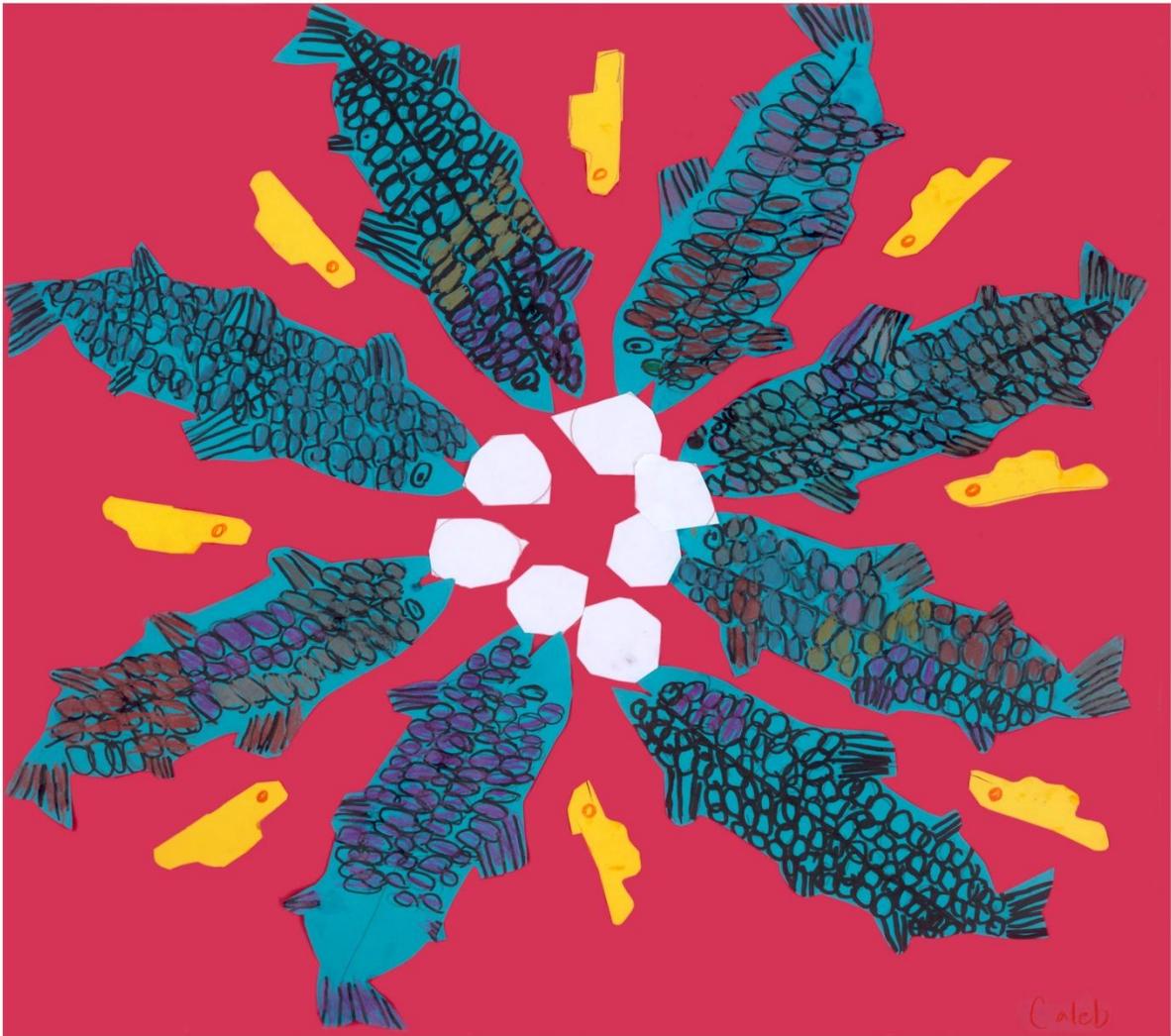


Duets and Dialogue: Voices on Inclusive Practices in Our Schools

Edited by Marie Cianca and Cathy Freytag



Caleb, Grade 4
World of Inquiry School
Rochester, NY

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www.inclusion-ny.org/duet-dialogue

Higher Education Support Center for Quality Inclusive Schooling
Midwest Region

New York Higher Education Support Center for SystemsChange

The Midwest Region Task Force on Quality Inclusive Schooling (TFQIS) is supported through a partnership between the New York State School Improvement Grant Activities and the New York State Higher Education Support Center for Systems Change, located at Syracuse University. This booklet is made possible through the ongoing support of Matt Giugno, Gerry Mager, Wilma Jozwiak, Steve Wirt, Peter Kozik, and Iris Maxon.

The HESC is committed to three goals:

- To plan and implement quality teacher preparation programs, or to enhance the quality of those already implemented in order to prepare high quality teachers in accordance with federal and state requirements that will serve the diverse student population of the State;
- To engage in and support the professional development of selected high needs schools to improve student outcomes as identified by the New York State Performance Plan; and
- To build the capacity of multiple stakeholder groups to examine data, identify, create and/or develop strategies for advancing indicators in response to the New York State Performance Plan.

New York Higher Education Support Center (HESC) for SystemsChange is an initiative of the Office of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities ([VESID](#)) within the [New York State Education Department](#). The HESC was established at Syracuse University in 2001 as an outgrowth of the NY Partnership for Statewide SystemsChange. The HESC currently coordinates the Higher Education collaboration with the [S³TAIR Project](#).

Additional copies of this monograph can be downloaded from:

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Dedication

For all the children, young adults and families we serve.

Foreword

*Ann Monroe-Baillargeon, Ph.D. Alfred University
Higher Education Support Center for Quality Inclusive Schooling
Regional Liaison: Midwest Region*

This monograph, *Duets and Dialogue: Voices on Inclusive Practices in Our Schools*, has been a very exciting project for the Midwest Region of the HESC task force, and is a product which represents what we value and believe in as an organization. The Midwest regional task force includes individual faculty representative from Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) from Rochester, NY, south to the Pennsylvania border and partnership network representatives from The Advocacy Center, Teacher Center, school administrators, S³TAIR, and Regional School Support Center (RSSC) initiatives. We have been meeting regionally on a regular basis for the past 10 years.

Serving as regional liaison for the Midwest region, I have seen over and over again, the commitment this group of diverse professionals has to inclusion and collaboration, this project being our most recent product of those commitments. Our commitment to inclusion is represented in the open attendance and involvement at our regional meetings; all are invited and welcome to participate. Our commitment to inclusion is also seen in our IHEs' commitment to inclusive teacher education programs, and our partnerships' initiatives to develop, support and sustain inclusive practices.

Our commitment to collaboration is reflected in the ongoing partnerships between IHEs, schools, and network organizations across our region. It is the foundation of the research, teaching, and initiatives we participate in as professionals. It is also the basis for the distributed leadership model we have recently adopted which laid the foundation for this powerful project. In regional meetings over the past two years, we have explored the individual expertise each of us brings to our collaborative work, and specific initiatives we might propose and lead. It was out of this discussion that the monograph "Duets and Dialogue" was proposed by Marie Cianca at St. John Fisher College and Linda Ware at SUNY-Geneseo. Their initiative, along with the unending support of the peer review process by Cathy Freytag at Houghton College and the participation of many task force members, has resulted in this monograph.

The opportunity to create this monograph has enriched our professional lives, and we hope that your reading it will enrich yours. We welcome your feedback, and should you wish to attend our regional meetings, or participate in our initiatives, please know, you are always welcome. On the back cover of this monograph is a map showing the Higher Education Task Force regions in New York State and contact information for the Mid-West Region.

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Duets and Dialogue: Voices on Inclusive Practices in Our Schools

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Introduction

Duets and Dialogue: The Vision and Rationale behind the Project

Marie Cianca, Ed.D., St. John Fisher College

Cathy Freytag, Ed.D., Houghton College

Over the past several decades, the field of inclusive education has experienced a significant evolution. In the 1970s, after the passage of PL 94-142, “mainstreaming” was the buzz word of the day. Students were beginning to experience physical inclusion with their non-disabled peers in general education settings, but the realization of true academic and social inclusion has taken much longer to accomplish and, in some places, teachers, administrators, parents, students and stakeholders continue to struggle to attain the kind of inclusive social reform that *all* students deserve.

Meaningful inclusion of all students continues to be a topic of significant interest and relevance. In addition, many educators continue to exert great effort to find ways to effect positive, productive and lasting inclusive reform in their districts. Because of these factors, the members of the Midwest Region of the Task Force for Quality Inclusive Schooling (TFQIS) have enthusiastically embraced this *Duets and Dialogue* project.

The members of the of the Midwest Region of the Task Force have experienced tremendous interest as we have actively sought to collaborate with K-12 partners and community advocacy agencies to promote the advancement of effective inclusive practices across New York state. While many of the Task Force participants are affiliated with college or university teacher education programs, our interactions with our K-12 partners and various community stakeholders have allowed us, corporately, to share significant gains in the advancement of effective inclusive education for all students. Because we have enjoyed such rich, meaningful collaborative partnerships, we felt it would be advantageous to invite colleagues from each of these constituencies to submit collaboratively-authored articles describing their best inclusive practices for publication in this *Duets and Dialogue* monograph.

Each of the peer-reviewed readings included in this monograph was co-authored by a combination of teacher educators, school-based practitioners and parents. The articles themselves symbolize the “*duet*” – the perspectives of two or more inclusive educators representing different, but complementary, viewpoints with regard to the advancement of effective inclusive education. Each reading is preceded by an introduction and followed by a set of discussion questions posed by a member of the Task Force. These introductions and follow-up activities are designed to foster extended “*dialogue*” between the reader and his or her colleagues. We envision many possible uses for this monograph: a reference for school principals, content for professional literature circles, discussion

topics in teacher education courses, impetus for advancing inclusive practices in one’s own district....and the list goes on and on.

We trust that you will find this resource to be of significant benefit to you and your colleagues as you continue to work toward the realization of best inclusive practices in your own district. As you use this resource, please take a few moments to provide us with *your feedback by responding to the brief survey, which can be found at the web link below*. Together, we can effective positive inclusive change for *all* students – thank you for your shared commitment to the attainment of this all-important goal!

COPIES

Copies of this monograph can be downloaded from the following link:

www.inclusion-ny.org/duet-dialogue

FEEDBACK

We encourage readers to give us feedback on the monograph and its articles by accessing the following link and filling out a brief feedback form. Your ideas and input are very important as we move forward. Please enter your feedback at:

www.inclusion-ny.org/duet-dialogue/eval

CITATION

When citing this monograph, please use the following format:

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ARTICLE MARKER

Caleb's fish rendering (right) will mark the introduction page for each of the ten essays in this monograph.



Caleb, Grade 4
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Duets and Dialogue:

Voices on Inclusive Practices in Our Schools

Guiding Questions

The following questions/statements are provided as general inquiries that pertain to all of the readings. Specific questions about each reading are included in the “additional learning opportunities” section following the reference page for each essay. As you read each essay, you might wish to:

- *Highlight* new terms or concepts learned or reviewed in the selected reading.
- *Explain* why these terms or concepts may be important for educators to know and understand.
- *Describe* the essential points in the selected reading. Explain their relevance and importance to current educators and to those preparing to enter the profession.
- *Invite* others to read, discuss, and evaluate the essential ideas and issues presented in the selected reading and ask about the extent to which they agree or disagree with the authors’ opinions and viewpoints.
- *Consider* how the content learned and reviewed relates to prior knowledge, experience and assumptions. Have prior perspectives changed at all?



Reading 1: A Principal's Lessons Learned: Implications for School Leadership

Introduction by: Ann Monroe-Baillargeon, Ph.D. Alfred University

Mary Haggerty and Susan Schultz in "A Principal's Lessons Learned" provide for us professional insights from their interactions with parents of students with special needs. It is a powerful statement to lead off our monograph, Duets and Dialogue: Voices on Inclusive Practices in Our Schools, with a focus on the relationship between school administrators and parents. All too often, our focus on parents comes at the end of a long list of other priorities, curriculum, instructional practices, student needs, etc. It is exciting to see that a focus on parents and the importance of school leadership to listen with the purpose of understanding, developing trust, and engaging parents in the change process help to frame our understanding of inclusive practices right from the beginning, rather than waiting to the end. Thank you to Mary Haggerty, Susan Schultz and the parents who generously shared their insights in getting our Duets and Dialogue monograph off to a great start!

A Principal's Lessons Learned: Implications for School Leadership

Mary E. Haggerty and Susan M. Schultz

"Mrs. Haggerty, we have a problem!" These five words can generate concern, stress, and outright fear in even the stoutest heart of the most effective administrator. When shared by the parent of a student in special education, the level of concern, stress, and fear can multiply, sometimes exponentially. When I made the decision to become an administrator, the last thing I was worried about was my ability to work with parents of students with special needs. Yet, after three years as a school principal, I found myself wondering why it was that sometimes interactions with parents of students with special needs went smoothly, and why did they sometimes go terribly awry?

To complete a course requirement, I decided to engage in a study that I hoped would answer my question. Drawing upon many interactions with parents of students with disabilities, I also interviewed three sets of parents (one father and two mothers) of students with significant disabilities, (two boys and one girl) all of whom were in high school. The children of these parents were enrolled in an urban school district, and they responded to an email request sent out to a local parent support group. Parents were interviewed at their convenience and in the location of their choice (two in their home, one in an office setting). Each interview took approximately 45 minutes. I also worked with a focus group of three mothers of four elementary students with mild disabilities (two girls, two boys). These parents represented suburban school district experiences and were recruited from a list provided by the Director of Pupil Personnel of the school district. They were interviewed at a McDonald's (so their children could play while we talked) for about one hour.

The results of that study did lead me to three important lessons that did not necessarily answer my question, but did lead me to challenge some of my assumptions and change my practice.

The First Lesson: Understanding

Seek first to understand, then to be understood. (Stephen Covey)

There is an expectation among professionals that parents will seek to understand the special education process. We teach them acronyms like IEP, show them data we collected about their children, and cite regulations and education law, in order to help parents become effective collaborators. Fish (2008), investigating parent perceptions of the IEP process, indicates "through persistence and becoming knowledgeable on special education law, (the parents in his study) were able to properly assist their children in acquiring the services and IEP implementation necessary for them to succeed" (p.13). Fish concludes that educators should seek parental input and collaboration so we can effectively serve students with special needs. Just as parents can become more active participants when they are knowledgeable about the process, educators can become more effectual participants when they have an understanding of the parents and children they work with.

I had hoped, and even expected, that during the course of collecting and examining the results of the parent interviews, I would come across some pithy quote from a parent that would provide a framework, or summary of what was the essential learning from this undertaking. Although I did come across such a phrase, it did not come from any of the parents. It came from the woman who was transcribing the tapes of the interviews for me. As she returned the last of the tapes she said, “You know, they’re not answering your questions, they’re just telling you stories.”

As I reflected on her statement, I realized that, yes indeed, they had shared many stories about their children. In fact, they were eager to share; it was fascinating to listen to parents who were able to recite the timelines of their children’s educational experiences with such facility and speed that I could scarcely keep up in my field notes. Reflection on these “stories” led me to understand that you have to listen to the story, the story is often complex, but, you have to listen anyway, because it’s the only way parents will perceive you as truly “knowing their children.” This lesson was reinforced when parents of students in my school brought pictures of their children to CSE meetings, wanting those on the committees to “see” their children as something more than just “the next case.”

