



MAY 16, 2014

## Private: The Meaning of Brown for Children with Disabilities

### **A. ANTHONY ANTOSH, ANDREW IMPARATO, BROWN V. BOARD SYMPOSIUM**

*by A. Anthony Antosh, Ed.D. and Andrew Imparato.* Antosh is the Director of the Paul V. Sherlock Center on Disabilities and a Professor of Special Education at Rhode Island College. Imparato is the Executive Director of the Association of University Centers on Disabilities and formerly served as Senior Counsel and Disability Policy Director for the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, Chaired by Senator Tom Harkin of Iowa.

*\*May 17 is the 60th Anniversary of the landmark Supreme Court opinion, Brown v. Board of Education. This post is part of an ACSblog symposium noting the landmark decision and exploring the ongoing inequalities in our society.*

The 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling laid the foundation for the 1975 federal law (now called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) requiring access to a free appropriate public education for all children with disabilities. Before 1975, about one million American children with disabilities were receiving no education from the public school system. Since then, we have made progress in securing quality, integrated

educational opportunities for American children with disabilities, but we still have a long way to go – particularly for children with intellectual disabilities.

There is a history of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities learning, living and working in separate settings. As the Court noted in *Brown*, “Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.” That statement was a stimulus for a civil rights movement that sought to integrate people with disabilities into every aspect of society. In the 1960s it was rare to find any public school that integrated students with intellectual disabilities. Although progress has been made, we still find widespread segregation of these students. Fifty-six percent of students (ages 6-21) with intellectual disabilities are primarily educated in separate classes or separate schools (*United States Department of Education. 31st Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of IDEA, 2009*). The effects of segregation are significant. Twenty-seven percent of people with intellectual disabilities (aged 21-64) do not have a high school diploma (*American Community Survey, 2012*). The curriculum offered in segregated settings is often vastly different than the curriculum offered in typical classrooms (*Wehmeyer, 2003*). Students in segregated classrooms are less engaged and spend more time alone (*Hunt, Farron-Davis, Beckstead, Curtis, & Goetz, 1994*).

The United States Department of Justice recently found that in Rhode Island, “only approximately 5% of the youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities who transitioned from secondary schools between 2010 and 2012 transitioned into jobs in integrated settings. Under the current system, the majority of transition-age youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities transition to facility-based providers, including sheltered workshops and facility-based day programs, to receive adult services.” Further, “... the average hourly wage of sheltered workshop participants in Rhode Island is approximately \$2.21 per hour. By contrast, persons with disabilities who receive individualized supported employment services in integrated settings earn approximately \$8.92 per

hour.” (U.S. Department of Justice; January 6, 2014). Thus, segregated schooling limits the opportunities available to those being segregated. Segregated schooling results in segregated adult lives.

In contrast, the benefits of integration are great. Integration in typical classrooms has been found to result in increased age-appropriateness, functionality and generalization of curriculum (Hunt & Farron-Davis, 1992). Students with disabilities placed in typical classrooms experienced an increase in instruction in both functional and academic domains (Hunt, Farron-Davis, Beckstead, Curtis, & Goetz, 1994). They learn more. They have a greater breadth of personal interests and a better understanding of the world (Council for Exceptional Children, 2006). Time spent in a general education classroom is positively correlated with increased employment and independent living (National Longitudinal Transition Study; Wagner, Newman, Cameto, & Levine, 2006). Teaching students in natural environments increases their ability to assume more typical adult roles (Agran, Snow, Swaner; 1999).

If the purpose of public education is, as Thomas Jefferson suggested, to prepare well informed citizens; then *Brown v. Board of Education* provides the direction we must all follow. Segregated education limits learning and limits the opportunities for meaningful adult lives. Some segregate out of fear. Some segregate out of a misdirected need to protect. History has taught us that fully integrated, fully inclusive schools produce adult citizens who lead lives of opportunity and meaning.

## **CIVIL RIGHTS, EDUCATION**