



SNAC Workshop Report Template

SNAC members who attend various Workshops may use this template to create a report to share information with other members of the group.

Report Written By:	Camelia Burlec
Title of Workshop:	Autism & Human Diversity 22 March, Montreal– speaker 1
Date of Workshop:	22 March, Montreal
Brief Description of Workshop:	
<p>Speaker 1: John Elder Robison, author of “Look me in the Eye: My life with Asperger’s The purpose of the first speech was to inspire people with HF Autism and their parents about overcoming enormous odds and having a successful life. The anti-social child who was not popular in school, spend valuable time in the lab and developed unique skills which put the base of his professional success. Being accepted for his special skills opened the way for being part of the team and learn the secrets of socializing.</p>	
Main Points that were Learned:	
1) Fixations/ special interest could become key to success/competitive advantage	
2) Have to find the environment where ASD kids could be successful	
3) Teachers and parents have to help kids to focus on what kid could do instead of what he cannot do	
4) Build and strength the ASD community - emulate the jewish or black community models in gaining the civil rights	
5) Increase awareness, train emergency responders to recognise ASD and act accordingly.	
Web Links for Additional Information:	
1)	
2)	
3)	
Titles of Printed Materials for More Information: (distribute one hard copy to the members at the next SNAC meeting, who may request that copies be made)	
1)	
2)	
3)	
Additional Comments:	
Very inspiring for high functioning ASD persons	



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Report Written By:	Camelia Burlec
Title of Workshop:	Autism & Human Diversity 22 March, Montreal– Panelists
Date of Workshop:	22 March, Montreal
Brief Description of Workshop:	
<p>Speaker 2: Antoine Ouellette talks about autism as part of the “Human Patrimony”</p> <p>Speaker 3: Katarine Cukier talks about institutionalized exclusion in Quebec</p>	
Main Points that were Learned:	
1) AO: Request to involve ASD people in consultation regarding the ASD people	
2) KC: “For those of us who believe that part- or full-time inclusion can bring rich learning and growing to the autistic child, it is clear there are powerful obstacles in our way”. See the attached open letter. 35% of Montreal’s high school kids are going to subsidised private schools, where ASD kids are not accepted. Future leaders are never exposed to human diversity. These schools where we do not have access are subsidised up to 70% by all tax payers. Education reform to stop subsidizing private schools is a moral necessity – especially in these times of austerity.	
Web Links for Additional Information:	
1) http://montrealgazette.com/news/quebec/opinion-the-gated-communities-of-education-in-quebec	
Titles of Printed Materials for More Information: (distribute one hard copy to the members at the next SNAC meeting, who may request that copies be made)	
1)	
Additional Comments:	
<p>Good to be considered for the coming budget discussions. “The Quebec education system never needed a curriculum reform. And it still doesn’t. It needs a moral transformation.”</p>	