The dilemma is, how does one keep the professional distance required to provide a valid evaluation of the child’s educational needs without projecting an uncaring, unsympathetic affect? Asking for regular feedback is one way of demonstrating sincere interest while maintaining professional distance. Active listening, where the listener is actively seeking to understand the speaker’s intent and emotional state, appears to be a significant and symbolic activity that facilitates positive relationships with parents. Active listening does not require the listener to agree with the speaker, only to seek to understand him/her and to use that knowledge to present his/her perspective. Each of the parents interviewed referred to the need to have those “in charge” understand their children. Because their children were not in a position to tell their own stories, parents did so for them. Salend and Duhaney (2002) underscore the importance of “paying attention” to what families (parents and caregivers) have to say about their child’s experiences with special education programs/schools. In seeking feedback they suggest that the following will facilitate the process:

- Being attentive
- Establishing a comfortable and supportive atmosphere that fosters the comfort level and participation of family members
- Asking open-ended, meaningful and non-intrusive questions
- Seeking clarification, details, and examples to support statements.

Lesson Two: Developing Trust

I meant what I said and I said what I meant (Horton the Elephant, by Dr. Seuss)

Federal mandates like No Child Left Behind (NCLB) can require parent involvement in the educational process, however they cannot mandate the effectiveness of involvement.

Collaborative relationships between parents and educators are dependent on developing trust (Shelden, Angell, Stoner, & Roseland, 2010). Given the opportunity for, and nature of interactions, teachers and support personnel have a likelihood of establishing trusting relationships with parents. However, the principal's relationship may be more complex. The principal, in a position of power and control, must be willing to work with parents as equals.

Understanding role relationships and the innate interrelated dependencies between parties assists the principal to create an environment of trust. The principal, faculty and parents depend on each other. These dependencies create a sense of mutual vulnerability (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). Shelden, et al. (2010) report that within this vulnerability exists the "potential for betrayal or harm from another person," necessitating trusting others. Therefore, the principal must establish and maintain trusting relationships through his or her vision for the school, demonstrating trustfulness in interactions with others, and mediating conflict in honest ways (p.160). Parents of children with disabilities have increased interactions with school principals. As a result, school principals must also examine how the trust factor relates to the special education process, parents and their children.

For the parents I interviewed, trust meant doing what you said you would. The difficulty was making sure that what they thought the administrator said and what the administrator thought s/he said, were sometimes very different. Thus, misunderstandings, lack of clarification and inaccurate assumptions can lead to what are perceived as broken promises. Because we are the "professionals/experts," we assume that we have it "right." It is easy to say of a parent, "S/he only hears what s/he wants to hear." My question is: "Do we know what it is that parents want to hear?"

Knowing what one expects from the IEP and being able to articulate these expectations seems to facilitate trust and enables both parents and educators to develop an effective plan for the student's success. The parent of a student with Down Syndrome, who attended my school, approached me about the inclusion program for her child. Her child's teacher, a former special education teacher, was expressing doubts about the child's ability to "keep up" with the rest of the class. The parent felt that the teacher was rejecting her child, expanding her concern to the entire school, stating that we were not living up to our promise to include her child. The teacher believed that the parent was holding on to unreasonable expectations for her child's participation in the curriculum.

We set up a meeting with the child's teacher, aide, parents and me. During the conversation, the teacher clarified her concerns that the child would never be able to participate fully in the curriculum demanded at that grade level. The parent was able to clearly articulate that her goals were not that her child demonstrate mastery of the curriculum, but that he would be able to learn how to write his name, take turns, follow school routines, and learn how to ask and respond to simple questions like, "How are you?" and "Do you need help?" She went on to say that she knew that this was a year-by-year thing. If it worked this year it might not the next and that we would all have to look at whether or not it was still making a positive difference for her child. In turn, the teacher was able to establish reasonable and effective learning goals. At a follow up meeting at the end of the year, the parents were

thrilled that all of these goals were accomplished. This couple did not need to hear “your child is not keeping up.” They knew he would not. They needed to hear “we understand your concerns and we will do our best to address them.” The end result was a trusting relationship that lasted many years and became a model for including parents in the practical matters of their child’s inclusion program.

Olivos (2009) asserts due to inherent inequalities, it is not enough to present the concept of parity and expect parents to feel like a valued partner. Increasing fair levels of parent involvement requires structuring schools in ways that minimize inequality. Including parents of students with disabilities on the Shared Decision Making Team, PTA and SEPTA leadership, and creating informal arenas for conversations are just few ways to increase the likelihood that parents will feel that their input is valued.

Lesson Three: Changing Culture

Give me a lever long enough and I can move the world. (Archimedes)

Barth (2001) asserts, “Probably the most important, and most difficult job of the school-based reformer is to change the prevailing culture of a school”(p.7). However, without this commitment to re-culture, we run the risk of allowing what Fine and Weis (2003) refer to as a “reproduction” of the attitudes and practices currently in place. As one of the parents in my study put it, “When I went into this, I realized I couldn’t change my daughter. So I had to change everyone else. It’s daunting at times, but that’s been my challenge.”

Principal leadership is the most significant factor in influencing the overall climate of the school. Beyond words and actions, the culture of the school must reflect relational trust, established through the principal’s vision for the school, his or her faculty and students. Sometimes faculty may need to be “reshaped” by supporting teacher/ parent collaboration, increasing face-to-face social interactions, building into the school culture the ability to sustain positive parent engagement (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). Re-culturing is not an easy task, neither is establishing an inclusion program; but one may help the other. By developing processes and procedures that enable students with disabilities to participate with the general education population, everyone benefits: students, teachers and parents. Developing common language and understandings leads to less confusion and better decision making for parents, more effective planning and goal setting for teachers, a richer curriculum embedded with more instructional strategies, and a more responsive school environment for students.

In developing a culture that is inclusive, we create a micro-community that reflects the elements we would like to see in our own, larger communities. This idea was driven home by a story from one of the parents in my study, a mother of a high school student with disabilities. At a school dance, it became clear that, although her daughter was enjoying herself immensely, she was not “doing it the right way.” As a chaperone, her mother watched as a group of students approached her daughter and her partner. They were clearly trying to show her how typical teenagers dance. When it became apparent that she could not, but was glad to be a part of the group, they backed off. The parent described it as a “clashing of cultures” but once the others saw that “she wasn’t likely to conform, and that it didn’t impact them, they backed away

and it was fine and they were accepted.” The parent offered the following advice to administrators: “You need our children with special needs more than we need you, because your general education students need to know how to live with each other, how to interact without that uncomfortable feeling.”

Conclusion

It’s Always Somethin’! (Roseanne Rosanadana, SNL)

For most administrators, the issue is not that there are problems; problems are a part of the job. Problems can be solved, solutions may not be readily apparent, but given a reasonable amount of time and talent, solutions are discovered and implemented. Typically, when parents of students in special education say there is a problem, they are referring to a dilemma. A dilemma is challenging because dilemmas cannot be easily solved, time and talent may reveal unappealing choices, and administrators must often resort to managing dilemmas, trying to build consensus while making repeated attempts to resolve them, and learning from the results of those efforts.

Learning is a dynamic process, always changing those who pursue it. As I have been changed by the learning gained from this endeavor, I will affect change in the buildings I serve. As the teachers, parents and I continue to discuss special education issues, we will inevitably see the need to change certain practices, policies and procedures. We will manage the dilemmas. There will be “ripple effects” to be sure. As Elmore (1995) has pointed out, changes are often connected and it is typical for one change to lead to other changes in school structure as implementation occurs.

In his eloquently titled article, *I think, therefore I am resistant to change*, Duffy (2002) points out what we know-or think we know- is our biggest roadblock to learning. His strategies for change focus on “raising doubts” about what is believed to be true. His suggestions include: discussing dissatisfaction, saying it’s only an experiment, turn surprises into questions, recognizing that all dissents and warnings have some validity, believe that collaborators who disagree are both right, remember that all problems have multidirectional causes and effects, and understand that what you know is not optimal. Not unlike the well regarded and often used K-W-L chart, our interactions with special education students and their parents will lead us through cycles of ever evolving understandings and opportunities for application that ultimately will lead to more questions and searches for answers. Fortunately for those of us who work in schools, listening to parents’ stories and learning from them is part of what we do every day. We can learn a great deal from Aesop.

Information about the authors: Mrs. Mary E. Haggerty is Principal of William Kaegebein Elementary School in Grand Island, New York. Susan Schultz, Ed.D. is Assistant Professor and Director of Special Education Graduate Services in the School of Education at St. John Fisher College.

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A Principal's Lessons Learned: Implications for School Leadership

Extended Learning Opportunities

- 1) In the introduction to the article, it is suggested that prioritizing parent participation in the education process is not often at the top of schools' lists. Have you found this to be true from your perspective as pre-service teacher, teacher, or administrator? If so, why might this be true? Is there something we can/should do about this?
- 2) In this essay, the authors speak about keeping a professional distance. What do you think is meant by this and how do you make sense of this in your own practice?
- 3) In one interview with parents, the authors concluded that "trust meant doing what you said you would"; however, what was said was often interpreted differently. Are there recommendations for principals' and/or teachers for communicating with parents in ways that establish a mutual understanding of discussion points and anticipated follow up?

Additional resources for working with parents that you may wish to explore include:

- 1) NICHCY is very pleased to offer you a wealth of information on disabilities! NICHCY stands for the *National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities*.
<http://www.nichcy.org/Pages/Home.aspx>
- 2) Exceptional parent magazine: <http://www.eparent.com/>
- 3) Brookes publishing: <http://www.brookespublishing.com/>



Reading 2: "I'm So Excited About This!" A Shared Administrative Vision for Inclusive Practice

Introduction by: John J. O'Kane, Assistant Professor, Teacher Education, Roberts Wesleyan College

Those of us who have long sought to promote meaningful program innovations and structural changes to advance the more normalized teaching model, often referred to as "inclusion," fully understand the critical need for administrative support of the process. "I'm So Excited About This" clearly and succinctly describes the significant contributions of Hilton Central School District's leadership at both district and building levels in advancing an inclusive continuum of services as the approach to integrating special and general education. This strategy is based on three key and fundamental beliefs: Hilton's students belong in Hilton's schools; general education settings afford the best opportunity for success; and special education is a service, not a place. This narrative history powerfully articulates and affirms the importance of a shared vision, mutual collaboration, and a common core of beliefs that promote learning for all students.

“I’m So Excited About This!”

A Shared Administrative Vision for Inclusive Practice

Katrina Arndt and Laura Whitcomb

The title for this essay is a quote from the Village Elementary School principal in Hilton who was very pleased to be engaged in the work of changing a 15:1:1 self-contained special education program for grades five and six to an integrated-co-teaching program. This work is the focus of our essay, which explores the success that can evolve with shared administrative support for inclusive practices. In Hilton supporting inclusive practice at all grade levels is ongoing. Our focus on the fifth and sixth grade classrooms reflects our commitment to exploring the experiences of one group of teachers and administrators.

Hilton Central School District in Western New York is a mid-sized school district adjacent to the Rochester area. Hilton has three elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school; the high school serves around 1500 students, the middle school has about 700 students in grades 7-8, and the three elementary schools serve around 2200 students between them (About Hilton Schools, n.d.). Hilton has a long history of low turnover for teachers and administrators; the result is a faculty strongly committed to the district. The security of long relationships has created a strong foundation for innovation and risk-taking in many areas, including exploring how to best serve students with disabilities. In this essay, we review the history of inclusive practice in Hilton, discuss how the district has developed inclusive practices, and provide recommendations for practice.

Inclusive Practice in Hilton

In the last thirty years – from 1980 to 2010 - Hilton’s inclusive practice has shifted from a reliance on special education services provided by private schools and Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) programs to retaining most students with disabilities in district. Before the late 1980s, Hilton –like many surrounding districts - utilized BOCES and approved private schools for services for students with disabilities who needed levels of specialized instruction or support not available through the district. This involved relying on these agencies to recruit, hire, and supervise special education teachers, who were then assigned to teach classes of students with disabilities who came from Hilton and other local districts.

Just as special education law and practices evolved from its beginnings in the 1970s, Hilton’s special education service delivery model evolved as well. Students with significant learning disabilities, emotional disabilities and developmental delays were gradually brought back to the district beginning in the late 1970’s. Students who had been attending approved private schools and BOCES classrooms began attending district-based special classes as programs were developed in Hilton to meet their needs. Programs included self-contained classrooms with ratios of students, teachers, and teacher assistants of 15:1:1, 12:1:1, 8:1:1, and 6:1:1. Some of those classrooms continue, while other classrooms have been dissolved as more co-teaching and inclusive practices have been instituted. A new model of service delivery

in many states is co-taught classrooms with a general education teacher and a special education teacher together for the full day. Over time, the Hilton school community has become accustomed to integrating students with disabilities in local school buildings and programs. As the district's capacity to deliver specialized instruction grows, fewer students are referred to out of district placements and more students received their special education services in the general education classroom.

The New York State Department of Education is clear that there are important reasons for students with disabilities to be part of State assessment and accountability systems. The New York State Department of Education notes that:

Including students with disabilities in accountability systems has resulted in parents, teachers, and administrators paying more attention to grade-level standards and ensuring that students with disabilities have access to the general curriculum and an opportunity to learn grade-level content. Together, the IDEA and NCLB work to provide the specialized and individualized instruction and school accountability that is critical to improving achievement for students with disabilities. (Modified Academic Achievement Standards, 2007)

As Hilton examined ways to help students with disabilities meet higher expectations, it became evident that self-contained classroom options did not ensure students access to the content and skills that define the general education curriculum. So, new settings and models of inclusive practice were developed, including less reliance on the in-district special classes and more provision of consultant teacher services designed to push into general education classrooms and resource room services to support skill and content.

Hilton Central School District's ongoing assessment of special education programs led to phasing out the district-based 15:1:1 special class option at both the middle school and high school level several years ago. These special classes had been designed for students with significant learning and or language disabilities. With the strong support of the middle and high school principals, students were successfully integrated in general education classrooms and are achieving at higher rates than when they were in self-contained programs. This successful integration at the secondary level has been supported by a strong consultant teacher and resource room model. Students formerly in self-contained programs receive support, accommodations and case management by special education teachers working collaboratively with general education teachers.

The natural next step for Hilton is to continue phasing out the 15:1:1 special class self-contained model at the intermediate level of elementary school. So, in 2009-10, with enthusiastic support from the elementary building principal and assistant principal, a yearlong staff development plan was implemented in order to enhance inclusive practices for all teachers working in a consultant teacher-general education teacher partnership and to prepare specific teachers for an integrated co-teaching model. In 2010-11 the district will not operate the 15:1:1 special class at grades 5-6 and will instead provide integrated co-taught classrooms at both grade levels. Students formerly in the self-contained classroom will now be educated

with their nondisabled peers in an instructional setting that provides a general education teacher and a special education teacher and a teacher assistant for the full day.

Inclusive Practice in Action

In our discussions about this essay, we realized that underlying all the practical realities of inclusive education in the Hilton Central School District are three strong beliefs, shared by building and district administrators. First, a sense that children from Hilton should be educated in Hilton is explicit; second, the “earn your way in” mentality that can be a barrier to inclusive classrooms is challenged; and third, the idea that special education is specialized instruction – not a particular classroom setting or particular teacher’s services - is clearly articulated and repeated. Professional development for building teachers and staff is aligned with these foundational ideas about what inclusion can and should be.

We Want Our Kids

The history of BOCES in the late 1970s is one of service provision for smaller districts with few resources for students with disabilities. BOCES served an important role in helping districts educate previously excluded students. As more districts recognized the possibility of including children with disabilities, BOCES has evolved into new roles in consulting services, professional development, and continuing to serve students with the most severe disabilities. Hilton has gradually brought more and more students with disabilities back into the district, supporting the belief that children from the community should be served with their non disabled peers, in their home district.

This philosophy grounds inclusive practices in the elementary, middle, and high school, and focuses discussion about students with disabilities on practical solutions at the building level. The shared commitment to “all means all” leads to productive discussion about shifting classroom composition, educating teachers, and continually adjusting how instruction is provided for all learners. While this is not always easy, the shared commitment to inclusive practices between the superintendent, special education director, other instructional directors, and the principals focuses discussions on solving problems and moving forward.

