

Case

It has been two months since Sue was placed in your grade 6 classroom. Sue is 11 years old, but it is estimated she is cognitively functioning at 1 to 2 years of age. Sue has no verbal language; she makes her wants and needs known by gestures and crying. Sue is also wheelchair bound and requires assistance with all daily activities of life. When Sue and her mom arrived at your classroom you were nervous as to whether you would be able to meaningfully include her in classroom activities.

During the first days of class Sue seemed upset and cried most of the day. By the second week of class Sue seemed to settle in a bit. However, her periodic outbursts were upsetting for both you and the class. Sue's parents have been wondering if their daughter would be better served in a special class in a private institution; in fact, they have asked your advice on the matter.

You are feeling pressure from the teacher consultant and your principal to keep Sue in your class. Your principal believes your classroom is a better fit for Sue than the other grade 6 class available. The teacher consultant wants to uphold the Ministry policy of inclusion; she encouraged you by demonstrating a few simple tools to help Sue communicate. After determining that different tools for communication are being used at home and school, the teaching assistant has collaborated with you to create a simple picture board for home and school use. Also, the occupational and physical therapists who work with the family and SETBC have offered in-school professional development.

The conflicting perspectives and interests of the parents, the teacher consultant, your principal, Sue, and the other students are overwhelming. While you believe in inclusion for a variety of reasons, you're not sure you are providing the best program for Sue.

Today, you also reflected on your relationship with George, the oldest but smallest boy in your class. George arrived in mid-September and although he seemed desperate to do well in school his aggression and defiance immediately upset the social cohesiveness of the rest of the class. He struggles with reading and his written work is at the emergent level. He goes to LAC for support every day. You are wondering how to support George's learning. You have hit a brick wall with your attempts to get him designated and wonder if the current arrangements are fair to George and the rest of the class.

You are unsure about what is the "right thing to do" to support both Sue and George. You've faced many ethical dilemmas in your teaching practice and wonder how they might help you to make a good decision here. Time to revisit your teaching philosophy, your fundamental moral commitments and your professional responsibilities!