eight week program or a six week program. It's short term intensive intervention with the hope that that then gets them on their way towards autonomy and independence.

So, there is that trend right now, but I don't know how true that is for someone in the developmental disabilities class, for example. Around autism, there's *Policy/program memorandum 140*, [Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007], where there's applied behaviour analysis strategies being incorporated into individual education plans and instructional strategies that teachers are supposed to take up. But that again is to push towards those kids being able to do it on their own. So, if anything, I feel like there's a trend towards pulling the supports, towards pushing for short term interventions, not something you would have forever. Even in autism classes, it's looked at that way now. As many kids as possible, we just put through this inten-

sive two or three year intervention and get them back into a regular classroom. Get them back into regular classrooms able to function according to the normative standard—not transforming the normative standard, not diversifying the normative standard, but normalizing and placing back. I look at it as normalizing interventions. We're trying to make kids normal and put them back into normal classrooms. But it only works for a certain catchment of kids. We will always have kids that will never even aspire to, or achieve, normative standards and that provides, for me, a critique of the normative standards. So, it's kind of like, we're leaving some behind but they're trying to capture as many as they can and get them to this state of autonomy. Which implies that we're going to carry on the way we've been carrying on. And that "relationality" and dependence is the territory of only these few over here rather than a state that all of us have. Which is another critique, I think, that that juxtaposition provides.

TM: *What about your experiences with R. [your son] as a parent.*

Well again. It's been on the up. Now, he's thriving. But the only reason he's thriving is because he fits in, truly. And because there is a small amount of accommodation made, like, "oh, you can have extra time to finish a writing assignment because writing is a challenge for you", or...there's a certain amount of quirkiness that's allowed for in the gifted class. So, he could be a certain amount of quirky and do handstands between the tables because we know he has sensory issues. But we'll tolerate that for a minute and then back you go. Which, you know, I get as a teacher, it's disruptive. But the experiences as a parent and the "pull" is different. You're pulled in terms of wanting your child to fit in and wanting your child to belong so there's a horrible emotional journey that's attached to these things. And needing the world to hear and see your child for who they are, especially if there's more severe issues happening. We met violence in the schools. We encountered violence in the schools towards R., which is an incredibly traumatizing experiencing.

TM: *What kind of violence?*

By other students, there was teasing and bullying that went on. They quickly figured out

that R. would react if they did certain things, and they went out of their way doing those things, in fact they followed him around the playground until he reacted. That's usually how it started. Sometimes it came from feeling overwhelmed in the class and R. would have a difficult time. But often it would start there and he would react, and push or hit or kick back and then because he had a hard time articulating verbally what was going on, and because he would sit and grin through his anxiety rather than look remorseful, he got into trouble. So, lots of things came into play. He had "alternate" expressions, he *has* alternate expressions for things like anxiety, fear, remorse, those sorts of things. His remorseful face is very straight and flat; it looks like there is no remorse when there is deep remorse. And his face for anxiety is a smile, a grin that looks gleeful. And he's not gleeful. He's highly anxious and often runs away when he looks like that. And he would often get into trouble.

Administrators and teachers restrained him regularly, for a couple of years. Which then would escalate into horrible incidents. Because he would panic and he would fight back, fight to get away, and that would mean more restraint, more force being used.

TM: *Physical restraint, physically holding him?*

Physically holding him, yeah. One administrator held him in a prone restraint, which is face down—a six foot tall man on an eight year old boy. So, there was a lot of violence. There was also—I think, we were shut out. One of the strategies I think administrators use to get rid of kids is to shut a parent out. A refusal to return phone calls...when they did allow a meeting, there were a couple of administrators who would typify him in such horrible terms that—why would you want your child to be in that school with an administrator saying you have an evil son?

TM: *They said that, literally, "you have an evil son"?*

Yes. And I remember once, R. made a comment, that a girl in his class had smashed something he had built and he said "I'm going to kill you!" He's eight years old. Kids say that all the time. In fact, I hear teachers say that, for better or worse. And it was taken seriously as a

death threat. He was suspended for three days, made to sit in the office with nothing to do. And the principal wouldn't return my phone calls. Nothing. And I know they involved Safe Schools² as well, although there's no safe schools report on his student record, so that's good. But, when I did finally get to see the principal after three days—I had to call, and go in, and say what the heck is going on here with my kid, they wouldn't even tell me what they were doing to him. He was eight at the time. I was told, "well, you know, we just never know with a kid like this. Maybe he'll bring a weapon to school." And I couldn't..! Just the assumptions made! The criminalization of an eight year old child.