This experience confirms what Tomlinson, Brimijoin, and Narvaez (2008) note about the nature of leadership – that at the building level, “the pivotal leader for change is the principal” (p. 23). In Hilton, there is a shared mission and vision among all stakeholders with respect to meeting the needs of each individual learner. This shared mission and vision, coupled with strong district-office administrative supports and enthusiastic building leadership has led to ongoing change and improvements in inclusive practices across the district.

Grades Do Not Always Reflect Learning

Affirming that students with disabilities need access to the general education curriculum is key to supporting inclusive practice. In Hilton, an understanding that the general education classroom is the best place to access the richness of the full curriculum is evident. The Director of Special Education believes that we may not always know what a student is capable of

learning; unfortunately, in the absence of traditional measures of success, students with disabilities have often been segregated in self-contained classrooms.

Instead of this traditional and limiting practice, the Director of Special Education helps teachers focus on individual achievement – and notes that grades are just one measure of success. Her philosophy is based on current recommendations about effective differentiation. Tomlinson & McTighe (2006) noted that shifting grading practices toward effective assessment includes thinking of assessment as “a photo album – a collection of evidence - rather than a single snapshot” (p. 135).

Special Education = Specialized Instruction

Special education is not a place; it is a service. The misconception that “those kids” belong somewhere other than the general education setting is a long standing one, and one that we continue to challenge. Teachers need to be prepared to provide high quality differentiated instruction for all students – and with appropriate supports and services, we believe this is possible. A concern for many teachers is that they are not prepared or knowledgeable about how to provide instruction to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Integrated classrooms help address this concern and there are far reaching benefits to everyone in the classroom when two highly qualified teachers are available to help a heterogeneous group of students.

Recommendations for Practice

Other districts considering how to move inclusive practices forward may consider this recommendation from Hilton: know and accept what your district’s capacities are. That is, be willing to examine what your district is doing well, what could change, and how to begin to implement change in deliberate and thoughtful ways. Hilton’s Director of Special Education notes that there is still a small group of Hilton students who have complex and severe needs. The complexity of these needs is more than Hilton is able to support in district based programs at this point.

While she is not pleased that some Hilton students are placed out of the district, the students are well supported and are getting what they need in their specialized programs. Trying to effect change in too many places at one time is often not useful; instead, Hilton is focused on manageable, measurable goals related to inclusion. In 2009-2010, the focus is on supporting the development of integrated co-taught classrooms in 5th and 6th grade.

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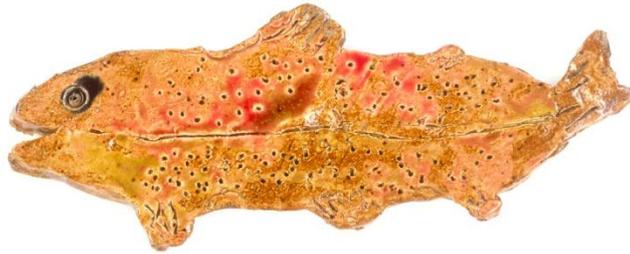
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“I’m So Excited About This!”

A Shared Administrative Vision for Inclusive Practice

Extended Learning Opportunities

- 1) What are the apparent strengths of the dissolution of the 15:1:1 classrooms and their replacement by an integrated consultant teacher-general education teacher partnership?
- 2) What do the authors suggest about the need to rethink our traditional view of assessment when they claim that “Grades do not always reflect learning?”
- 3) Why do you believe that it has taken nearly thirty years for many schools in this region to accept more direct responsibility for educating all students in the home district?
- 4) How might you personally help to promote what the authors describe as “a shared vision among all stakeholders?”
- 5) Can you envision a time when even students with “complex and severe needs” would be educated in their neighborhood schools? If so, how do we get there?



Reading 3: Are We There Yet? Making Inclusive Schooling Part of Our Daily Journey

Introduction by: Jackie Czamanske, Regional Field Facilitator, NYSED S³TAIR Project

As a School Improvement Specialist, I've facilitated numerous discussions over the years on how a school district may address the various challenges it faces. During these conversations, teams often voice their fears on how including students with disabilities may negatively affect a school's overall performance. The Rochester City School District's World of Inquiry School provides a solid illustration on how high expectations and inclusion can lock arms in a large urban environment to achieve a performance-enhanced setting for all students. "Are We There Yet?" gives building administrators and leaders an intimate illustration of one school's journey to create an inclusive environment. Concrete guidance on structures, culture, collaboration and a developmental implementation model provide navigational tools on how to "Get the world for EVERY student!"

Are We There Yet?

Making Inclusive Schooling Part of Our Daily Journey

Marie Cianca and Beth Mascitti-Miller

“School 58, please get the world for us!” This refrain is on every page of a picture book describing World of Inquiry School (WOIS) 58 in the Rochester City School District. To those who enter its doors, World of Inquiry School immediately reveals itself as an exciting learning community – one that embraces people, places and adventures in its journey to explore the larger world for each and every learner. How does a principal develop a school culture that accommodates all learners? How can a principal navigate inclusion and stay on course? This article provides three areas of emphasis to help new or experienced elementary principals create and stay on an inclusive journey.

The current WOIS community exists, in large part, because administrators, teachers and support staff at World of Inquiry School 58 deliberately created the intention to “get the world” for every student enrolled. World of Inquiry School 58 is located in a large urban district and has approximately 370 students enrolled in Kindergarten through Grade 7. It was not always one of the highest performing schools in Rochester or in the region. In fact, in 2001, school staff members voiced concerns that caused the principal and teachers to review academic progress and other integral facets of their school community. As they did this, they were distressed to find a steady decline in student achievement, few connections across teachers and grade levels, and significant family stressors based on increasing levels of poverty in the city of Rochester. After researching, talking, and planning collaboratively, the school adopted a comprehensive reform model in 2002 to address some of the major concerns. The new instructional design formed a basis for establishing effective ways to engage students and families using an inquiry based approach. Design principles for inquiry-based learning also helped World of Inquiry School define and create school structures that engaged the entire school community in the success of the school.

As in many large urban school districts, a high percentage of students in Rochester receive special education services. At WOIS, 17% of students receive special education support. In adopting a new instructional design, the principal and teachers had to purposefully plan for delivery models that benefitted all learners. If World of Inquiry School was to “get the world” for all of its students, administrators and teachers needed to seriously consider how to foster the strengths and address the needs of students with special needs.

In re-examining school mission and outcomes beginning in 2002, WOIS discovered that co-teaching was the most effective classroom delivery model for all students. In configuring

classes, the principal was able to staff one co-teaching section at every grade level. Co-teaching teams consisted of a special educator and general educator with a class size guideline of 23 students per section. This allowed all students to be included in general education with support and teamed general educators with special educators who were previously assigned to resource or special classes. As an example, during the 2009-2010 school year, fifty students with special needs were all fully included in general education using the co-teaching model.

With a new instructional design and a more effective model for delivering instruction, WOIS was well on its way to addressing its challenges. However, the change process is complex. There was much to be done to implement and embed the new ideas that were underway. Further, under typical circumstances, it is a daunting task to lead school change, but it is even more challenging to ensure an inclusive school culture. For WOIS and for other schools implementing inclusive change, three areas make the journey a successful one for all stakeholders.

Clear Structures

First, there must be clear support structures in place for teachers. This was not in place back in 2001 at WOIS. There was little to no common planning time and no consistent approach to rituals and routines in the classroom or school. During the past several years, the master schedule was developed to include two 90 minute periods of common planning time during the week for each grade level. This was possible by block scheduling special subject areas. In addition, daily morning meetings were held in the classrooms and weekly school-wide community meetings occurred to reinforce and solidify school rituals. At the weekly school-wide meetings, students at each grade level rotate responsibility for delivering several consistent themes performed each week. Grade levels share a reading and weekly greeting based on learning themes, conduct an activity for the whole school, perform a skit on the number of the week and share a fact of the day. At the meeting's end, there is a "torch-passing" ceremony to anoint the grade level in charge of the next meeting. Intermediate students take leadership by owning and facilitating the meetings. Parents and visitors are always welcomed at the weekly school-wide meetings.

These structures were developed and revised over time and make a critical contribution to an inclusive school setting. This takes perseverance and, if overlooked, the lack of support structures can take a school off course very quickly and diminish the opportunities for students. The impetus to persevere emanates directly from the principal and is key to moving forward.

When building structures of support, the principal should carefully examine several areas.

- Get to know the student body and be aware of the types of learners in the school.

- Know the number of students receiving special education services and their grade levels.
- Consider the classroom environments that would best respond to student needs and talents.
- Examine the programs of students individually and build the school schedule with these considerations in mind. Think about the related services that each student may need. Work with related service personnel when building the master schedule so that each student receives the instructional opportunities that are required and anticipated.
- Keep the goal of inclusivity in mind when purchasing furniture, technology, classroom supplies, library books, and arranging for field experiences or guest speakers.

While becoming familiar with the programmatic elements for each student, developing teams of teachers is also important. Considering student numbers and logistics, it helps to purposefully build in planning time for classroom teachers who are working together and supporting similar students. In the case of World of Inquiry School, special education and general education teachers in co-taught classrooms have daily planning time together. Teachers use their planning time to develop standards based instruction with activities centered on inquiry and student engagement. Planning time is also used for cross-grade level team planning and “specialized crew” meetings where special education teachers and related service providers problem solve situational needs of students that arise.

Inclusive Culture Building

When the principal and teachers of WOIS looked at the state of their school in 2001, they found that many students were unaware of or did not have access to the school. Staffing and classroom space was arranged in a way that discouraged placements of students with special needs or students with other learning needs. Establishing an inclusive culture and philosophy became an important part of the school improvement plan and the second area of emphasis in this article. Building an inclusive school culture takes a concerted effort and does not happen automatically. Leading by example sets the tone. The principal shows by example that inclusivity is a school priority and helps establish a common language among teachers to internalize the concept and take it further. Communicating an inclusive vision to parents and families is also key. Often, when building a school culture, parents are not aware of the steps and supports that are foundational to a school’s intended direction. The principal and teachers can use a school-wide newsletter, displays and school website to communicate with parents and families about the school’s values and, specifically about the ideals of inclusive schooling. This allows parents to understand the intended purpose, context and benefits of the vision.

Developing and communicating information to parents on an inclusive school culture also serves to solidify the direction for teachers and support staff. In the process of developing a common language, teachers and support staff form a common understanding of the vision of

inclusive education. Each school's vision is uniquely tailored but school staff can readily incorporate research and models of success from information in current professional journals and organization websites. When principals, teachers and students know and understand the benefits of inclusive schooling for all students, they are much more likely to understand and support the common journey.

When one enters World of Inquiry School 58 and walks its hallways, it is immediately evident that individuals matter and each person is a valued contributor. Large photographs of each student are framed and hung along school hallways. Family customs and cultures are displayed. "I am" poems are posted for all to see. A personalized environment and relationship building is symbolized throughout the school and is reinforced every morning through morning meetings. This builds upon the concepts and ideals practiced in the weekly school-wide meeting by incorporating the values and instructional expectations of the school. These everyday relationships between and among students and staff at World of Inquiry reinforce a caring, compassionate school culture and help all involved to continue on their journey to "get the world for all." It is critical for the school principal to build these opportunities, model inclusive values and extend behaviors that demonstrate inclusive practices.

At World of Inquiry School 58, the vision and context for "getting the world" was developed and modeled over several years. Teachers, families and students identified with the culture at WOIS because the journey continues to be collaborative and transparent. In fact, each day, students recite the school's Model Citizen Pledge where belief in an inclusive culture is stated aloud:

Model Citizen Crew Pledge

We, the crew of World of Inquiry School, make this pledge for all Model Citizens.

We should all give service and have compassion for others.

We will celebrate our discoveries and wonderful ideas.

Through reflections, we will learn from our successes and failures.

While collaborating, we will show caring for diverse people and the natural world.

We are all responsible for our own learning.

Our education is our future.

Multi-faceted Collaboration

The third area of emphasis is multi-faceted collaboration and does not occur in isolation but through cross-team collaboration, interdisciplinary planning and systematic feedback from teachers, support staff, families and community. When planning for a more responsive school community, WOIS staff members discovered that parents and community were entitled to more of a voice and more opportunities to be part of the school community in ways that were resourceful and mutually beneficial. One example in this area was an ongoing professional development project that involved parents and community in a major way. With principal and teacher support, several families prepared and implemented a professional development experience for all staff. The collaborative project allowed teachers to work in teams with families from the school to explore different parts of the Rochester community, become familiar with public transportation routes, visit community stores, churches and organizations. This was all facilitated by parents who shared expertise and knowledge about neighborhoods and community resources with staff.

Additional practices that have helped sustain an inclusive environment where success is achieved for all kinds of learners include:

- Summer planning to fine-tune the curriculum and meet the needs of children for the following year;
- One on one reading and math support for students to address their particular needs and also access their strengths;
- A data wall in each classroom that allows students to follow their progress in skill development and concept acquisition;
- Considerations for student groupings that are an ongoing part of lesson planning and are flexed based on current student data and student talents;
- Teaching teams that meet weekly with support staff and administrators to discuss and focus on individual student progress;
- Special education teachers and related service providers that meet together twice monthly to exchange strategies and share expertise in adapting lessons and diversifying lesson delivery;
- Multiple methods for student assessment that are used on a daily and weekly basis to allow students to effectively demonstrate what they know; and
- Students observations that take place during practice tests to help match testing conditions to each child's needs.

Daily and weekly collaboration at World of Inquiry establishes an atmosphere of open communication and ongoing creativity that fosters student-centered, positive approaches as the foundation of its pedagogy. In addition, parents and community take part in school-wide learning exhibitions twice each year, where grade level inquiry projects in science and social

studies are expertly designed, developed and demonstrated for hundreds who come to see the evidence of student growth.

3-S Model

As a principal leads his or her school with *clear structures, inclusive culture building* and *multi-faceted collaboration*, a principal also must consider depth of understanding and implementation within each of these intentional building blocks. One way to deepen the level of implementation is to follow a 3-S model. The term “3-S” describes an implementation method that is at first *simple*, next *substantive*, and finally *sustainable*. So, when implementing any of the suggestions in this article, a principal can benefit by following these three steps. He or she might first introduce it to staff or community in the simplest of ways. Following the introduction of a practice, the principal and other school staff members develop the substance of the practice on a school-wide basis. Lastly, the principal and other school leaders incorporate policies and systems that enable the practice to be sustained. The example below highlights the progression of an idea using the 3-S model.

<i>Idea</i>	<i>Simple</i>	<i>Substantive</i>	<i>Sustainable</i>
Common Planning Time for Co-teaching Teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Principal develops the master schedule with priority consideration to co-teaching teams. Ensures that there is daily planning time for co-teachers and with other teachers at that grade level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A standards-based tool is developed or adapted for use by co-teachers and grade level teams to assist with collaborative lesson planning. Embedded professional development occurs to gain a common understanding of collaborative planning strategies. Principal and specialists attend common planning meetings on a regularly scheduled basis to provide support and resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Common planning time becomes part of the school plan. Teachers exchange collaborative units and share best practices. Teachers effectively use various co-teaching models. Teachers are both skilled and meta-cognitively aware of their skills. School leaders support collaboratively planning on many levels.

The use of the 3-S model helps a school to go beyond a surface level of implementation, and paves the way to a deepened understanding with a scaffolded, step-by-step approach.

Roles and Responsibilities

When embarking on this journey to find the world, it helps staff members at World of Inquiry School #58 to stop frequently and ask, “Are we there yet?” This is an important question to ask several times during the year because, by doing so, inclusive schooling is characterized as a dynamic, ongoing process. All school stakeholders receive an opportunity to continuously reflect on progress towards the journey’s destination.

