

On “natural proportions”

Summarized from

*The "Natural Proportion" Guidepost:
How Many is Too Many or Too Few?*

By Dr. Lou Brown

**The Minnesota Governor's Council
on Developmental Disabilities (1987)**

Dr. Lou Brown: In the past, segregated schools were common, and we began questioning their impact on individuals with disabilities as they transitioned into adulthood. We realized that segregated schools often led to limited opportunities, such as placement in day activity centers, because they did not prepare individuals to participate in meaningful activities in the real world.

We started asking, *"What makes segregated schools problematic? Why don't they lead to the outcomes we want?"* One key issue was the concentration of individuals with disabilities in one place. This led us to ask, *"How many is too many?"* After much discussion, we considered the natural proportion of individuals with severe disabilities in society. We defined this as the lowest 1% of functioning individuals, a concept that applies across all living beings.

We concluded that if only 1% of individuals with severe disabilities exist in nature, then no more than 1% should be concentrated in any one environment. This became a critical guidepost for promoting inclusion and integration.

Applying the "natural proportion" principle means individuals with disabilities should not be congregated in segregated settings. For example:

- **Schools:** Instead of segregated schools, students with disabilities should attend regular schools where they are integrated with their peers.
- **Living Environments:** Group homes and institutions should be replaced with domestic environments where no more than two individuals with disabilities live together.

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- **Workplaces:** Workplaces should avoid segregated workshops or enclaves. Instead, individuals with disabilities should work alongside others in integrated settings. For example, in a workplace with 100 employees, one person with a severe disability might be employed, and in a hospital with 1,000 employees, ten individuals with disabilities could work in dispersed roles.

The goal is to ensure individuals with disabilities are included and dispersed across environments, rather than clustered or segregated. This principle of "natural proportion" remains a foundational guidepost for creating inclusive communities.