Now, having said that, I understand that if a child is hitting that's a problem in a school setting. It's a problem in a home setting, never mind in a community. That's a problem. But there are other ways to intervene and deal with it. There are other ways to physically intervene that are much more gentle. So, it was really obvious to me that these people had no training around it or the training they did have was questionable. Because I've been shown by people who have expertise, I've had the restraints done to me; and they don't feel scary, they actually make you feel held and secure, like you don't want to fight, you want to kind of melt into the person. Rather than being put face down, or being hugged with your arms down by your side, but hugged hard. R. used to say it hurt a lot when they touched him.

And doctors in the field who are world experts who know so much about it from a scientific point of view, say there is absolutely no call for restraint of a child that young. There's no excuse. It's inexcusable under any circumstance, other than if a kid is running into traffic and you grab them or they were going to jump out a window, you grab them. But in terms of having to control an eight year old body it's an inexcusable intervention.

But basically people panicked because they didn't know what to do. They just did not know what to do. They had no idea how to handle

² Students who contravene the Province of Ontario Safe Schools Act (see References) may have reports placed on their official school record.

him. So, that's a pretty scary thing and there are lots of kids who go through that and particularly at certain ages it seems there are vulnerabilities. There's a whole group of parents who went through it. Similar things. For some of them, the police were called on their eight year old. It never happened to us, but had we stayed in this particular program through the next year, for sure it would have been. Pretty scary stuff. Especially when your child is seven or eight.

TM: *And terrifying for the child. And what effects that may—*

Traumatizing. It took us two or three years to get over—we were traumatized as a family, not just R., but his brother saw the prone restraint. And it took R. three years to trust adults in the community again. He withdrew from all his activities. He was a precocious piano player at the time, and gymnast, and had to withdraw from everything. I took him home and home-schooled him half-time for a year because he couldn't, he was so anxious about the school. And eventually his curiosity and love of life won out. He got bored at home so that the motivation to be around other kids was stronger than his fears. So, things are going well now.

A group of us who met, who had gone through these things together, a group of parents—we considered a class-action law suit, we considered human rights challenge. I considered calling Children's Aid on the principal. In the end my emotional energy was so needed just to heal my child and our family and to figure out what we were going to do because he couldn't function. It shut us completely down. He could no longer function in the community. In the end the emotional energy it would have taken to fight the education system and the repercussions as a single parent who needed an income were too much to bear on top of the trauma that had already been done. So, I'm doing this work now, the academic work, in the hopes that someone will listen. Who knows?

...

There's so little understanding, cultural understanding. It's knowledge that we don't have access to, like we would have access to interpret other everyday things. We just have cultural knowledge that we all grow up with—and

when I say "we" I mean...we're a multicultural world—but in terms of how do you deal with what are just normal, typical things on an ongoing basis. We have no access to [the knowledge needed for questions such as], "How do we deal with a student who's going rigid on me and is refusing to do something" Well, the only knowledge I have access to, as a teacher, is to call it "non-compliance" and do everything I can to make them comply to what I think they should be doing.

TM: *You're talking about the kind of knowledge that is available within a culture, everyday life situation.*

Yes.

TM: *—a cultural knowledge of practice of how to resolve certain situations.*

Yes... A thing will appear to us. And there's a whole horizon behind and around and under what appears to us that shapes and informs what that thing is that appears to us. So we may see a child who is grinning or grimacing at us, and we'll have a particular interpretation based on that horizon that's already there, that's taken for granted. What I'm trying to get at is what that horizon is made up of, and what is needed to shift that horizon, because it's arbitrary, it's cultural, it's historical, it's a lot of things. Our interpretation of things needs to shift and transform and our arsenal, our tools. There are many ways to respond to a child who has gone rigid on you, or is refusing to do something. In the school system you tend to say "That's non-compliance. Progressive discipline: my next step is to give a consequence." And it's a pretty crucial point. Because progressive discipline says if a child is non-compliant or does A, B, or C, then I go to my next step on the progressive discipline ladder and that is give a consequence. I may intervene with a behaviour plan, or a contract, or this or that reinforcement program which sometimes can be helpful. But often these kids have Asperger's or Tourettes' or some kind of neurological or developmental issue. I think that if you're profoundly developmentally disabled you might be treated better in a way. But if you have, quote unquote, average intelligence, if you appear to be competent in any way then it's assumed that you can be competent in every way. Or you appear normative in one way, then it's assumed you should