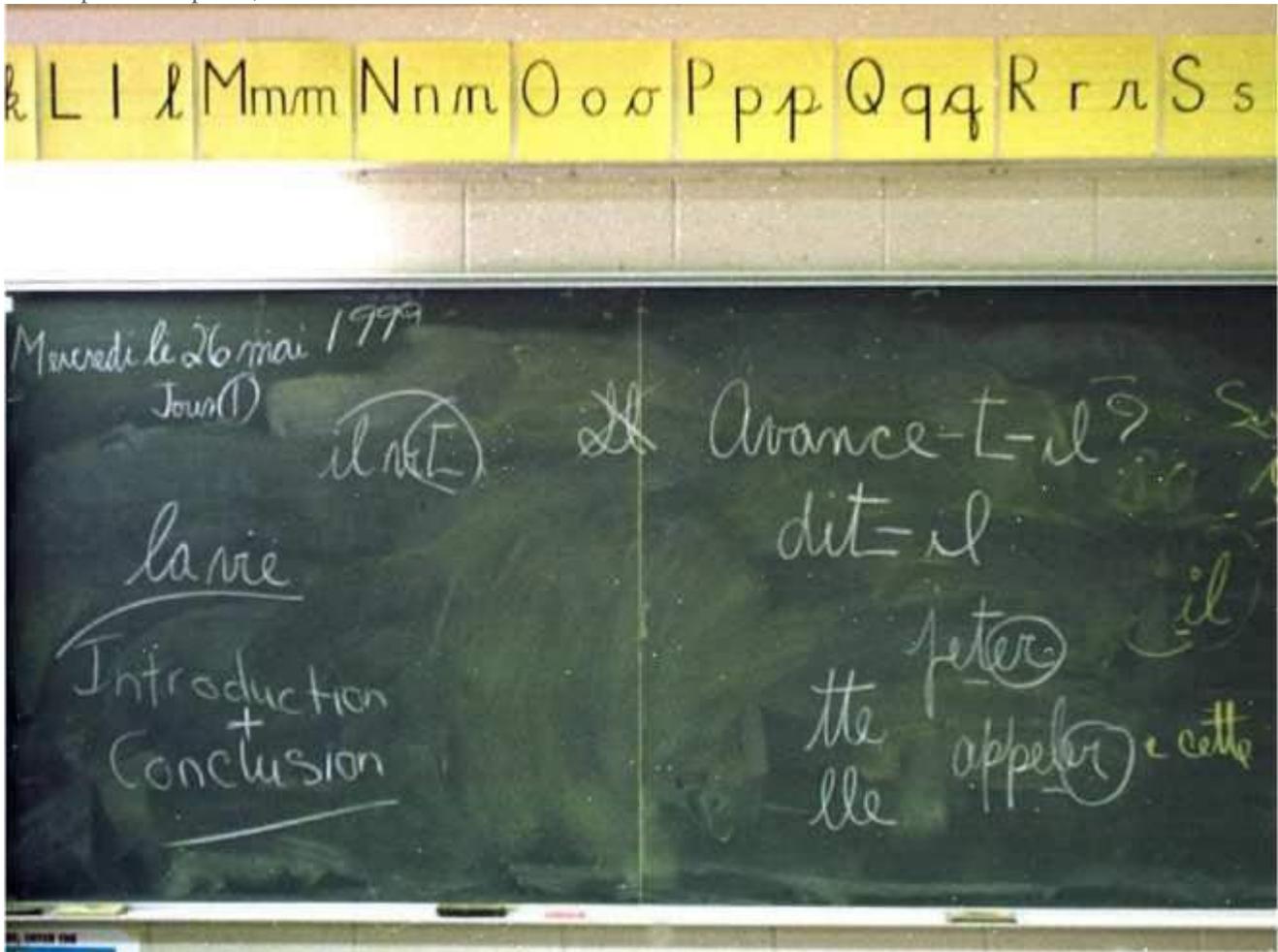
Opinion: The 'gated communities' of education in Quebec



KATHARINE CUKIER, SPECIAL TO MONTREAL GAZETTE [More from Katharine Cukier, Special to Montreal Gazette](#)

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A school blackboard.

SHAREADJUSTCOMMENTPRINT

A few years ago, when she was living in an affluent gated community in Phoenix, my sister had a dinner party. In great distress, she described to her guests, many of whom were doctors, how her housekeeper's 20-year-old daughter nearly died. The woman's baby had been dead inside her for weeks before anyone knew. She couldn't afford to go to a doctor for pre-natal care and, like many poor Americans, she was counting on giving birth in an emergency ward. When my sister insisted that the United States needed public health care, one of the doctors looked at her and said, "But sweetheart, that would mean they would raise my taxes."

My sister was stunned. The United States really is different from Canada, and my sister realized that there is something admirable about societies that strive to care for all their citizens, especially the most vulnerable.

But there's an analogy here to what has happened to education in Quebec. Quality education for all is not considered part of the common good, part of the collective responsibility to citizens in a fair society. Indeed, there is an increasing cultural and political tolerance for inequality in education.

There are all kinds of historical reasons that Quebec's education system has drifted away from being one that focuses on the common good. And that history has led to an institutionalization of exclusion as the model that is not just tolerated, but defended aggressively by much of the middle class, particularly at the high-school level.