The asking of this central question also encourages the examination of individual roles. To the principal, what has specifically been put in place recently to support teachers and students? To the teacher, what is the feedback from my students and my colleagues? To all, how have new roles and areas of expertise been incorporated into the daily repertoire? What resources are being used more effectively and why? The journey of inclusive schooling is a challenging but fully satisfying one and the principal makes a substantive difference in facilitating its success.

To new or experienced principals whose school community is poised for inclusion, ask yourself, “When am I getting started on this journey?” and continue to ask “Am I there yet?” Children are waiting for you to show them the world!

Note: World of Inquiry School 58 adopted an Expeditionary Learning (EL) model in 2000 and continues to use this instructional design to this day. Currently, students at WOIS 58 achieve the highest average math and reading scores of any elementary school in Rochester and 100% of its students are proficient in science and social studies. In 2007, World of Inquiry School received the Panasonic National School Change Award. To receive this award, World of Inquiry School provided evidence of:

- *A significant change in attitudes, beliefs and values;*
- *Dramatic changes in instructional practices;*
- *The existence of systems to promote and embed success;*
- *A multi-year sharp increase in achievement;*
- *Changed perceptions inside and outside the school;*
- *Engaged teachers and students who enjoy school and contribute to its success in significant ways; and*
- *A school culture that promotes inquiry, research and professional development.*

In addition to the change award, WOIS also received the 2008 National Excellence in Urban Education Award, and was recently selected as a National Blue Ribbon School by the Secretary of Education.

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Are We There Yet?

Making Inclusive Schooling Part of Our Daily Journey

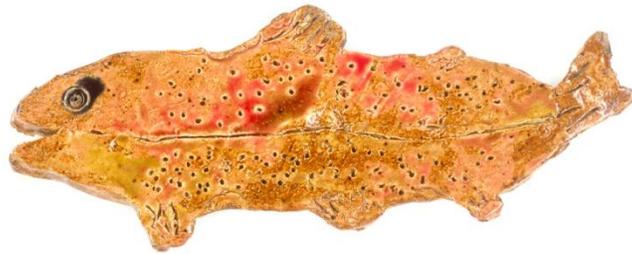
Extended Learning Opportunities

1. In what ways do the characteristics of this school work to support all learners?
2. Discuss the role of collaboration in an inclusive environment. What can be gained from a collaborative infrastructure? What might be some cautions?
3. Create a diagram illustrating the primary issues a building administrator needs to address when growing an inclusive environment.
4. Considering the 3-S model, create a personal action plan on how inclusive practices would be implemented in your educational setting.

For further resources on Inclusive environments, visit the following:

www.S3TAIRproject.org

<http://www.vesid.nysed.gov/specialed/techassist/specedQI.htm>



Reading 4: A Commitment to Change: One District's Journey Toward Inclusion

*Introduction by: Ellen Contopidis, PhD
Associate Professor, Nazareth College*

As a teacher educator preparing future inclusive educators, I often find myself responding to my students' experiences with inclusion as "bad examples of a good idea." The common element of these bad examples is that they are often the description of a place, a classroom, a service, a teacher or a child. Never do these bad examples reflect a philosophy or a culture within a system. Dr. Harold Leve's leadership of transforming his school to an inclusive instructional environment is founded in a strong vision of social justice. The tools of collaboration, co-teaching, consultant models, common planning and quality professional development were all used along the journey. Yet, tools they were and would have been ineffective if not grounded in a vision that allowed a transformation to a "mindset of a more inclusive philosophy." Hildenbrand and Leve are very pragmatic in their description of the journey. They provide specific details that can be replicated or morphed to be used in other school systems. They also clearly demonstrate that leadership is key to transforming a school's culture. Active leadership is an important catalyst for system change.

A Commitment to Change: One District's Journey towards Inclusion

Susan Hildenbrand and Harold Leve

Introduction

“This is an inclusion model; we acknowledge the challenges, and we figure out – together – how to make it work. We don’t abandon people who are having trouble. We don’t celebrate “I won” unaware or indifferent to those who are struggling” (Sapon-Shevin, 2007, p.7).

With the passage of the *No Child Left Behind* legislation in 2001, the educational system assesses the majority of students with disabilities using the same statewide standards-based assessments as their general education peers. Similarly, this legislation requires schools to look at different service-delivery options for special education (Weiss & Lloyd, 2002). As a result, districts are placing more students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms with their general education classmates (Bouck, 2007). In fact, almost half of all students with disabilities are served in general education classrooms with their non-disabled peers for more than 79% of the school day (U.S. Department of Education, 2005).

However, it is not a simple or easy task to make this move to placing students in inclusive classrooms instead of a traditional segregated or pullout system of delivery. East Rochester Elementary School, under the leadership of Dr. Harold Leve, and working collaboratively with Donald Shuryn, the districts’ special education coordinator, did just that and began the amazing journey towards an inclusive elementary school where all learners are welcomed as a part of their learning community.

It Will Never Happen! Where Do We Start?

Even though East Rochester Elementary School had primarily self-contained classrooms for many years as the service option for special education services, there was little academic and social growth for the students in these classrooms within this traditional service delivery model. At the time of the beginning of the transformation, there was also a first cohort of students placed in an integrated kindergarten classroom. As this group of students began their educational experiences, we, as a school, began the transition from self-contained to inclusion. In addition, the New York State Education Department audited the school district’s special education department in the early 2000s. The 2003-04 NYSED School Report Card Information about Students with Disabilities reported the percentage of students at East Rochester Elementary identified with disabilities was 15.3% at the time, which was above the statewide average of 11.9%. The 2003-04 report card also showed that 14.2% of the district’s special education students were in segregated settings, compared to the statewide average of 6.6%.

Therefore, Dr. Leve was even more convinced that collapsing the self-contained classrooms and replacing them with co-taught, inclusive classrooms would be a positive step to

breaking the social barriers between the students with disabilities and typical students while at the same time possibly improving scores on state- wide exams. Dr. Leve and his support team thoroughly researched the benefits of inclusion for students with and without disabilities and acted on the school's vision of social justice for all learners in his building by setting up inclusive classrooms (Hunt, Hirose-Hatae, Doering, Karasoff, & Goetz 2000; Peck, Staub, Gallucci, and Schwartz 2004).

This unyielding, transparent, and continuous administrative support directly affects the viability of the decision to commit to this philosophical shift in the placement of students with disabilities within a school hierarchy. Among teachers who co-teach, administrative support is frequently stated as the number one need that is instrumental in the success of the teachers' collaboration (Scruggs, Mastropieri, and McDuffie, 2007). If the commitment to inclusion is not fully supported by the principal it is difficult to make this paradigm shift in how a school delivers special education services. As Friend and Cook (2004) discuss, administrators must possess a "general understanding of the importance of collaboration, the role of the administrator in fostering a school climate supportive of collaboration, and enough knowledge about collaborative activities to make them a reality" (p. 282).

Dr. Leve speaks the language of inclusion, creates, and supports opportunities for his teachers to be able to successfully collaborate in this new model of delivery, including professional development opportunities surrounding co-teaching. More importantly, Dr. Leve is present at all trainings centered on inclusion and co-teaching and continues to provide opportunities for further educational opportunities in differentiation and collaboration. This professional development agenda resulted in collaboration between Dr. Leve and professors from St. John Fisher College, who provided training for this inclusive model.

However, this inclusive pedagogy was not widely accepted at the beginning, and many in the school thought it was a concept that would never happen, would certainly not last and would not produce the growth in assessments that was predicted. Dr. Leve pushed on, eliminated one self-contained classroom at a time, and watched the positive results begin to appear.

Let the Journey Begin: Baby Steps

The transformation of the elementary school began with the elimination of the first of the established self-contained classrooms, the K-1-2 classroom. During the planning year before this classroom was dissolved, Dr. Leve, with administrative input, sought out the general education teacher that would be open to an inclusive classroom and would be willing to collaborate with the temporarily displaced special educator teacher to plan and deliver differentiated instruction for all learners. When these two teachers agreed to be a part of this inaugural inclusive classroom, Dr. Leve formally reassigned the special education teacher to co-teach in this general education classroom at the first grade level, and the teacher assistant was utilized across several classrooms. According to Scruggs, Mastropieri, and McDuffie (2007), in order for co-teaching to be a successful pairing, there needs to be a level of choice and

volunteerism on the part of the co-teachers. Although Dr. Leve purposely approached certain teachers and encouraged them to think about becoming partners in an inclusive classroom, he did not mandate this situation, but allowed for a comfortable level of teacher choice.

Dr. Leve also worked very closely with the district coordinator for the Committee on Special Education, Donald Shuryin, and through a collaborative effort, they made the commitment to draft Individual Education Plans (IEPs) that offered an integrated classroom as a placement option. This co-taught classroom was not presented as an option on the continuum of services prior to this transformation to inclusive education. The students with disabilities were then returned to the general education classrooms, including the co-taught classroom, and the remaining students were supported by other special education teachers in a consultant model. The inclusion experiment began...

The Journey Continues: Next Steps

Each year after the initial inclusive, co-taught classroom was launched, the remaining two self contained classrooms at the 3-4 and 5-6 level were also closed, and the students with disabilities assigned to these classrooms were placed back into general education classrooms. As with any new referendum for change, there were growing pains from the faculty and staff, and a small number of students left the school to return to other more restrictive placements in other settings. The early resistance to integrating special education students into general education classrooms can best be expressed as a long-standing, traditional mindset that general education students are the responsibility of the general education teachers and special education students are the responsibility of the special education teachers. Even though several teachers volunteered to teach in integrated classrooms, they still needed to change their mindsets. For example, at the start of integrated classes, the expectation was that all instruction would take place in the general education classroom. What was found was that some of the special education teachers were still taking “their” special education students to other classrooms for their instruction.

To transform this mindset to a more inclusive philosophy, the participating teachers were provided professional development about inclusive practices and how to deliver all instruction within the four classroom walls. Next, the “extra” special education classrooms were gently absorbed and utilized by other service providers, thereby providing the physical constraints to support the inclusive mindset. Finally, the teachers were encouraged to think and talk about all students being the responsibility of all teachers, regardless of classification. For example, the administration leads by example by always saying both teachers’ names when referring to integrated classrooms. The integrated teachers are proud that their students often don’t know who the special education teacher is and who the general education teacher is in the classroom. Equally, students have difficulty identifying special education students from their general education peers.

For this restructuring to occur, Dr. Leve had to re-conceptualize the whole idea of special education programming in his building, and he spread and supported the belief that special education is defined as the delivery of services, but not a particular place or classroom.

By reconfiguring the delivery of services, Dr. Leve was able to operate his entire building in the spirit of the logic model for the delivery of specialized supports and services which “focuses on what students need rather than what they are in terms of a categorical service system” (Sailor, 2006, p. 127). No longer were the students with disabilities isolated according to their disability, but were now given the freedom to experience a general education experience while still receiving the support they needed to be successful regardless of their disability. In addition, with this new integration model of service delivery, the supports and modifications took place within the general education classroom, which is a way to benefit the maximum number of students, and the delivery of services was shifted from the classroom to the school, using all of the available resources to enrich the educational experience of all the students in the school (Sailor & Roger, 2005).

Reaping the Rewards and Facing the Challenges: Final Thoughts

There are data supported rewards from this commitment to inclusion at all grade levels, but barriers to a completely inclusive building also exist. The first cohort of students to experience inclusion was in fifth grade in 2008-09. On the New York State English Language Arts assessment, 90% of East Rochester students with disabilities achieved levels 3-4 compared to 46% of students with disabilities in similar schools. 86% of East Rochester students with disabilities scored levels 3-4 on the NYS mathematics assessment compared to 46% of students with disabilities from similar schools. On the fifth grade social studies assessment, 95% of East Rochester students with disabilities scored at levels 3-4. (No similar school data available on the NYS social studies assessment.) In addition, the NYSED 2008-09 School Report Card for the East Rochester School District also reported that 4.2% of students were in segregated settings, compared to 14.2% in 2003-04, which is a powerful statistic that illustrates this broken paradigm of a separate education for students with disabilities.

There are also more subtle rewards observed, such as a decrease in social isolation for students with disabilities who have now become full members of the general education classroom. In addition, the teachers have begun to embrace the collaborative culture of inclusion, which acknowledges the expertise of each member of the staff. This philosophy of inclusion was a gradual mindset that took hold slowly as the all of the stakeholders began to see the positive effects of inclusion for all of the children in the elementary building.

Although a future vision is a completely inclusive system of delivery of special education services, there remain three district-based self-contained classrooms in the elementary school building. However, these classrooms allow for a continuum of services for those students who are unable to be supported in the inclusive classrooms at this time but are able to remain in their home school. Non-traditional delivery models are used within these classrooms as well, such as reverse mainstreaming where students without disabilities are brought into the self-

contained classrooms to receive additional support not provided in the general education classroom and to provide role modeling for the students in the segregated settings.

Embracing change, whether or not it is the right thing to do, can be an insurmountable task for a traditional system that is used to doing things the way they have always been done. When change is approached and supported from the top down, this shift, no matter how large, is attainable if done one-step at a time and allows for true buy in from all involved parties. East Rochester Elementary School took hold of the vision of inclusion and is making it a reality one classroom at a time. The transition process is just that...a process. It takes time for people's perceptions and perspectives to shift. Some people's perceptions change faster and easier than others. We have made co-teaching one of our building initiatives and have provided the professional development to teachers to ensure their success and that of their students. Although the ultimate results remain to be seen, this paradigm shift has already produced measurable academic gains and a decrease in the number of students in segregated settings, but the most significant gain is in the feeling of community that permeates from every aspect of the school.

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A Commitment to Change: One District's Journey towards Inclusion

Extended Learning Opportunities

1. What are five things that Principal Leve did to support the transformation of the elementary school to an inclusive environment?
2. What are two collaborative relationships that Principal Leve engaged in and what were the goals of these relationships?
3. What was the re-conceptualization that Principal Leve and his faculty experienced?
4. Sapon-Shevin writes of "inclusion: a matter of social justice." The authors of this article speak of the school's "vision of social justice." Speak to your understanding of the connection between inclusion and social justice.
5. What would have to happen in your school to move toward a more inclusive environment? Which of the activities initiated by Principal Leve would be a starting place or next steps, in a movement toward a more inclusive environment in your school?

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Reading 5: Looking Backward, Looking Forward: One School's Story of Co-Teaching

Introduction by: Jennifer Ashton, Ph.D., University of Rochester

With its reliance upon collaboration between general and special educators, co-teaching has emerged as one of the most effective and viable methods of providing an appropriate education to students with and without disabilities in the same classroom. As a former co-teacher and a current co-teaching researcher, I have found that there are multiple ways to experience success in co-teaching and the successful method employed by one team does not necessarily transfer guaranteed success to others. However, Dr. Linn and Mr. O'Kane present a set of general principles that guided one school's transition from a somewhat restrictive structure of traditional special education placements to a more broadly inclusive co-teaching arrangement. These seven principles do not provide a recipe for success, but rather a sequential series of stages that could help guide other schools through similar inclusive transitions.

Looking Backward, Looking Forward: One School's Story of Co-Teaching

Jeffrey Linn and John O'Kane

Introduction

It is well-established that the building principal is the most important variable in the process of school change (Tomlinson, Brimijoin & Narvaez, 2008). Without visionary leadership, successful team work, and clear communication of goals, change is doomed to failure. This is especially true when considering how to design, implement, and evaluate changes intended to promote increased inclusive education through co-teaching. The following is a description of the change process at a large primary (K-2) school in Western New York.