be “normal” in another. So there’s been many comments along the way such as, “Well, he can control himself sometimes”, or “he understands”, or “he’s articulate”, or “he’s this”, or “he’s that,” so, “What are you talking about he can’t articulate socially?”—Because it’s a disability! Anyway, it’s hard for people to get, so it’s a crucial point.

TM: *You say it works for R. because he fits.*

He fits in now. Yeah.

TM: *Now? Before he did not, so what were the issues around that? He’s at a different school now...*

Yeah. He’s at a different school. I think for the last two, well, grade 5, grade 6, grade 7, he’s fitting in and doing well. Up until that point, no, he didn’t fit in at all. So, there were disciplinary consequences to that. At the same time, he had issues that you can’t live with in the classroom. But the way that’s dealt with in the schools, I think, is highly problematic. It’s met with disciplinary measures, rather than being met with some sort of—this is where I was going—there’s no knowledge base other than “oh this is bad behaviour and we need to discipline,” there’s absolutely no other way to come to it. [There’s no alternate approach such as] ...“I have to transform something that I’m doing”, or “maybe the student has something to teach me”. There are other techniques that we can work with in order to make a certain transition work for a child, but there’s just no repertoire of strategies or no knowledge base of other ways to be in a classroom.

As a teacher I’ve worked with kids who are highly resistant and become rigid and can’t be flexible and there’s a way in which to work with a child like that in a classroom.

For us [our family] and for many others it was met by mother blame, family blame, discipline measures, moral judgment, and it’s traumatizing as a family. I pulled R. out for his grade four year; we did only half time schooling because it was so overwhelmingly negative and traumatic. He would get blamed for being bullied because he reacted to the bullies. Until grade 5 and a very smart administrator, there was no belief that this child was someone who deserved good things.

TM: *So the issues, then, were the lack of knowledge on the part of the administrators and the teachers within the school?*

And the other parents. There was one point where the other parents were starting to talk to each other and they were trying to get him declared as a dangerous child or something and the administrator did put a stop to that and said that’s ridiculous.

But it could have gone that way, and the relation between what’s happening on the ground at school and the safe schools department at the ministry and the board, I think that there’s been a criminalization of neurological disability and there’s been a criminalization of racialized bodies in the school systems over the past ten or fifteen years in Ontario and other places. Police are being called for six year old kids who are having trouble in schools; kids are being restrained. It’s changing, now, because there have been a lot of human rights challenges and lawsuits, etcetera, so the system’s getting a little more savvy and obviously don’t want... it’s a very litigious environment and good for parents for challenging it. That’s not to say that kids don’t have big challenges, but there are ways in which to work with them. And ways in which not to work with them. I think, particularly, neurological disabilities like autism, Asperger’s, Tourette’s, ADHD... we’re not well versed. There have just been moral judgments made, [the] “bad kid”—kids have been put in the “bad kid class” up until recently. So there’s a lot of contention and contentious dialogue between parents and schools and parents and ministry. It’s good in the long run, I think.

TM: *In your situation, you yourself were educated about and sought information and researched the issues R. was facing and how to deal with that in a classroom. In other words, a lot was because of your advocacy that things changed for him. What about parents who do not have that knowledge or those resources?*

