

Stereotypes Limit a Child's Potential by Trevor Laugen

We are all created equal under the first article of the UN Declaration of Human Rights, but in reality we can't all be the same. Some differences make it hard for everyone to have the same rights, such as place of birth, skin color, culture, religion, language, parents and many others. Some differences make people more likely to be unfairly labeled. Stereotypes about immigrants, accents, cultures, and religion, all can limit the human right to an education and an equal chance at participation in the community, as stated in articles 26 and 27 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights.

Consider the experience of two fictional boys who live in Colorado. One boy, named James is from an upper class family. He doesn't have to struggle against stereotypes, but he does have a reading disability that makes learning hard for him. He is white, and his father works while his mother stays home to take care of him. He went to a school where teachers discovered he had dyslexia. He has a nice house, and his parents are very well-educated. When James starts kindergarten, his parents hire a tutor to help James keep up. Later on in school, when math gets hard and he gets discouraged, his parents also hire a tutor for him. Because James' parents are well-educated and successful, everyone, including James thinks he will be too.

For a boy named Fernando however, life is different. His parents immigrated from Guatemala. They both had unsuccessful school experiences, and dropped out after the 8th grade. They came to America as teenagers and an uncle helped them get Green Cards. Fernando is an American citizen like James, and he also has dyslexia, although no one has figured this out yet. His parents couldn't afford preschool, so his older sister took care of him while his parents worked. In their home, they have a Bible and some comic books Fernando got as a birthday present, but otherwise their family has no books. Like his parents, Fernando

doesn't enjoy school. He is always behind in his classes because he doesn't like to read.

Fernando and James are similar in many ways. They are both the same age, they both happen to be skilled soccer players, and both enjoy computers. They also both have trouble with reading. But in terms of education and opportunities in the community, James and Fernando are very different. James joined the traveling soccer team that had good coaches and the best players. Fernando, on the other hand, could not join the travel soccer team in his community, because he had to work after school to help his family pay for their rent. James also has a computer at his house, and frequently goes to computer camps and takes computer classes at his school. Fernando's family has a very old computer that frequently crashes and doesn't have a good internet connection. So he tries to go to the library and use the computers there, although it is far from his home.

Stereotypes affect Fernando in ways that James doesn't have to deal with. For example, Fernando's dyslexia is not identified because his teachers have assumed that his reading problems were because English was his second language and his family is immigrant. Fernando's parents also have stereotyped ideas about teachers left over from their school days in Guatemala. They assume teachers don't care about the welfare of their students, and that they are very strict and traditional. They figure that when a teacher calls, it's always bad news and it means trouble for the family. James' parents in contrast understand how school works in America. They assume James will be successful in school as they were, and they spend lots of time and money finding resources to help him. James' parents see teachers as allies and assume they will always want to help James learn.

The UN Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26 states that all people have the right to a full educational experience. I don't believe a boy like Fernando received this type of educational experience. Because of prejudice, people at Fernando's school assumed he was lazy and not very smart rather than dyslexic. If he had had access to treatments for dyslexia today, he would have had a much fuller educational experience. Instead, Fernando was bored in school, didn't

learn much, didn't get good grades and got in trouble frequently. When he reached the end of high school, the school counselors said that college was not a good idea for him. James, however, ended up in college with a soccer scholarship.

These two boys, who are similar in many ways, ended up very different because of the prejudice that one faced. Assuming that kids from immigrant families won't like school, are lazy, and always struggle with reading can all be stereotypes that can affect the right to an education. Some immigrant parent ideas about teachers can get in the way of using all the school has to offer. Stereotypes can really limit a student's potential in school and the community.