In Quebec, the middle-class is no longer a stakeholder in public education. Its children are flocking to generously (some of us would say obscenely) subsidized private schools (35 per cent of high school students in Montreal, 25 per cent in Quebec City and Montérégie, versus 7 per cent in Toronto, 5 per cent across Canada). Or if the middle-class deigns to consider the public system at all, it is to gain access to exclusive academic programs whose entrance exams help keep out the barbarians (special needs and low income).

To quote a piece in *La Presse* a few weeks ago by Marc St-Pierre, a brilliant, humanist, educational theorist:

"At the rate things are going, what we risk bequeathing to future generations is a society where the social determination of school success creates fractures, first educational and then social. Blinded by obsessive fear of sinking to the lowest

common denominator, we find ourselves pulling the most privileged upward, and pushing the less favoured downward.”

That is not how a democratic society that thinks well of itself should be acting. Remember the Phoenix physician who doesn't want to pay higher taxes? Well in Quebec, we don't want to “pay” for diversity in the classroom because it might bring the standard down for Brittany or Marc-Olivier-Raphaël.

For those of us who believe that part- or full-time inclusion can bring rich learning and growing to the autistic child, it is clear there are powerful obstacles in our way. The “neurotypical” models we want for our kids are virtually inaccessible behind the doors, either physical or psychological, of this exclusive mentality. Huge segments of our society, children of the poor or disabled, immigrants lacking language skills or cultural capital, as well as our special-needs kids, are seen as expensive problems, dragging the middle class, “normal” kids down. The gated communities of people's minds are more insurmountable than the bricks and armed security guards of my sister's Phoenix neighbourhood.

Because exclusion is the norm in middle-class Quebec, the very people who will be the leaders of the future are underexposed to difference. These middle-class children have a “défiance sociale” because they have not been given the opportunity to meet and learn with people who are different from them.

I am a mother and a teacher, so I am programmed to be optimistic, and I see individual victories of my son or other students with Autism Spectrum Disorder as triumphs for them and as part of the incremental incursions against the “gated community” of Quebec education. But we need more than just incremental change.

Subsidies to private schools need to be eliminated. Those schools are financed up to 70 per cent by the taxpayer (through subsidies, tax deductions, private foundation tax writeoffs). That will be the single most effective way of getting the Quebec middle class to come to its true home, the public school. It will be a boon to the public schools in terms of a motivated peer group, confident, demanding parents and a class of stakeholders that the political establishment actually listens to. For those who lament the poor quality of the French language among immigrant youth: Adding a bit of pure laine to the linguistic fabric of Montreal public schools will do wonders.

Special needs kids should not have to fight so hard to be included in the regular classroom. It's time for a made-in-Quebec court challenge to bring this to Quebec's

attention, to follow up on the 2012 Supreme Court of Canada landmark ruling in the Jeffrey Moore case. The Supreme Court made a unanimous and powerful statement that: “adequate special education, therefore, is not a dispensable luxury. For those with severe learning disabilities, it is the ramp that provides access to the statutory commitment to education made to all children.”

As both parents and teachers know, for most special needs children, full- or part-time inclusion in a regular classroom is indispensable to their development and flourishing as full members of society.

Schools are the matrix of a society; diversity and acceptance begin in the classroom and in the playground.

But even where there is diversity, acceptance remains a work in progress.

Émile is the name I will use for a child in my son’s Giant Steps classroom. He came to my son’s birthday party last year (Benjamin was 12) and his mom told me he was so excited that he put a package of birthday candles in his backpack two weeks before. He had never been invited to a birthday party before.

Émile has been in “inclusion” for four years in a suburban primary school. He has been in class with “neurotypical” children two or three days a week for the last four years accompanied (at his parents’ expense) by a shadow. He had been learning and playing alongside them, and no one — no child, no parent — ever thought to invite him to a birthday party.

There is no doubt Émile has made enormous progress because of his inclusion in this classroom: His communication, his social and academic skills and, most important, his self-esteem have been given an enormous boost. But the promise of diversity demands much more. It demands people who have the empathy, the courage, the moral conscience and social awareness to invite the Émiles in our world into their homes and lives, by inviting them, including them, welcoming them into their schools, and to their birthday parties.

The Quebec education system never needed a curriculum reform. And it still doesn’t. It needs a moral transformation.

Katharine Cukier is a Montreal teacher.