That’s a big problem, because, yeah, those are privileges and resources that not everyone has. So, for those parents and families that don’t have it, we see kids being knocked out of the school system, basically. I insisted that that not happen [with R.]. Because they tried. They were trying to separate, put him in an autism

class which I knew would be the end of him. Because he's around other kids who have the same problems rather than being around other kids who are stable and who can help draw him back in to being able to believe that there is a place for him in the school. I only have anecdotal stories from the mothers' networks that I'm part of [but] I've heard of many kids and know of many kids who simply leave the public school system. And I think yeah, you know, they're sitting in autism classes having horrible experiences and police are involved in their lives and... It's crises oriented. There are more and more advocates and I think more education happening for parents [informing them that] "you deserve an advocate to sit in a meeting with you." And boards and the ministry are very nervous because the more parents, the more savvy kind of privileged parents who come through and say, I know my child's rights...the boards being more careful in terms of informing parents of their rights. Which is good. But, again, it depends on the individuals in the school. I've sat with parents, as a teacher, who are very nervous and very intimidated. If you have a good group of people working in the school, you really do want the best for that child and parent. And I think that's the case a lot of the time. If you have people who don't understand and want a child out of the school, then the child will be pushed out of the school, which happened to us. I mean, we were pushed out of his grade 3 school, for sure. Administrators can do all—they can refuse to talk to you and can write up incidents in particular ways and shift [perspective], email it off to "safe schools" and have your child declared a safe schools issue.

TM: *And this happened? They sent off a report to "safe schools"?*

Oh yeah. Sure, yeah.

TM: *And yet when you switched schools. R. fit in and he was fine?*

Well, it wasn't quite so simple. I quickly realized after a year of contention and difficulty and a particular kind of advocacy, I realized that not only do you need to know your rights, not only do you need to bring an advocate, but you need to bring a particular kind of advocate who is going to make the educators feel really

good and not feel like you're trampling on their territories. There's a kind of disrespect for parents' knowledge and educators need to feel that they're the professionals, that it's their territory and they need to feel like they can be helpful. This I've observed over the last however many years, and to an extent, it's true. But there is a real disconnect in terms of [the] judgment that's made of parents in the school system. Terrible judgment. If there's a child having a problem, the story goes it's the parent who has the problem. Very rarely, do I experience or hear as a parent or a teacher, parents being supported. There's always judgment and, according to the discourse in schools, [the parents are] doing something wrong. [But] if a parent comes in and knows their stuff, and is demanding, and is fighting for rights in a particular way, it's really going to piss off the school. So not only do parents have to know what they're doing, they have to do it with finesse. You need to bring a really friendly advocate in, who can get the things accomplished that make everybody feel good like their professional expertise is not being questioned. As a parent, I've learned to do that too. Never mind just knowing what your rights are and about your child, you also have to finesse it.

TM: *You have to be a PR expert as well.*

You do. Absolutely. Which to me is really wrong. It's incredible how the authority and expertise of parents is completely decimated, unless it serves the view of the school. So, questions might be asked of parents, "you can be a really helpful parent if you give me this information, because I'm going to fit it into my interpretive frame of the problem and then I'm going to tell you what the problem is." It's a real tension for me as a parent and as an educator and an academic who looks at these issues and lives them. It's a real tension because, there is some truth to, you know, "I know what's going to work here in the school," but that doesn't mean that it's the best thing. "I know what the problem is, given the context of the school, and I know some things that will help your child fit in to the school," but again, that does nothing around inclusion and does nothing around the possibility for us to transform who we are in the classroom and who we are as a larger society? There's a real tension around that and as a parent I have to spin it in a particular way and make everybody

feel like it's their idea, that they're doing a fabulous job. And it's true, they are. The teachers work really hard. It's true that most teachers are very caring and helpful individuals. I just think we don't train our teachers. And psychology has become the dominant discourse within education and everything is viewed through a kind of pop psychology lens ... It breaks my heart, it breaks my heart the way that parents and mothers are spoken [about].

TM: *Within the school board, within teachers meetings?*

Yeah. And again, I think I have a particular understanding of that. Teachers are stressed, there are difficult kids in their classroom, they need a way to understand them and deal with it, the resources are not provided—there's a whole context to that teacher talk. I would love to do a research project on it. And then talk to teachers after and say, "What did you mean by that? What are you feeling and what's the problem?" And if you do have a hostile, angry parent, "Why do you think they're hostile and angry anyway?"

And why do we judge parents who are struggling? Because all of us struggle, we're all dependent and vulnerable and have difficulties, so why do we judge them so harshly? I've worked with parents that other teachers have had terrible times with and, for the most part, I find if you try to figure out where they're at—they're going to get that, they're going to feel that, that you want to support them and their child and it's okay that they're struggling; it's okay that they're having a hard time with their kid. Like I was struggling and having a hard time with my kid. And then to be judged on that? It's tragic I think.

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