Looking Backward

Inclusion is a not a new idea! Many view the movement of public schools toward more inclusive programming, where students previously described as “handicapped” or “disabled”, students with special education needs, are afforded the same educational opportunities and experiences as their peers in regular/general education classes, as a late Twentieth Century phenomenon. It is not. Elizabeth Farrell, founder of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and Supervisor of ungraded Classes for the New York City Public School System, proposed similar ideology more than a century ago. She was an advocate for educational programs that addressed the needs and challenges of children described as “atypical, subnormal, and dull of spirit, slow of speech, the inert” (Kode, 2002, p. 96). Her vision, dedication and tireless efforts on behalf of large numbers of impoverished, illiterate and excluded children of recently arrived immigrants established a foundation for many current practices. She argued for non-discriminatory evaluations based on more than just intellectual criteria. She challenged Goddard, an imminent psychologist of his time (and also a proponent of Eugenics), on the validity and reliability of Intelligence Quotient (IQ) tests. She developed standards of professional accountability for teachers and established numerous professional development opportunities for faculty and staff. She is generally acknowledged as a pioneer in creating collegial teaching teams or cohorts to advance the skills and knowledge of novices and veterans alike. As Kode (2002) notes, her work “served as the framework for later mainstreaming efforts in this country’ (p. 98). The authors believe that she would be proud of what is going on in Canandaigua.

One School and One Principal's Story

The legal and social pressures to promote more inclusive and collaborative models for addressing the needs of all students, including those with special education needs, have intensified since the initial passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1974 (Yell & Katsiyannis, 2004; Yell, Rodgers, & Lodge-Rodgers, 1998). Many schools and school districts, including the Canandaigua City School District and the Canandaigua Primary School, are committed to a more inclusive general education- special education relationship. In the 2009-2010 school years The Primary School had approximately 835 students in grades K-2 and additional 80 students in a Universal Pre-Kindergarten Program. There were 13 or 14 classrooms at each grade level. At the start of the school year, the population of students with special needs at the Primary level consisted of about 85 students. That number has increased to more than 90 during this school year.

Prior to the 2009-2010 school year, in 2008-2009, the model for providing supports and services to students with disabilities was traditional and somewhat restrictive:

- 12-1-1 Kindergarten class
- 8-1-1 for Kindergarten-aged children with severe behavior or emotional problems
- 12-1-1 First grade class
- Resource rooms and similar pull out services for second graders
- 8-1-1 class for first and second graders and one third grader with severe emotional or behavior problems as identified on their IEP's
- A variety of configurations for teachers and related service providers pushing into classrooms in a limited yet integrated co-teaching model to meet the requirements of IEP mandated services.

The Director of Special Programs and building principal determined that this model was neither meeting the needs of the children nor the faculty. Yes, there were still children whose needs could not be adequately addressed in a general setting and would therefore continue to need special classes, but there were also children being pulled out of classrooms who could benefit from a more inclusive setting. Similarly, it was believed that a number of both classroom teachers and special education teachers would benefit from closer and more collegial, collaborative professional relationships. Hence the principal's role consisted of a number of steps that can be best characterized by, at the insistence of his co-author who has an unusual fondness for alliteration, a series of "S" words: Selling, Scheduling, Selecting, Staff developing, Supervising, and Supporting with Sensitivity.

Selling

The Director of Special Programs and Principal met on several occasions midway through the 2008-2009 school years with the purpose of proposing a more inclusive model. Discussions were quite spirited. Teachers expressed numerous and passionate questions and concerns about “giving up” their classrooms and not serving “their kids”. Some had previously worked in a co-teaching setting while others had not. After we presented the model and our ideas we invited faculty and stake-holders to generate a list of questions and concerns which we addressed over the course of more meetings, usually held from 8-8:30 in the morning. Later, at the insistence of teachers, these meetings were held after school to provide opportunity for more in-depth discussions. A few extended 30 minutes or so beyond the contractual day; but most teachers were interested and stayed because they wanted to help. To facilitate understanding, the Director of Special Programs generated a number of color coded models with sample schedules. While not everyone’s attitudes and reservations were changed, we ended the school year without animosity.

Our working model looked like this.

Kindergarten – All students with the exception of one 8-1-1 class would be integrated into the regular education setting with a home room class. Using what we have defined as a “walk to” model, students move to a new setting for math and reading with the special education teacher, while spending the remainder of the day in the classroom for science, writing and social studies. These students also participated with their non-disabled peers in music, physical education and art. Still other classes implemented a less restrictive co-teaching (CT) or integrated co-teaching (ICT) “push in” model for reading and math.

First grade – All first grade students would be in a home room class and use the identical “walk to” model as kindergarten to a co-taught (CT) or integrated co—teaching (ICT) class.

Second grade – This model was identical to that of the first grade. Additionally, there was another 8-1-1 class for first and second graders whose severe emotional and behavioral needs required a special class setting.

Scheduling

All students were scheduled by a committee of administrators, teachers and counselors. The deciding factor for most students was their reading level based on the Degrees of Reading Assessment (DRAII). The school planning team has already made some changes to the placement throughout the year, usually by adding students to the mix as some were newly classified or entered the district. Due to this anticipated need, the Principal purposely kept the

CT and ICT class enrollments two students lower than the general population classes to start the school year.

Selecting

An important responsibility of the principal in any change process is selecting the change agents who will help him or her drive the change. This was a top down process. A vital role of the principal is to assess the capability of the classroom teachers who would be expected to work collegially in a co-teaching setting. Ideally the most exceptional teachers would come forward to accept this challenge, but that is not always the case. Hence the selection process typically overlaps with the selling process. The administrator's role is to create the best matches of persons and personalities. For example, the Primary School principal recruited and convinced three veteran second grade teachers who were friends to create the three classrooms that would feed into a "walk to" model where students could relocate and regroup for differentiated instructional opportunities. Similarly, the new plan incorporated classrooms that were close together and in a separate wing for the kindergarten model.

Staff Developing

All the teams of teachers were offered the opportunity to take a two day paid workshop at the end of the summer in co-teaching and co-planning. Based on the work of Marilyn Friend (1996), the workshop was structured to initially generate conversations between co-teachers about their belief systems, prerequisites of a co-taught classroom, and affective domain issues having to do with teacher attitudes about change. After these guided conversations, teachers were presented with six distinctive models of co-teaching and nine instructional adaptations that they could use in a co-taught classroom. Finally the teachers were led through a series of activities that focused on assessment in a co-taught classroom and presented with a number of lesson planning models prior to being given the second half of day two to plan.

Two co-teaching teams enrolled in the summer course and others took the class when it was offered for two days in the fall. Still others availed themselves of our staff development plan which allows teachers to submit individual plan for selected superintendent's conference days. And other teams took their one allotted professional day to work together and meet with the building principal for a more condensed version of the workshop and planning.

Supervising

In addition to observations the K-5 director of Special Education, K-6 Director of math and Reading and Principal set of a series of meetings with the Special Education teachers and other providers every other month to review data on all children with special needs. The principal also observed all classrooms as part of his normal observation process which means

that untenured teachers were observed three times and others were observed twice, one for the general teacher and one for the special education provider. The principal and Director of Special Programs also did walk through and provided feedback throughout the year.

Supporting with Sensitivity

The principal must be able to work with teachers, Director of Special Programs, parents, and paraprofessionals to find the correct mix of adults and be sensitive to their needs. For example, there have been challenges and concerns with paraprofessionals working with co-teaching teams. Often, these caring adults know the special needs of children and have much information but they are not the professionals in the classroom. If communication is ongoing and roles are well defined, paraprofessionals can be effectively brought into some conversations with teachers or parents for another perspective.

Yet despite our efforts, sometimes the relationships just do not work. The principal has made adjustments to at least one team while continuing to support those teams that effectively and successively fostered more inclusive education through co-teaching and collaboration.

The final work belongs to the teachers who work in the model. They have learned much and grown both professionally and personally after nearly one full school year. When asked to identify the pros and cons of their experiences, these are some of their thoughts:

Pros

- Help with frequent assessments
- Another expert in the classroom
- Two of us can differentiate and “make it happen”
- Ability to frequently regroup kids
- So good to listen to someone else
- She “settles me when I get frantic”
- Allows to sometimes step back and see the whole picture
- We value each other

Cons

- Planning time is still an issue
- People should be allowed to pick their own partners
- I don’t have my own classroom. “It hurts to not have my kids.”
- Tough on kids with other needs outside the cognitive domain like anxiety

It is essential that the building administrator listen to, reflect upon, and plan to implement appropriate recommendations and suggested adaptations in next year's model. Yet it is important to always remember that schools exist for the benefit and well-being of our students, not for the comfort and convenience of those who serve. Pugach and Johnson (2008) defined teaching as "working well together with students *and* interacting well with adults" (p.5). They emphasized that schools must be communities of learning – for children and adults – engaged in complex and challenging work necessary "to be a source of vibrant, intellectual stimulation for every student who attends" (p.5). The efforts of the Canandaigua School District in general and the Canandaigua Primary School in particular to implement co-teaching practices are meaningful and enriching steps to strengthening our community of learning.

Final Thoughts

At the first annual meeting of the Council for Exceptional Children in 1922 Elizabeth Farrell charged all teachers and school leaders – not just special educators, to create schools and classrooms that would be:

...less machine-made and more individual; that the schools of this country will use the ability of each pupil group to its maximum; that the school will fit its burden to the back which bears it; that it will bring the opportunity of successful achievement to every child. (as cited in Kode, 2002, p. 90).

This vision of learning environments where each student's potential was fully acknowledged and nurtured was echoed decades later by another President of the CEC, Dr. Lloyd Dunn. Dunn (1968) asserted that the segregation and removal of students with disabilities from regular classrooms fostered a social and learning environment of isolation, inferiority, and non-acceptance by both peers and teachers. He forecast four changes that he saw as shaping "An American Revolution in education" that would "help special education ... begin moving to fit into a changing general education program and to assist in achieving the program's goals" (p. 10). These four "powerful forces" as he called them were: changes in school organization; curricular changes; changes in professional public school personnel; and hardware (or technology) changes. Extending Farrell's initial visions, he prophesied much of what the Canandaigua Primary has implemented in the 2009-2010 school year – team teaching, flexible grouping, curricular innovations that are respectful of the varying needs of learners, increased professionalization and staff development, and a climate that is cautious yet receptive to change and considers the needs of both children and adults.

One must always view educational change within the broader context of societal evolution. The advocacy and pursuit of inclusive education encompasses attitudes, beliefs, and practices beyond the classroom door. Barton (1999) asserted that inclusion represents "the

transformation of a society and its formal arrangements such as education. This means changes in the values, priorities, and policies that support and perpetuate practices of exclusion and discrimination” (as cited in Winzer, 2009, p. 206). Through the cooperative efforts and collaborative vision of school leaders and teachers, significant restructuring of an established yet inefficient service delivery model has helped move a district and a building closer to Farrell and Dunn’s long-ago dreams of justifiable, innovative, and rewarding classrooms where professional partnerships assure a better education for all.

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Looking Backward, Looking Forward: One School's Story of Co-Teaching

Extended Learning Opportunities

1. What does the continued recognition and acceptance of the need for special classes for some students indicate about the current structure of special education in terms of inclusive education?
2. In a co-teaching situation, how can you begin to break down the barriers that designate students with disabilities as being the primary responsibility of the special educator?
3. How might the selection process look differently if a "bottom up" process were used in which the teachers took the primary role. What are the benefits and consequences of using both a "top down" and a "bottom up" model for selecting co-teachers?
4. A two day workshop on co-teaching set the foundation for the teams of teachers. What types of issues or concepts do you think should be addressed in follow-up sessions and how important is sustained professional development in co-teaching?
5. What might the list of Pros and Cons of participation in co-taught classes look like for students with disabilities?
6. How does the continuum of services and placements in special education hinder or facilitate our progress towards inclusive education for ALL students?

Additional Resources:

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Reading 6: Listening First: Designing and Implementing Middle School Inclusion

Introduction by: Cathy E. Freytag, Ed.D.

Associate Dean for Education and Physical Education, Houghton College

(... and former middle school inclusive educator)

In an era of high-stakes testing, standardization, and increased accountability, how can schools effectively include students of all ability levels and provide them with appropriate access to grade-level content? This question, of significant concern to many administrators and educators, is one which the faculty, staff and administration of the Garden City, NY Middle School have addressed and answered with considerable success. While co-teaching has been a popular inclusive delivery model for many years, educators at Garden City Middle School have found ways to harness the power of effective co-teaching so that the needs of students with and without identified disabilities are met. In this article, you will see how purposefully-implemented co-teaching can enable all learners to realize their full potential and meet with academic success.

Listening First: Designing and Implementing Middle School Inclusion

Peter L. Kozik, Peter Osroff, Susan Lee and William Marr

Introduction

Inclusion at the middle school level can become problematic since secondary curricula presents increasing challenges to students. Planning time, concerns about caseload, inadequate preparation, and meager professional development opportunities loom as barriers to full inclusion (Coleman, 2000). The complexity of schooling at the secondary level involving the level of the content, the pace of instruction, the need for study skills, and standardized tests (Mastopieri & Scruggs, 2001) is another impediment to full inclusion. What happens, however, when the need for social justice for students with disabilities meets with the expectations of best practices at the middle school level? The likelihood of inclusion is strengthened (Kozik, Cooney, Vinciguerra, Gradel, & Black, 2009). When you add to this, the determination of a team of school administrators who listened carefully to staff and set in place a vision and a means to fulfilling the promise of inclusion, you have the story of success at Garden City Middle School.

This essay documents the efforts of Garden City, NY Middle School to include students with disabilities using an integrated co-teaching model in the four academic content areas. By listening to the staff and the community, by creatively using data, by developing innovative uses of the middle school schedule for collaboration and for planning, and by holding all students accountable to high standards of achievement, administrators at Garden City successfully included their students with disabilities (Goertz, 2000). Among these students' successes was the first cohort's passing of the Math B examination in high school. As a result of its efforts, Garden City has been recognized as both a blue Ribbon School by the Federal Government and a Validated Practice School by the Office of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID) in the New York State Education Department.

Communication and the Decision to Change

Prior to restructuring the school in 2004, Garden City placed its students into gifted, honors, Regents and self-contained English, Social Studies and world language (gifted, honors and Regents only) fixed academic tracks. As a result of the periodic Middle States Accreditation process, the school developed plans for where it wanted to be in five years with goals established in academic and affective domains. This planning process uncovered a need for improved communication between teachers and administration. As a result, school administrators implemented several initiatives to improve staff/faculty morale and empowerment, enhance communication and build a sense of a shared progressive and inclusive mission. Among the changes, faculty meetings were shifted away from administration-directed

agendas to faculty members presenting professional development topics to each other with faculty members usually setting the agenda (Bugeja, 2005; Hinkle & Kinney, 2008; Rourke & Hartzman, 2008). In addition, the principal instituted *Bagel Breakfast Meetings* with academic teams and non-teamed departments to establish direct, professional conversations with all teachers. Building administrators established an open door policy where teachers were encouraged to speak with administrators to share concerns and ask questions.

Opening up the decision making process provided the administrative team access to a greater range of ideas with regard to educating all students. Data analysis showed that students in self-contained programs were not meeting minimum expectations on the New York State Assessments in every subject and in every grade. Garden City also witnessed an increasing number of students being moved into self-contained programs. After data were shared with teachers, they created action plans to address the problems.

Best practice research showed that students with disabilities in regular classrooms exposed to the regular curriculum with typical peers were more likely to succeed and gain a high school diploma. In addition, middle school administrators noted that students in self-contained Grade 8 classes were never moved back into general education classes at the high school level. Special education and general education teachers and the district Math Coordinator were asked to identify patterns and provide the administrators with potential solutions. They found that students with the same scores on the NYS Assessments in Grades 3 through 5 dramatically separated in performance in future years when they were separated into self-contained classes in the middle school years. They also found a tendency for students to be moved into self-contained classes when they had academic difficulty.

