

Film Reaction: Educating Peter

Educating Peter is a short documentary film that follows a young boy Peter throughout his third grade year. Because of the Disability Act of 1990 and the federal law that states all disabled students must be able to attend regular school, this was Peter's first time interacting with and learning with students who did not have disabilities. In the beginning Peter struggled with paying attention, participating, following the rules and nicely interacting with the students. Peter would often scream in class, tell people to shut up and hit and kick the other kids. However, as the year progressed the teacher and students both learned how to handle Peter and Peter learned how to participate like any other student. By the end of the year, he was able to have conversations with others, partake in PE and even read on his own. This documentary showed that if you are willing and open to change your mind about something, it might change you.

In watching the film, I was continuously surprised by the maturity of these third grade students. Every day they were faced with difficult situations posed by Peter. Although these students disliked Peter very much, they never gave up, hit him or yelled at him. They were patient and did their best to include him and teach him right from wrong. Towards the end of the film they interviewed a young girl who said "He changed because we changed. He changed because we changed our minds about him. He changed because we helped him." This really stood out to me and amazed me because it made me realize that if a third grader can be accepting and open to helping and allowing a disabled student to learn with her, there is no reason that adults cannot do the same. Disabled people are human beings, just like us. They are highly capable of doing incredible things; they just need a little more time and patience from the people surrounding them. If we as a society could remain open minded and try to change our initial thoughts of disabled people, we could not only change their lives, but they could change ours.

This documentary showed me the struggles that the students, teacher and disabled student faced. Going into this, I admit that I was biased towards anyone who resisted letting a disabled child in their class. However, after watching this film it is exceedingly more evident to me why people would protest. While watching the film one of the students said "Why do we have him in our class? He probably isn't going to learn anything." And "I was pretty scared of him because he was pushing people, kicking people and the class didn't know what to do." When the student said these things it was an eye opener because I never took into consideration how the other students felt or how they were being treated. Although this film hasn't changed my perspective that all students should be able to participate in regular schooling, the film helped me have a better understanding of why people were against it.

One connection I made to this film was PE class. When I was little and kids were picking teams for PE, kids would always choose the strongest and biggest kids for their team, leaving the smaller and weaker kids to be on the other team or chosen last. This is very similar to our modern society when interacting with disabled people. When people are choosing employees or partners to work with, they rarely choose the weak ones. They want the strongest and best person for the job so their business is more successful. In this case, many people view people with disabilities as the "weak" and seldom choose them because they believe they are not as capable as others. However, this does not give the

disabled an equal chance. And without this chance, they will never know how capable disabled people are.

Questions that still remain:

- 1) Do teachers have an option if they want to teach disabled students or not?
- 2) How have students' and teacher's attitudes and learning environment changed over the past 20 years for the disabled student?