

Asset Development: Moving Beyond a Deficit Model In Special Education



What would it mean if gifts and assets were fully developed?

What if talents were valued and acknowledged?

What if.....

The Animal School: A Fable

by George Reavis

Once upon a time the animals decided they must do something heroic to meet the problems of a “new world” so they organized a school. They had adopted an activity curriculum consisting of running, climbing, swimming and flying. To make it easier to administer the curriculum, all the animals took all the subjects.

The duck was excellent in swimming. In fact, better than his instructor. But he made only passing grades in flying and was very poor in running. Since he was slow in running, he had to stay after school and also drop swimming in order to practice running. This was kept up until his webbed feet were badly worn and he

was only average in swimming. But average was acceptable in school so nobody worried about that, except the duck.

The rabbit started at the top of the class in running but had a nervous breakdown because of so much makeup work in swimming.

The squirrel was excellent in climbing until he developed frustration in the flying class where his teacher made him start from the ground up instead of the treetop down. He also developed a “charlie horse” from overexertion and then got a C in climbing and D in running.

The eagle was a problem child and was disciplined severely. In the climbing class, he beat all the others to the top of the tree but insisted on using his own way to get there.

At the end of the year, an abnormal eel that could swim exceedingly well and also run, climb and fly a little had the highest average and was valedictorian.

The prairie dogs stayed out of school and fought the tax levy because the administration would not add digging and burrowing to the curriculum. They apprenticed their children to a badger and later joined the groundhogs and gophers to start a successful private school.

Note: This story was written when George Reavis was the Assistant Superintendent of the Cincinnati Public Schools back in the 1940s! This content is in the public domain and free to copy, duplicate, and distribute. If you would prefer a full-color, illustrated book, one is currently available from Crystal Springs Books at 1-800-321-0401 or 603-924-9621 (fax 603-924-6688).

GROUP TASK

Work in small groups

Use the following questions to guide your discussion

- How would you describe the Animal School? What in your opinion, are the values and beliefs that guide the Animal School model?
- How do you see conditions at the A.S. reflected in contemporary education?
- In what way might conditions at the A.S. contribute to student behaviours?
- How might the A.S. program be modified to better serve the needs of students?

Possible Debriefing Questions

- What are the predominant goals of the Animal School? Who is responsible for determining these goals do you think? What values do they reflect?
- What is the role and responsibility of the student in the A.S. What is the role of the teacher?
- What challenges does the Animal School present?
- What are the broader social implications of the Animal School? How do they differ from those of inclusion?
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- In what ways might the A.S. reflect issues of diversity and inclusion in contemporary classrooms?
- How might a focus on student assets and strengths change outcomes at the Animal School? What implications would this have on the student, the school culture and community health?
- What do the lessons of the Animal School have to teach us about of Special Education and student difference
- What recommendations might you bring forward? Which might you advocate for?