Teams of teachers were developed to address shortcomings in student academic performance. The School Improvement Team was formed to provide a mechanism for faculty involvement with school decision-making. Teachers from each academic team were trained to become members of the Instructional Support Team, providing uniform representation across each grade level. Faculty members were empowered to determine the best action to help each student reach success. A Student Review Team comprised of building administrators, guidance counselors, psychologists, and the social worker met weekly to discuss interventions for at risk students. Also, the teachers' union and building administrators met regularly to work collaboratively to provide the best outcomes for students. The administrative team discovered individual teachers and departments willing to engage in co-teaching arrangements for all students and, after piloting co-taught classes in mathematics, the concept expanded to include all academic areas in the school.

Restructuring For Inclusion

The vision for including students in academic content areas required a reconfiguring of staff responsibilities at Garden City Middle School. Teachers in all grades are assigned to academic teams. Each team of core area teachers is assigned the same heterogeneous group of students. If a team is assigned students that require co-teaching, the special education co-teacher is also assigned to that team (Bray, 2005; Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007). As a result, the special education teachers travel with their students throughout the school day. Importantly, the core area subject teacher and special education teacher are both listed as the teacher of record in co-taught classes, so the responsibility for all children's academic success extends to both teachers. At the end of the school day, each special education teacher is assigned a team support class (.2 FTE) where he or she provides additional support for students with and without disabilities. This teaching assignment works well since the special educator helps instruct each co-taught class the student attended earlier in the day. Critical to the success of inclusion at Garden City, team teachers are assigned a daily meeting period when they meet to collaboratively plan lessons for all children (Keefe, Moore, & Duff, 2004; Thousand, Villa, & Nevin, 2006).

The design of inclusion meets student needs in a number of ways. Students attend a daily, 22 minute advisory program known as Home Base with members of their team. This program is designed to meet the affective needs of students by providing opportunities to build community and to interact with peers. A staff member makes the curriculum for the Home Base advisors and trains students to act as peer leaders in quality circles. Each team teacher has a Home Base. Special education teachers assigned a Home Base are assigned a heterogeneous group of children (Villa, 2003). Students in need of assistance, classified and non-classified, are able to attend academic support classes in English, math, science, social studies and Spanish. These classes provide students with an additional period of instruction on an alternating day basis. Academic support classes are scheduled to avoid a conflict with the team support classes. This process allows at risk students to attend team support as well as core area subject support on the same day so they are exposed twice a day for support in the content area in which they are struggling.

Additional supports are available for students outside content areas and classes. Students are assigned a guidance counselor who follows them for all three grades. The guidance counselors are also unique to each grade level limiting the number of teachers he or she must interact with on a daily basis; this provides the counselor a greater ability to provide support services for students. Reading and Speech teachers push into academic classrooms as consultant teachers whenever possible. They work collaboratively with the classroom teachers and administrators to serve the needs of students with special needs within general education

settings. Students with disabilities are provided with a full continuum of services, providing each student with a setting in his or her own least restrictive environment. Educational settings include co-taught classrooms, resource room support and special classes with specialized curriculum. These offerings are available for the student and his/her family to choose. All students receive developmentally appropriate amounts of homework in each grade.

What Inclusion Looks Like at Garden City

As is often the case in inclusive schools, it is impossible to discern which students are the ones with disabilities in a typical twenty-five person classroom (Pedroza, Mullen, & Whiley, 1998). Students interact with one another and with their teachers comfortably and often. Everyone appears ready to work from the start of a sixth grade class, homework out, attentive to the teacher's corrections and her direct instruction. Homework is reviewed; almost everyone volunteers an answer in this ten minute warm-up. This is followed by groups of students rotating through learning centers at which teachers and teaching assistants are stationed to provide understanding about multiplying fraction using manipulatives and other resources. Both teachers of record share the timekeeping. Both teachers share the management of all the students. They each assess the entire class of learners not just the students for whom they would have been responsible in a typically structured special education system or in a failed co-taught situation.

Just as remarkable is the fact that the general education content teacher and the special education teaching strategist are equal contributors and impossible to distinguish from one another. Visitors to Garden City's classrooms invariably misidentify which teacher is the general educator and which the special educator. Special educators regularly undertake the task of delivering content instruction in math, ELA, social studies, and science while the general educator circulates through the classroom, answering questions and keeping students on task (Mastropieri, Scruggs, Graetz, Norland, Gardizi, & McDuffie, 2005; Villa, Thousand, Nevin, & Liston, 2005). Students regard both teachers interchangeably; the special educator is another teacher in the classroom. Teachers remark to visitors how co-teaching has invigorated them professionally. Fluidity is typical of the experience of teaching and learning in Garden City. Labels are all but non-existent; students move in and out of learning situations purely on the strength of their work and their ability to continue to take responsibility.

Working Toward Success

Restructuring from the middle in Garden City has prompted changes throughout the district. The elementary schools in Garden City still maintain segregated classes. The High School on the other hand has had to adapt to the waves of well-prepared, high achieving students with disabilities. High school credit courses in math and science have been

reformatted from honors classes to accelerated classes. Students are now able to self select for these accelerated classes with assistance and recommendations from parents and teachers (Diffily, 2004). Prior to this change, students were pre-placed into fixed academic tracks with little opportunity for change in placement.

Although the drive for greater inclusion has resulted in increased opportunities for students with disabilities, two classes housing less than .02 % of a population of 1,053 students remain in special classes. Students from self-contained elementary settings in the district are invited to visit co-taught fully integrated middle school classrooms before entering sixth grade. Thus, the focus on greater inclusion has created the opportunity to accommodate all learners more successfully. Students who choose not to participate in the integrated content area classes in Garden City may opt to attend a Life Skills Program. The program functions within large, centrally located classrooms which were converted to resemble apartments with kitchen appliances, living/dining furniture, and sublet breakout mini classrooms that enable small groups of students to receive individualized instruction. In spite of the option, inclusion at the middle school has led to a dramatic decrease in students placed in these self-contained classes since very few children with special needs are unable to remain in a regular classroom when appropriate supports and accommodations are provided (P. Osroff, personal communication, March 1, 2010). Since an inclusive setting remains a choice for students, all middle school aged children with disabilities in the Garden City District attend its middle school.

The sustainability of the inclusion model at Garden City Middle School was cultivated by the administrative team's continuing efforts to listen and respond to its staff. The success of the model eventually brought other teacher volunteers into the mix as the program expanded. Teachers mentored each other through this paradigm shift. Additionally, district consultants were used to fine tune the approaches at the Middle School (Wilson, 2006). Teachers asked for and received the assistance they felt they needed. Teachers attended workshops and conferences on co-teaching. Inter-visitation across classrooms and across schools was encouraged. In the end, the teachers working together and the success of their students led to their embracing the new model.

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Listening First: Designing and Implementing Middle School Inclusion

Extended Learning Opportunities

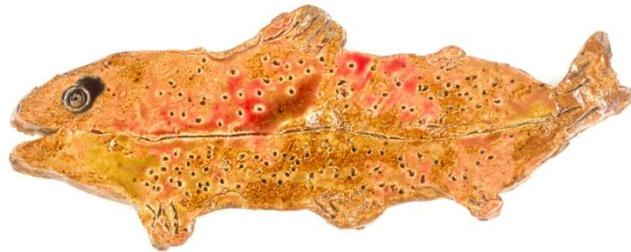
- 1) What aspects of the co-teaching model at Garden City Middle School were most notable to you? How did these elements contribute to the success of co-teaching in this district?
- 2) How did administrators at Garden City Middle School facilitate an inclusive climate that led to the success of the co-teaching model in this district? What steps might elementary schools administrators and teachers take to help secondary students transition?
- 3) How can a well-implemented co-teaching model advance meaningful and effective inclusion?
- 4) What aspects of the inclusion model at Garden City Middle School might inform the development of a successful co-teaching program in your district? What potential barriers should also be considered, and how might they be addressed?
- 5) How might a well-implemented co-teaching program align with your district's Response to Intervention model?

Additional resources on this topic:

Burello, L. (Producer), Burello, J. (Producer), & Friend, M. (Producer). (2005). *The power of 2: Making a difference through co-teaching* (2nd ed.) [Video disc recording]. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, Elephant Rock Productions.

Friend, M. (2008). *Co-teach! A handbook for creating and sustaining effective classroom partnerships in inclusive schools*. Greensboro, NC: Marilyn Friend, Inc.

McLeskey, J., & Waldron, N. (2000). *Inclusive schools in action: Making differences ordinary*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.



Reading 7: An Administrator's View of Inclusion as a Parent of a Child with Special Needs

Introduced by: Barb Klein, parent and Director of the Parent Centers at The Advocacy Center in Rochester, NY.

Charlie's story is an inspiring one and ultimately one of success because of several individuals who went above and beyond what was expected of them in their professional roles as educators. It is also a story of success because his parents were integrally involved as collaborators in finding, creating, and advocating for a program that would support Charlie's strengths, challenge him appropriately, and accommodate his needs so that he could learn and achieve all that he was capable of. Had these individuals not come together on his behalf, it is quite likely that Charlie would not be a young adult who is currently living independently and positively participating in and contributing to his community. Barriers were encountered in the very system designed to support students with disabilities, but with perseverance, these barriers were overcome. Dr. Manaseri identifies several challenges that still exist within New York schools and encourages us to work together to improve upon these issues. I concur with the authors in suggesting that "we would all do well to become... co-conspirators for the benefit of the many children with special needs who require professionals, including administrators, (to make) a special sense of commitment to meeting those needs wherever and whenever possible."

An Administrator's View of Inclusion as a Parent of a Child with Special Needs

Christopher Manaseri, Eun-Joo Kim and Jie Zhang

Introduction

The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC), which has widely used standards for school leader candidates, comprehensively addresses the importance of promoting *all* students' successful learning (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008). Administrative roles for successful inclusion are crucial (Voltz & Collins, 2010). Lack of administrators' support is one of biggest barriers to implement inclusion (Valeo, 2008; Worrell, 2008). However, administrators have also expressed their own challenges to support inclusion such as overwhelming paper work (CEC, 2001; Garrison-Wade, Sobel, & Fulmer, 2007), lack of understanding CEC (Council for Exceptional Children) standards (Fiedler & Haren, 2009), lack of finding well-trained personnel and needs for more concrete adapted curricular materials (Carter & Hughes, 2006).

Administrators also view their main role to support inclusion as making sure all paper work is correctly done (Valeo, 2008), while teachers view the important aspects of administrators' supports as more comprehensive such as encouraging equal leadership among teachers (Hines, 2008), handling subtle organizational barriers (Darrow, 2009), or advocacy from principals (Garrison-Wade, Sobel, & Fulmer, 2007). Meanwhile, not many studies have identified administrators' perspectives about working with parents for successful inclusion. This essay presents a unique story of a school administrator who is a parent of a child with special needs. This story will describe how inclusion is much more successful when administrators practice a deeper understanding of parents' needs.

Charlie

Charlie is a college-educated young adult living independently with minimal parental support in the greater Rochester community. But that was not the outcome many who knew him would have predicted twenty years ago when he entered public schooling, despite the fact that his father was a new school administrator with more than a dozen years of classroom and school counseling experience. Along the sometimes joyous, sometimes arduous journey Charlie took through local public schools from kindergarten to two and four year publically supported higher education institutions, there were both barriers and barrier-breaking heroes who made the path what it was. Charlie's journey provides some sense of what works and what does not in a recent real-life experience in school systems that continue to struggle to provide quality inclusive education for thousands of children in central and western New York.

We might have seen the trouble coming. Charlie, a paraplegic kindergartener with spina bifida, was incontinent of bowel and bladder and would need assistance with personal care during the school day. His first school nurse found the need challenging to meet because she seemed afraid that she would hurt the child in the routines required for his daily care. Thankfully, we had the support of a principal with a background in school psychology and experience as an administrator in a non-traditional school setting for children with emotional disturbance. He provided professional development and patient problem-solving so that the basic needs of the child were met. Charlie could attend class with age-appropriate peers, and become indoctrinated to the routine of a typical public school experience. Charlie's principal was one of the heroes whose own experience with children with differences helped pave the way for Charlie with veteran school staff members who were not used to dealing with the differences Charlie presented. That the same basic issue of continence would represent the first and almost insurmountable barrier to Charlie's college experience thirteen years down the line is a sad commentary on the ability of the P-16 system to function as a system for students with disabilities, ironically those who may need optimal systemic support the most.

Charlie's kindergarten teacher was a developmental educator ahead of her time. She understood the need to allow children to grow and to learn the skills they would need to interact successfully with peers, with teachers, and with text in order to establish a foundation for success in school. The system where Charlie started had toyed for years with a supported kindergarten and a supported first grade. The system allowed its youngest children to spend as many as four years in early childhood environments equivalent to what would amount to kindergarten and first grade for children travelling through school at a traditional pace. His teacher knew that Charlie needed more time to be ready for the curriculum and the social interaction that would lie ahead, and she was bold enough to suggest that he spend a second year in kindergarten rather than move on with his peers or be subjected to an early tracking system in support classes that might have doomed him to a more restrictive special education setting. Her wisdom and bravery in suggesting a second year spent with her in a looped environment where she knew his strengths and needs, may well have paved the way for his future success in that school and beyond. The kindergarten teacher's insight into early childhood education, and her willingness to personally own Charlie's success made a significant difference in what worked for him in the long run.

Many educators recognize fourth grade as a pivotal juncture in a child's readiness to succeed in school. Charlie's fourth grade experience was marked by interactions with three individuals in particular, whose sometimes conflicting viewpoints about the challenges he presented proved to be pivotal in his future success. His classroom teacher was a local resident active in the community and a teacher with a reputation for high expectations of her students. That she would hold those same high expectations for Charlie was critical and much

appreciated. At the same time, Charlie was beginning to chafe at the level of support the CSE had recommended for his first few years of schooling, specifically a 1:1 aide in support of his physical needs. At this critical juncture, the relationship of the aide to the student became problematic to the point that we, as parents, felt we needed to advocate for Charlie to be allowed to do more on his own, to be free of the ever-watchful and sometimes domineering eye of the aide, and to assert his emerging independence as a learner and as a child beginning to be ready for early adolescence. Learning to let go was something the system needed to do to provide Charlie with the environment in which he might be recognized by his peers as someone capable of interaction without constant adult intervention.

Also at this critical juncture, his relationship with his “self-contained” special education teacher became a challenge. Charlie was “mainstreamed” for most classes, but needed more rigorous support in math, and the model in place removed him from his peers for a portion of the day, to spend time in a smaller, more specialized math class with other children with special needs (who were not his self-perceived social peers). The result proved problematic. Charlie struggled in his relationship with the teacher who had been assigned the primary responsibility for his IEP, ironically the very person who was assigned to be his hero, his mentor, his chief advocate, to the point that the greatest frustration he experienced in school at this time was not with the general education personnel, but the special education personnel in both his teacher and his aide. Fortunately, calm heads and a sense of perspective prevailed that kept him from contentious relationships that threatened failure. We might all learn to keep such a sense of perspective when dealing with our neediest children – that special educators are most responsible to support and appropriately challenge the students in their charge, not to become the very barriers to their success. The fact that Charlie could not yet tie his own shoes or master the multiplication tables was perceived to be a barrier to his advancement beyond the critical fourth grade juncture, not by his general education teacher, but by the special education staff!

At the same time that Charlie was asserting his emerging independence from the confines of his special educators and the system he had once needed but perhaps now needed less, one of the true heroes of his elementary experience crossed his path in adaptive physical education. Charlie’s teacher was a Cortland football player and physical educator whose commitment to working with children with special needs manifested itself in the founding of a weekend wheelchair sports camp at Ithaca College in which Charlie was an eager and engaged participant. Being hungry for male role models in his elementary experience, and an avid sports fan, Charlie responded marvelously to the interventions in gym class and outside. His teacher found unique ways to include Charlie and others in physical education and activity that encouraged a positive self image about Charlie’s abilities, rather than focus on his limitations. His enthusiasm, his commitment above and beyond the school day, and his sense of helping children with special needs discover all they could do as opposed to what everyone assumed

they could not and became lessons that this talented special educator gave not only his students, but to their parents (this author included) and his professional peers as well.

