

popular educational publications are market-driven and often tend to inflate, simplify, or even over-generalize original research findings to appeal to their wide readership (Cahill, 2005). In other words, educators need to seek evidence and ask hard questions about their relevance and reliability before adopting or rejecting proposed initiatives.

The sociology of education helps us to recognize and understand the roles and motivation of bandwagon promoters and the effect that such individuals have on the social fabric of schools (Clifton, Long, Cranston, & Mandzuk, 2013). Recognizing that innovations may be expected to hit an implementation dip and are often followed by a back-to-the-basics movement, essentialist reforms, or even retrenchment helps us to understand the dynamics of change in schools (Ravitch, 2003). We need to ask ourselves honestly whether we are attracted to new ideas, approaches, or solutions because of the appealing form in which they are being presented and the charismatic qualities of the proponents or because of their intrinsic merit.

In this chapter, as in the previous chapter, each case is followed by five questions that will help you to examine the case more deeply, to further develop your skills in asking historically, philosophically, and sociologically minded questions, and to apply the facts of the case to your own practice. We think that essential questions drawn from the foundations disciplines will help you to develop the skills you need in order to know when it is time to jump on or off a bandwagon and to be prepared to justify why you have done so (Kerr, Mandzuk, & Raptis, 2011).

## THE CASES

### *Alone in a Crowd*

It was 8:30 on a Tuesday morning and 11-year-old Darlene already looked stressed, covering her ears to drown out the noise as she inched along the hall with her back against the lockers to avoid touching any of the other students. When she finally arrived at her own locker, she stopped in front of it but waited for the other children to clear the area before trying to dig out her materials. Watching from a distance, Jim Fenton, her teacher, started to make his way toward Darlene to offer her a few words of support, but his progress was slowed by the students still rushing to class before the bell rang.

Unfortunately, by the time he reached Darlene, she had already kicked over Gavin's backpack, which he had placed too close to her locker for comfort, and a red liquid, probably fruit juice, was pouring out and down the side of his bag.

Flushed with anger, Gavin turned to Darlene and yelled, "Why did you do that? I didn't touch you! I was just getting my stuff! Now everything is wet and you've wrecked my lunch and my homework is dripping wet! You are such an idiot!"

Two of Gavin's friends had already arrived with a stack of paper towels and had begun to clean up the mess while he tried to rescue his homework. Although a few of his classmates were quietly snickering in the doorway, most of the students in the class ignored the incident and busied themselves with their usual morning routines as they waited for the announcements to begin.

Darlene, fighting back tears, angrily threw her coat and boots into her locker shouting, "I'm not an idiot. You're an idiot. You're all idiots!"

Jim and various support staff had been working with Darlene to help her cope with the challenges she experienced with sensory overload, particularly from sound. One of the strategies she was supposed to use was to navigate the crowded school halls only *after* things had quieted down. Although she had repeatedly been advised to wait at the front entrance for Paula, the class educational assistant, Darlene often sneaked by her.

Today, Darlene had been particularly anxious to get to class because she and her group were ready to begin painting their project. Having spent weeks researching different art techniques, Darlene had excitedly brought her favourite books to share with the others. While Jim and Paula had both given Darlene a number of opportunities to share her growing interest in watercolour painting, they were also trying to help her understand that she needed to consider other people's ideas too. Thinking about others had always presented a huge challenge for Darlene, and Jim and Paula were quite sure that Darlene was going to continue to struggle in this area; in fact, unbeknownst to her group members, Darlene had already assigned them all "painting jobs," and she had also chosen each of their colours.

After discussing the morning's locker incident with Darlene and the other students involved, Jim and Paula circulated around the room, discussing project goals with each group. Paula kept an eye on Darlene. Things seemed to start off well; group members appeared interested in Darlene's art books, and she compromised when it came to choosing colours. The members of Darlene's group even appeared to be enjoying each other's company as they worked diligently on the assigned task.

