

Lesson Plan

Rachel is: A Dialogue on Disability in Our Culture

THE FILM:

At 21 years old Rachel Glynn is graduating from high school. She is excited by the prospect of living more independently. As Rachel and her family prepare for her future, they have some of the same concerns many families have as children prepare to leave the home: Where will she live? Where will she work? Will she successfully transition to a life away from her family? But with Rachel there are additional concerns.

Rachel is a person with a disability. Her life thus far has been filled with school and after-school activities, and she and her family have received many supports over the years. While she is now an adult, Rachel continues to require supports in her home and work environments. Unfortunately, these supports come at a cost, and government funding is minimal and difficult to access. *Rachel is* documents Rachel Glynn's transition from a childhood dependent on the structures of school and home, to an adult life where other supports must be discovered if she is to be successful and happy.

OBJECTIVES:

Viewers will reflect on:

- The rights of people with disabilities
- How service providers can best meet the needs of people with disabilities
- Service providers' interactions with people with disabilities and their families

ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED: 2-3 hours

BACKGROUND:

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was enacted in 1975. Before then, many students with disabilities were turned away from public schools. Parents were forced to keep children home or even institutionalize them. Now, with Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) signed into law, all students have a right to access general education curriculum within the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE).

Many people with disabilities exercise their right to attend public school up until the age of 22. The year they turn 21 must be the last year they attend public school. Many students with disabilities attend regular public high schools; many of them achieve diplomas and are never recognized as individuals with disabilities by their peers. Other individuals are perceptibly different, some of them attend regular public schools while others attend more specialized programs, designed to better fit their needs and learning styles. Rachel Glynn is one such student.

VIEWING AND RESPONDING TO THE FILM:

Family, Service Providers, and Communication

During a meeting to discuss Life Sharing, Rachel is compared to a man's young child. Some cognitive testing provides developmental ages for individuals with disabilities. Are comparisons between adults with disabilities and small children appropriate? How do you imagine families and individuals feel about such comparisons?

"I don't want my life to be defined by the circumstances of Rachel's life. It's like, I've got a lot of life in me and I want to live still." To what extent do you believe the parents and family of a person with a disability should remain responsible for the daily supports and supervision that person may require?

The new supports coordinator is the first person Jane feels she has been able to communicate with. What do you suppose are the characteristics that Jane is responding to?

Good communication between families and service providers is essential to a successful transition. How do you work with a family if you disagree with some of the choices they are making? How do you overcome communication challenges such as cultural differences and professional disagreements?

Transition Issues and *Rachel is*

The film depicts a successful transition for Rachel into her group home. What kind of supports do you imagine Rachel will need in this environment?

Rachel and her family clearly felt Life Sharing was not the best environment for her. How would you determine whether or not Life Sharing is appropriate for an individual? What characteristics do you look for to make an appropriate match?

Rachel and her mother meet with Karen to determine whether her home will be an appropriate setting for Rachel. Karen seems enthusiastic, but discontinues communication before the next meeting and is not heard from again. What supports should be utilized in working with individuals and families opening their homes to Life Sharing?

Rachel clearly did not enjoy her job hanging clothing. As you are working with an individual during transition and beyond, how can you be sure employment or housing are a good match? How can you ensure that someone like Rachel who may not be able to articulate or immediately recognize her preferences will be appropriately matched in work and home settings?

There is a marked difference between how Rachel presents on paper (regarding abilities, necessary supports, etc.) versus how Rachel presents in person. How does a service provider go beyond the paperwork to provide the most appropriate matches possible in living and working environments?

How would you begin to make plans for an individual transitioning into a Life Sharing environment?

How does the role of the service provider change once an individual has transitioned from living in the family home? What types of continued services might an individual need?

What are advantages and disadvantages of a group home versus a Life Sharing environment?

FURTHER ACTIVITIES/ENRICHMENT

- View and discuss *Willowbrook*
- Readings from books by Rachel's mother, Jane Bernstein: [Loving Rachel: A Family's Journey from Grief](#) and [Rachel in the World: A Memoir](#)

OTHER RESOURCES

The ARC - The Arc is the world's largest community based organization of and for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities
www.thearc.org

Rachel is website – www.rachelis.com

Jane Bernstein's [Loving Rachel: A Family's Journey from Grief](#) and [Rachel in the World: A Memoir](#)

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Developmental Disability – a mental or physical impairment beginning before the age of 22 that alters or inhibits a person from doing at least three of the following: take care of themselves, speak and be understood clearly, learn, walk, make decisions, earn and manage an income, or live on their own.

Mental Retardation - is a disability that occurs before age 18. It is characterized by significant limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior as expressed in conceptual, social and practical adaptive skills. It is diagnosed through the use of standardized tests of intelligence and adaptive behavior.

Person first language – the correct way to speak about a person with a disability, putting the person before the disability, e.g. a woman with developmental disabilities rather than a developmentally disabled woman.

Person Centered Planning – service planning which assists a person to achieve his/her goals by emphasizing the individual's gifts, talents, skills and challenges. Person centered planning recognizes that individual needs and wants may change and the services and supports needed will also change. Services are viewed as vehicles to enhance each person's well-being, independence, productivity and capacity for appropriate social interaction.

Transition – a process designed to facilitate an individual with a disability in his/her movement from school to post-school activities including integrated employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. Depending on individual state's laws, transition planning begins between ages 14 and 16 and may continue through age 21.

Life Sharing – sometimes called family living, is a program that arranges for an individual with a developmental disability to share a home with a family or individual he/she is not related to.

Service Provider - An agency or individual employed to provide a service to individuals with disabilities. Services may include at home support, job coaching, residential placement, etc.

Underserved people – people who receive some services, but not all services they need.

Unserved people – people who do not receive services.

Self Determination – a person's right to make decisions determining the course of his/her own life.