Less encouraging in special areas was Charlie's initial experience with instrumental music. Charlie and other students with disabilities were screened out of participation through auditions and assessments that systematically discouraged their participation in an area that could be highly individualized but that, perhaps because of the public nature of the performance of such ensembles, discourages difference and an appreciation for varying talent development. Fortunately, his parents prevailed in advocating for and allowing his participation, and by the time Charlie was in high school in a different district, he was playing trumpet in a marching band, being pushed down the street in his chair by another student with cerebral palsy! It might not have helped that band win any competitions or pageants, but it surely made a difference in the quality of school life and experience for the two young men in question. And at the end of the day, isn't that what school is supposed to be about?

By the time Charlie had moved to middle school, both he and his father were in a different district, one challenged financially, but one with a strong sense of teamwork and commitment to individual student success nonetheless. A newly established middle school model that involved an extraordinarily high level of teaming among general and special educators saw each student's needs attended to regularly by interdisciplinary teams devoted to the success of each of the 45 or so students in a grade level. Testament to the commitment to the effective integration of students with disabilities into inclusive settings was an effort by his science teacher to include Charlie in a winter field trip to Cummings Nature Center. He involved his own family (not ours) in constructing a safety sled that would allow Charlie the opportunity to attend the same outdoor winter experience as his classmates. Charlie's science teacher and other members of the middle school team not only allowed and encouraged students with disabilities to participate in the general education program, they expected and demanded them to meet the same high standards of participation and success as all other students. Despite the fact that these teams functioned in the smallest K-12 district in the Finger Lakes, they did and continue to produce excellent student results in state-wide assessments and the school continues to enjoy strong parental and community support.

By the time Charlie entered high school, both he and his father had once again changed districts. In high school, Charlie continued to receive excellent support for his special needs from a variety of individuals, general and special area teachers, but perhaps most significantly from the special educator with whom most students with learning disabilities interacted in that school. This special educator created a "Learning Center" model for the provision of multiple support services to all students in the high school who were in need of special education in inclusive settings. The model included a double classroom of welcoming design, staffed by both

general and special education teachers throughout the school day as well as before and after it. Students with IEPs received Resource Room support through the Learning Center, throughout the school day from special education teachers, tutors, aides, and/or general education teachers assigned to the Learning Center. The teacher's belief in creating the most desirable learning environment in the school specifically for those students who needed extra support transformed the image of special education there and created an environment where every student's individual needs were recognized and supported without stigma. His long-term commitment to that school, that Learning Center, and to those students sends an enduring message of commitment and caring that is too seldom recognized in schools where every day, every year, other teachers make that same commitment.

Also part of Charlie's high school experience was an experimental year at the local BOCES Career and Technical Education Center. There, Charlie became exposed to a career path that would allow him opportunities to consider a college education in the communications field, as well as the opportunity to be exposed to a different clientele of students and a different expectation about demonstrating hands-on learning. His experience allowed him to interact with students from a broader geographical area, students with similar career goals, students with greater socio-economic and racial diversity, and with adults who were able to see beyond the limitations of his disabilities to varying degrees. Somewhat ironically, however, the nature of the classroom instruction he received there and the physical design of the learning labs were not always conducive to the challenges posed by a student with physical disability. The lack of effective resource room support for students at BOCES-housed programs themselves, and the difficulty bridging the gap between home-school support and the needs of special education students taking career and technical education are barriers we would do well to continue to attempt to eradicate. Charlie only completed one year of a possible two-year program at BOCES, but that one year was sufficient to allow him to complete a sequence leading to a diploma.

After earning a high school Regents diploma, Charlie enrolled in and enjoyed a successful experience at a local community college attending classes for a full day on alternate days of the week, allowing him the opportunity to minimize transportation issues and the concomitant difficulty in arranging for services related to his continence issues. As the locus of control for such health-related issues shifts dramatically from the K-12 system to community-based support in higher education, it was difficult to arrange a transition which was minimally supported by even good special needs coordinators on college campuses. Charlie was required to see the Dean of Student Services regarding the provision of space on campus for use by a visiting nurse so that he could successfully attend classes for more than half a day at a time. Such issues as adequate private space, parking for visiting health aides, and the coordination of services with college personnel almost as inadequately prepared to deal with students with

special needs as was Charlie's first school nurse a decade and half previously, almost precluded his return to a second day of classes. On his first day, he was referred to the Dean's Office by the campus health center for what medical staff members were willing to consider a student conduct issue in terms of cleanliness and adequate personal hygiene!

After successfully completing an Associate's degree within two years, Charlie transferred to a four-year state school in the area, and again faced significant challenges in transition. Fortunately by this time, his parents had learned enough themselves to seek the support of an advocacy agency and the provision of case management services. Charlie's case manager from CP Rochester helped coordinate home health care services on campus that allowed Charlie the opportunity to live in a handicap accessible dormitory room (tellingly, though, only one of four such rooms available). Despite success in establishing routine daily living care, health issues, including behavioral health issues that many typical students face in dormitory living, caused Charlie to contract pneumonia by the end of this first year on campus. It was a serious enough situation that we moved him home, reduced his course load and had him finish his Bachelor's degree as a commuter student. Even then, difficulties around the physical accessibility of classrooms, and the inflexibility of certain professors to make modifications to curriculum for required subjects posed challenges for a student in a wheelchair. This is not what we would have anticipated from in a college with both a school of professions, including education and human development and educational administration majors, as well as a school with health science and physical education as major areas of study. We all still have much to learn.

So, with two decades worth of experience as both the parent of a student with multiple significant disabilities and as an administrator working both inside and outside of the school settings where my son attended, what have I learned about the requisite skills and aptitudes necessary for the full promotion of inclusive education? First and foremost, effective inclusive education requires an understanding and caring classroom professional who sees the possibility in every child. It requires the support of administrators who can look beyond placating staff members who may be asked to do more than usual or to do things in ways that differ from the norm. However, since few states require a special education course before obtaining credential and license, lack of special education content may limit principals' ability to fully understand the field and to provide sufficient support (McHatton, Boyer, Shaunessy, & Terry, 2010). Thus, appropriate preparation, including foundational knowledge of the academic, social/emotional, and functional needs for students with disabilities is necessary to ensure the effective leadership, which leads to schools' response to inclusion (Villa, Thousand, Meyers, & Nevin, 1996).

In addition, inclusion requires the cultivation of relationships that extend beyond contractual obligations and compliance with the law to relationships that promote caring for the long-term well-being of students who do not necessarily fit the mold of what one was trained to deal with or what one encounters in one's own personal life. Effective inclusive education also requires parents to be willing to engage as partners when they can and when they must, to challenge the status quo as adversaries to a system that too easily dismisses difference and insists on conformity to artificial and too often absurd and arbitrary standards. When one or both of the parents of the child with a disability are also school administrators, there is an additional edge to the relationships with teachers, special educators, support staff and even fellow administrators. During one job interview, I was accused of using my handicapped son as both a sword and shield. That comment has stuck with me for more than twenty years. Charlie and I used his disability and our intimate awareness of his needs as well as his rights as a student with a disability in publically funded institutions to lead the way for others, sometimes attacking the status quo as inadequate (using the sword), and in defending his rights and ours as parents (using the shield) in promoting necessary change that would benefit not only him but all other students with disabilities who followed him in these institutions.

As an administrator with a child with a disability, I had both an additional responsibility and challenge in negotiating relationships. I saw to it that my son's needs were met in challenging the capacity of the system, while also supporting those within the system who were providers of services that I might recognize more than others needed improvement or reinforcement. By and large, I look back on my time as a school administrator in New York with pride in having moved some school organizations to look at the needs of students with disabilities from a more personalized perspective (when the boss's son is the student in need, people often pay attention, begrudgingly or not- that doesn't matter). I also look back with some chagrin at how difficult it was for even a school superintendent, even a BOCES superintendent, to negotiate the labyrinthine system of (non)support we have created between VESID and K-12, much less P-16, in a network under a single structure within the State Education Department. In the end, I rest comfortably knowing that if we do, in fact, make the path by walking it (as Paulo Freire says), having helped my son "walk" his path through the system as both his parent and his administrator, we have helped make a path that might also work for others.

Since federal legislation mandates parental involvement throughout the process of assessment and service delivery (IDEA, 2004; NCLB, 2001), collaborative relationships have to be established and maintained between parents and school professionals to benefit the student (Shelden, Angell, Stoner, & Roseland, 2010). Without talking with parents and families, listening to their stories, happiness, dreams, and needs, it's impossible to build trust and better

understanding. Perhaps one can sum it up best as contributing to a conspiracy for success of all children despite what other professionals with fewer tolerances may commit or omit in responding to typical students. That being said, we would all do well to become such co-conspirators for the benefit of the many children with special needs who require professionals, including administrators, to have with a special sense of commitment to meeting those needs wherever and whenever possible.

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An Administrator's View of Inclusion as a Parent of a Child with Special Needs

Extended Learning Opportunities

1. Were there common themes which you can identify in the people/things that contributed to Charlie's success?
2. What barriers were identified that you as a professional see ways to overcome? To what extent were you surprised by any of these barriers and did you find irony in any of the barriers that were identified?
3. What role did the "heroes" play in Charlie's success?
4. Describe what you believe was the most essential concept or content described in this article. Explain its relevance and importance to teachers and administrators.
5. How will what you've learned by reading this story influence you in your role and what changes, if any, will you make? Alternatively, what current practices does it validate that you will continue to use?

Additional Resources

For more information about working collaboratively with parents, contact your local Special Education Parent Center:

NYS Parent Centers: <http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/specialed/techassist/parentcenters.htm>



Reading 8: Billy's Story: The Power of Collaboration

Introduced by: Marie Cianca, Ed.D., Assistant Professor in the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education at St. John Fisher College.

Although this story happens to be about a young man in a district-based BOCES class, Billy's story presents possibilities for any student with special needs in any elementary school. From my perspective as a school practitioner and teacher educator, the power in Billy's story is the incredible bond between parent, teacher, child and school. In Billy's school, a collaborative and welcoming environment blossomed from the school's genuine care and concern for Billy and his family. In return, Billy's family became connected to his school in ways that we hope would be universally anticipated and achieved. Will it be much longer before Billy's story is typical and Julie's advice is merely a pleasant reminder of what is? Whether you are a school principal, aspiring leader, parent advocate or teacher candidate, the wise words in the following article describe how to build positive and meaningful relationships between schools and families. As Julie says, "Having a school and a team that believes wholeheartedly in meaningful inclusion goes a long way in supporting a child who has a sense of pride in his abilities and presence."

Billy's Story: The Power of Collaboration

Julie Buick and Stephanie Scism

Looking back over the last 6 years brings tears to my eyes. Billy started Kindergarten not even being able to attend lunch in the cafeteria due to the overstimulation and unexpected situation of the environment. Community and inclusion were only ideas and dreams that we envisioned for Billy but seemed impossible to achieve. Had it not been for strong communication with our team about our vision as a family for Billy's future and their willingness to engage in the efforts to make it happen, I'm not sure where we would be today.

One thing is certain over the last six years. We all have worked hard and consistently with one another to make huge strides in Billy's education, independence, maturity, inclusion and community outcomes. Billy was embraced by an entire community of students, teachers, and administrators. He was included in specials, assemblies, after school activities, and within the 5th grade as a whole. Was it even an option not to be? Having a school and team that believes wholeheartedly in meaningful inclusion goes a long way in supporting a child who has a sense of pride in his abilities and presence. Billy's excitement for life is contagious and everyone who gets to know him can't help but want to be around him, to hear his humor and laugh. I've often heard teachers say that it has been an honor to have Billy in class. They talk about how he puts his all into everything he does. He lives life out loud.

As a parent of two children with developmental disabilities my goal is to create a community where everyone feels they belong. At Dewitt Road Elementary that is exactly what happened. We are sad to be leaving our District-based BOCES program at Dewitt Road Elementary School in Webster, NY. However, we know that we have the tools for meaningful inclusion wherever we go.

-Julie Buick

Julie is the mother of three children, two of whom have developmental disabilities including Fragile X and Autism. Julie is also an Educational Advocate and Trainer in the Rochester area. She has been helping to prepare future elementary and special education teachers through sharing her story and best practices for community inclusion through The Advocacy Center's Speakers Bureau in collaboration with St. John Fisher College. Her experience at DeWitt Road Elementary School in Webster, NY reaped many mutual benefits. Her experiences are helpful and authentic tips for principals and teachers working towards inclusive practices. The following advice explains what Julie's experiences have shown.

What Parents See As Successful Inclusion

All parents want their children, regardless of their abilities and disabilities, to be successful academically, feel a sense of pride in their accomplishments, have meaningful community inclusion and outcomes. Making this happen begins with strong communication among classroom teachers, paraprofessionals and administrators.

Vision is key. When a vision is developed by each family for their child, it asks: What does a family wish to accomplish with their child's school career towards future outcomes? Vision aligns a family's goals for the future taking into account the IEP: Present levels of Educational Performance, current level of abilities, strengths, needs, and what needs to be added to make gains towards future outcomes. Like vision and goal setting, the IEP is a work in progress that needs to be reshaped to meet the child where he or she is and build upon skills and strengths in advancing toward the long term goals.

Creating meaningful inclusion and community starts from the top down. Bridge builders are everywhere. They are the people who ask, "How can we work together to make this happen?" They know the value of out-of-box thinking and how it leads to positive outcomes for all. In order for inclusion to happen, administrators need to believe in the philosophy, live by it and endorse it in schools. Administrators need to be able to take the fear of the unknown out of special education and replace it with acceptance and understanding. Looking to families to help facilitate this can be a win/win situation. Parents are allies and often are willing to dedicate their time to help educate professionals, parents and students about their child's individual needs, abilities, and learning style. More and more parents in our communities are taking on the role of providing disability awareness and training. Implementing the vision for their child prompts them into this active role to better prepare communities to accept and include their children.

Strategically setting up classroom environments is another way to successfully create meaningful inclusion that works for everyone. Administrators will want to help students and teachers understand a student's way of learning or why they need a specific accommodation. Matching teacher styles with students is important in creating responsive classroom environments. It is also helpful to bring others on board by sharing articles and workshops that help teachers diversify their styles and methods. Planning and preparing helps students understand that inclusion is not special treatment but rather providing what a student needs for him or her to be successful in a particular learning environment. Open dialogue is key to this. Let students know it is okay to ask questions and learn so that all can feel confident and included.

Classroom observations and graduated transitions prior to beginning a new classroom environment can put a student's and parents' fears at ease. Transitions into new environments are often one of the most difficult things a student and parent has to do. Understanding and guiding families through this process strengthens the teacher-family relationship and builds trust for one another. The opportunity to see classrooms in advance minimizes fears and allows families to imagine their children in a certain setting. All this helps prepare the student and parents to become a part of their new community by meeting, asking questions, sharing

information, and helping to set up the environment. This is the foundation for successful inclusion.

Home communication is an essential to any program that supports students with disabilities. Sharing information on key aspects of a student's day helps create a sense of community with the family. For a student in a more restrictive environment who also participates in many school learning opportunities, communication is helpful for families. It allows families to receive ongoing information on friendships that are being built or activities that are successful which can be built upon at home. For families, being in the loop in their child's day is priceless and often leads to better communication with their child and more meaningful on target conversations with educators.

No other tool bridges home and school more strongly than team meetings. During an effective team meeting, outcomes are valued and set collaboratively. Actions to meet these valued outcomes are prioritized. Teachers and parents share new information, ask questions of each other and contribute answers. Team meetings also create time to discuss inclusive opportunities in school and out. This is a time for key players on the team to discuss next steps or any concerns while attempting new activities and raising the bar for all.