Unfortunately, the co-operative mood was broken when Tara spilled some water on the work table, which threatened to ruin the map they were working on. This, along with the classroom activity and the growing noise of group work proved to be overwhelming for Darlene. She reacted by throwing her prized art books across the room while yelling, "Now everything is ruined. I hate this group. You're stupid people and I hate every single one of you!" The room fell silent as



the books hit the wall and dropped to the floor. As her group members scrambled to wipe up the water, Darlene closed her eyes and began to mumble to herself as she had been trained to do, "It's okay. Everything's okay. It's okay." Paula coaxed her out of the classroom and into a more private place as Jim carefully picked up the books. He gently encouraged the rest of the students to return to their small-group discussions, now more subdued in the wake of Darlene's outburst.

After spending close to an hour outside in the frosty, mid-January air at lunchtime, the students returned to the classroom, ready to put the morning's events behind them. When Darlene, who had spent the lunch break alone in the library reading her art books, met them outside the classroom, she couldn't help noticing that her classmates were not smiling at her. When she tried to talk to some of them, they ignored her and walked away. Jim was aware of what was happening and could tell that Darlene was confused by the way the others were acting toward her. Jim had to begin the Language Arts lesson, and he put an extra effort into redirecting everyone's attention to the story they were reading together.

Later that afternoon, during the locker break, Darlene, once again, tried unsuccessfully to talk to a classmate.

Jim had a hunch that this wouldn't go well, but before he could intervene, she was screaming, "Why aren't you talking to me? I didn't spill the water. I didn't ruin things. Why isn't anybody talking to me? Everyone is so stupid!"

"If we're so stupid, Darlene, then why don't you just leave? Leave and never come back, okay?" one of the students shot back angrily.

Jim calmly escorted a sobbing Darlene back to the library, where he tried to explain how her words had upset the other students. She spent the rest of the afternoon alone with Paula, but she was too agitated and bewildered to accomplish very much.

At the end of the day Jim met with Scott Raeburn (one of the school's vice-principals), Paula, and other members of the support staff to debrief the day's events. Jim was exhausted, upset, and worried. He explained that although there were occasional encouraging moments of success in the classroom, Darlene's erratic behaviour was disturbing the other children and was having a negative effect on the overall learning environment.

"Darlene's outbursts seem to be escalating in frequency and intensity," Jim continued. "Not only that, but each episode erodes the potential for developing positive relationships with the other students a little more. To make matters worse, Darlene now has every reason to believe that her classmates don't like her and hope she doesn't come back!" Frustrated, he admitted, "I no longer know what to do. I just can't get there fast enough to intervene, and Darlene gets so easily overwhelmed. With her short fuse, she just can't control her emotions."

Paula nodded, adding, "I think some of the students are willing to try and include her but they *are* becoming more fearful of her outbursts."

"It's not just the kids who are treading on eggshells," Jim replied. "I'm tied up in knots worrying about the next episode, and I can't help thinking that I am short-changing the rest of the class."

The group concluded that Jim needed more educational-assistant time for his classroom. He appreciated the extra help, but feared that Darlene would continue to be overwhelmed and temperamental and that she would be increasingly isolated by her peers.

"You know," he reflected, "I wonder if our school's philosophy of inclusion is missing the boat by focusing only on differentiation of *instruction* and never on differentiation of *space*."

Just then, Jim was called to the office—Gavin's mother wanted to speak to him and a school administrator about how her son had started his day and she wasn't happy in the least!

## Questions

### The Case

What strategies did Jim use to support Darlene in the classroom? How effective were the strategies?

### History

What has happened to change the ways that schools treat students with special needs?

### Philosophy

Is the regular classroom always the best place for students with special needs? Why or why not?

### Sociology

Darlene is clearly marginalized in Jim's classroom. What are the signs of her marginal status, and how might she be better integrated with her peers?

### Implications for Practice

What would you do if you believed that your school's policy on inclusion was compromising your ability to teach *all* of the students in your class?

## Be the Change

Tammy Borden's Social Studies classroom at Winterburn High School was warm and inviting—the desks were arranged in a semicircle so all her students could see each other and she could walk around during class discussions. She