The student's voice must also be heard. Often students are overlooked when decisions are being made about their curriculum or future. Students have a lot to add to conversations regarding meaningful inclusion. Not all students want the same outcomes. Some may have strengths in the area of the arts while others value science. Making informed decisions based on student's strengths can be key to their success. Students, if appropriate, should attend their IEP and team meetings so that they can begin to steer their own interests, vision and outcomes. After all, investment in inclusive education begins with the student. As much as we need to prepare the environment and support the student, we must also prepare the student for the environment. The techniques and tools required to effectively achieve this will depend on the individual student. Preparation might include social stories, observations, transition with visits, assessing individual interests/strengths, and listening to what the student wants.

Parents are the expert on their child and the one consistent force in the child's life. Valuing parents input can lead to strong meaningful inclusion and positive outcomes. When parents and educators work together on behalf of a child and a vision, the opportunities and successes multiply!

Teacher and Administrator Support

Successful inclusion in the school community does not happen accidentally. A large part of Billy's success is the responsiveness and purposeful actions of his teacher. Another part of Billy's success is due to support from his school's administrators. When teachers and

administrators think sensitively and strategically about inclusion, so many powerful practices can be developed and applied.

When Billy's teacher began teaching at DeWitt Road Elementary School, she only knew a couple of people at the school and she was not aware of school procedures or philosophy. Instinctively, Billy's teacher felt that she had to meet with the principal. She wanted to find out what the principal's philosophy was and how inclusive practices played out in this school.

I have been the teacher in the Dewitt Road District Based classroom for four years. Several steps are taken prior to my students walking into a general education classroom. At the start of my first year at Dewitt Road, the principal and I met to formulate the steps for successful inclusion opportunities. An inclusive opportunity is successful when the student with autism, the general education teacher and the general education students all benefit from the experience.

-Stephanie Scism

Billy's teacher's instinct to meet and plan with the principal is an effective strategy in any school implementing inclusive practices and programs. Before school starts, whenever possible, special education teachers should initiate a meeting with the building principal to discuss their assigned students, highlighting student strengths and identifying opportunities for inclusion. At the meeting, special education teachers should be prepared with the academic levels, strengths/interests and characteristics of students being included in the general education setting. Prior to the meeting thought should be given to grade levels and settings (i.e. core subjects, art, music) for students. Also, teacher should be prepared to discuss the students' goals in the inclusion settings as well as specific support that paraprofessionals or teacher assistants will provide to support students in these settings.

The initiative of the principal is important, too. Most general education teachers are open to working with any student when they are given information in advance and included in the process. Early collaboration with general education teachers helps with plans for inclusive practices in the classroom and provides a forum for "what ifs" or potential concerns that can be problem-solved upfront. Discussion should include class size enrollment, potential for heterogeneous grouping, classroom resources and materials and instructional strategies that encourage success for all students.

Once potential settings have been decided, special education teachers and general education teachers should meet to discuss students with special needs and agreed upon goals. This is the time where Billy's teacher sets up a means of correspondence to regularly communicate with the general education teacher about student progress and any concerns. A simple form or progress journal can be used or, if any common planning is available, a regular

meeting time can be established so that any anxiety on the part of the general education teacher can be diminished.

When inclusion of a student begins, the special educator can help the general education teacher by together reviewing the child's IEP and explaining what kinds of program support are included in the child's individualized plan. Understanding on the part of the general education teacher is one step towards successful inclusion and understanding on the part of general education students is crucial, as well.

The special education teacher should plan a 15-20 minute awareness lesson to be held for the general education students in any inclusive classroom. At that time, the special education teacher and the general education teacher should present together to the class. The presentation can include a brief profile of any student that will be joining their classroom. Books or stories that best describe the student's disability can be shared (i.e. autism, down syndrome). The teachers should provide a question/answer period for the students and encourage questions to be asked. When possible, have the student with special needs join the class after the Q/A period. If there is a paraprofessional working with the student, introduce the paraprofessional to the class and have the paraprofessional join the class with the student.
From Stephanie Scism:

If my student is joining a 4th grade art class, I go to that art session to do the awareness lesson. I always start the lesson by asking, "Does anyone know someone who has autism?" I have yet to be in a classroom where no one raised a hand. At least 3-4 hands go up. What is nice to see is there isn't any resistance to sharing or an embarrassment to say they have a family member with autism. The hands go right up! The students talk about their sisters, neighbor or another student at Dewitt Road who was in their class at one time.

For my first 2-3 awareness lessons, I used a book I purchased that talked about special education students in a general school setting. After my readings, I always asked the students for questions. Their questions made me realize the contents of the book I read to them did not prepare them to understand the characteristics that might be displayed by a student with autism. I decided to write my own story that is more specific to defining autism characteristics.

After the story, the general education teacher and I have a question/answer period. Then the student who will be joining the class comes to the room for a brief visit with the paraprofessional who will be supporting the student during inclusion. If a communication device is used we give a demonstration of the use of the device for all to see.

Before students join a general education setting, it is helpful to arrange a brief visit so the student has an idea of his/her classroom and gets an opportunity to explore the setting in advance. In some cases, where students are reluctant, he or she might start by staying brief periods and work up to longer periods of time in the new setting. Here is where the ongoing

communication with the general education teacher works well. With prearranged meetings or established written communication, the general educator and special educator can problem solve any issues that arise and develop strategies together that effectively support the student.

Some students in district-based BOCES classes do not participate for a full day in general education for a variety of reasons. For students with autism, they may be in need of related services or other specialized activities that are delivered in the special class setting. In these cases, it is often feasible to begin partnerships between general education students and students with special needs. Peer mentoring or buddy programs can be established so that general education students can take part in a variety of activities with students receiving special education support. Again, this starts with an awareness lesson for general education students. Oftentimes, there is so much interest that students take turns coming to the special class setting or buddying up with students in the cafeteria or for school-wide activities and clubs!

Buddy opportunities usually start with a structured activity and once the students get to know each other, the structure can be altered or relaxed as the teacher sees fit. Students can play board games together, complete art projects or be reading buddies. In the cafeteria, students can pair up to ensure that students with special needs are not isolated and have plenty of opportunities to be social with their peers.

As a teacher, Stephanie is working diligently to support inclusive practices in this partnership between a public elementary school and the local BOCES. The BOCES and school administrators are working hard to support the growth of an inclusive school culture, too. This manifests itself in several ways.

From Julie's point of view, when she walks in to DeWitt Road Elementary School, she knows she is welcomed. Staff in the front office greet her pleasantly and know she is Billy's mother. They smile and are happy to see her. Julie is also welcomed by all the teachers in the school who work with Billy. They were initially excited to meet Billy's parents and, during the growth of his inclusive opportunities, made sure to welcome the family to school and community events. The physical education teacher made a point to invite Billy's family to special activities and included Billy in countywide events. Even the teacher that supervises the "lunch buddies" made sure she met Billy's parents and shared positive anecdotes about Billy. This type of support makes such a positive difference.

For program consistency, administrators have demonstrated flexibility in assigning paraprofessionals to Billy and other students receiving such services. Stephanie, with administrative support, was able to adjust paraprofessional assignments to best meet the needs of each student. In fact, Julie says that ongoing contact from Billy's paraprofessional

through his daily Home/School Communications binder has regularly added to her knowledge about school successes and accomplishments.

Program reviews are collaborative sessions with none of the pitfalls of an adversarial or detached relationship between parent and school. In team meetings, the BOCES administrator makes sure she is present when needed. She facilitates problem solving, question and answer sessions and gathers input between teachers and family. When an opportunity is posed, the team makes a commitment to figure out how to make it happen smoothly and positively. Julie's message to families and educators:

I view life as a journey with many learning experiences along the way. Billy may be leaving his current BOCES District Based Program at Dewitt Road Elementary but the journey continues with many new learning experiences ahead of us. I will be forever grateful to Dewitt Road School and our BOCES team for providing Billy and his classmates with an unconditional sense of community and belonging. Having experienced it first hand in the school, I know what acceptance feels like inside and out.

Billy began his journey at Dewitt Road unsure of his own strengths and abilities and unable to cope with what seems like a simple task to others: eating lunch in the cafeteria. Inclusion wasn't something I said out loud back in those days. I just wanted Billy to be able to make academic strides while being with others who had similar needs. I wanted him to be safe and comfortable. As we became more educated on who Billy was, and as we began to see him outside his label of Autism, we began to see his strengths and abilities along with his needs. This is when our "Vision" for his future became clear. It also became clear that my husband and I needed to move outside our comfort zone just as much as Billy did. We began to use the word inclusion not only when discussing school but also when looking into our community. The word inclusion changed our life and Billy's life all for the better and it all started with the cafeteria with one step at a time.

Had we not invited inclusion into our lives and had our team at the school not been willing participants, would Billy feel acceptance and belonging in the hallways at Dewitt Road? Would his peers genuinely wave and say hi to him as he walked down the hallways like they do today? Would he have been invited to eat lunch every day with his 5th grade peers this year? Would he have gotten a note from a girl in 3rd grade which he kept in his pocket saying, "Billy, you're the best"? Would he have mastered the monkey bars with other recess buddies encouraging him on? Would he have been invited to be part of extracurricular activities such as a school wide race supported by his adaptive PE teacher and General Education PE Teacher? Would he have gone on that after school gymnastic opportunity? This, again, was Billy's PE teacher inviting him, knowing that Billy loved everything about gymnastics and had been working to master his handstand. One thing is for sure. Billy is consistent in mastering the handstand with his peer buddies as spectators all witnessed! Would we have experienced Open House? Would we have seen Billy waiting so proudly and patiently year after year to introduce his whole family to his Art, PE, Science, and Music teacher? I'll leave that question up to you to decide.

Just when we thought things couldn't get any more exciting for Billy, a true testament of Dewitt Roads dedication and acceptance of all their students was shown. This year, Billy was invited to

represent his class in all school wide assemblies as flag bearer. Our Billy! The same Billy who couldn't eat lunch in the cafeteria due to overstimulation and his anxiety around others! He was now front and center before the entire student body and faculty holding our country's flag. What a proud moment for us and for him. What a true sense of accomplishment for his dedicated team. Billy was part of "the elite" so I say but it was really proof that he was part of his school community.

As Sally Field said so nicely "You like me, you really like me!" That is what life and our journey is all about, being liked, being happy, being accepted for who you are and being able to contribute in a meaningful way to the whole! Our vision for Billy is becoming a reality one year at a time. We know we still have a long way to go. As we leave Dewitt Road and enter into our next journey with Billy, we know that Billy is a well rounded 6th grader with many strength, abilities, needs and lots of humor and friendship to give. We are okay with moving on in our new journey and looking forward to all the life experiences that come our way. We are confident that we have the tools to establish true, meaningful inclusion where ever we go. I hope those around us are up for it because I know Billy and our family members are!

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Billy's Story: The Power of Collaboration

Extended Learning Opportunities

1. Julie had several recommendations for schools. Compare the importance of these recommendations and discuss how they might look in your school or your classroom.
2. Think about Stephanie's efforts and the efforts of teachers you have known who collaborated to support all learners. What stands out to you? How do these efforts reinforce an inclusive school culture?
3. Billy was placed in a district-based BOCES class because his home district had no similar program. What should the future direction of BOCES be? What can principals do to ensure that parents have inclusive options in their home school district?

Resources:

Davis, C., & Yang, A. (2005). *Parents & teachers working together*. Strategies for teachers series. Turners Falls, MA: Northeast Foundation for Children.

Halvorsen, A. T., & Neary, T. (2009). *Building inclusive schools: Tools and strategies for success*. Upper Saddle River, N.J: Pearson

McNary, S. J., Glasgow, N. A., & Hicks, C. D. (2005). *What successful teachers do in inclusive classrooms: 60 research-based teaching strategies that help special learners succeed*. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Corwin Press

Rief, S. F., & Heimburge, J. A. (1996). *How to reach & teach all students in the inclusive classroom: Ready-to-use strategies, lessons, and activities for teaching students with diverse learning needs*. West Nyack, N.Y: Center for Applied Research in Education.

Sapon-Shevin, M. (2007). *Widening the circle: The power of inclusive classrooms*. Boston: Beacon Press.



Reading 9: Creating and Sustaining Partnerships with an Inclusive Childhood Graduate Program: Learning from our Journey

Introduction by: Dr. Susan M. Schultz, Graduate Program Director, Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education at St. John Fisher College

Regardless of how long it has been since you stepped into your first classroom, you can probably still remember feeling a mix of emotions. You knew the theories, but would you be able to effectively put them into practice in the classroom setting? In "Creating and Sustaining Partnerships with an Inclusive Childhood Graduate Program," the importance of collaborating hand in hand with building administrators and classroom professionals is highlighted. This essay outlines one college's paradigm shift from observing in the classroom to active engagement and purposeful collaboration with classroom professionals, emphasizing the theory to practice connection.

Creating and Sustaining Partnerships with an Inclusive Childhood Graduate Program *Learning from our Journey*

Kerry Dunn and Debbie Godsen DePalma

This essay focuses on the formation and sustainment of relationships between a public elementary school and the Graduate Inclusive Childhood Program at Nazareth College. The purpose of this collaboration is to integrate a graduate course on literacy assessment with an elementary school that shares similar ideals and values regarding the role of literacy and assessment in inclusive environments. The power of this partnership is in the strong and constant commitment from the leadership at the elementary school, the classroom teachers, and the course instructors. This multiple leveled partnership allows for continued professional conversation and application of theory to practice through the lenses of all stakeholders. The practical and consistent applications and benefits of this project include graduate students working one on one with elementary students in the areas of literacy, classroom teachers serving as consultants and collaborators with the graduate students, building administrators and course instructors consulting regularly regarding process and product, and elementary students gaining one on one assistance in areas of literacy. The classrooms engaged in this project represent diverse learners in grades k-3. The essay represents the many voices involved in the ongoing collaborative relationship.

The Need for Collaborative Partnerships

The work of teacher education often focuses on the theory to practice spectrum. This is vital to one of the most practical areas of study. In order for us, as teacher education faculty, to best support our graduate students, we must provide learning opportunities that promote the active engagement and discovery of graduate learners in elementary classrooms. Just as we espouse the tenets of constructivist thinking and inquiry learning in elementary classrooms, we need to engage graduate students in these processes so that they can develop their own thinking and decision making abilities.

This is no easy task, and the opportunities must be carefully crafted to allow for the power of this type of learning. In this essay we will discuss how we as college instructors have connected with local schools to develop a reciprocal relationship where graduate students, college faculty, teachers and administrators work together to create models for inclusive education in the area of literacy. We will look at the administrators' role in our placement, and provide some reflective questions for administrators who wish to become more involved in the field placements occurring in their classrooms. It is our goal that, through this essay, building level administrators will see how this collaborative partnership enhances the inclusive setting of the school and supports teachers through a multi-leveled collaboration.

Our Students

Our graduate students attend Nazareth College, a small liberal arts school in western New York. Most of our students work full or part time and have typical life commitments of graduate students. None of our students live on campus. Our students' experiences in

education range from being a few who are current classroom teachers, to most who are embarking on their initial certification. As with other graduate programs, we are challenged continually to provide integrative learning opportunities and field work experiences that will enhance, and sometimes drive the graduate education. There is strong commitment to the theory to practice connection. This is needed especially when experiencing teaching and learning in elementary classrooms while also studying the philosophies, theories and processes of the education profession. Students enrolled in methods courses in this program have fieldwork hours that are attached to each course. These hours allow students to learn about methods in the graduate course, and then both observe and apply these in the elementary classrooms.

The Course

Students enrolled in the graduate course: “Literacy Assessment, Program Planning and Assistive Technology for Diverse Learners” fulfill a requirement for their program in Inclusive Childhood or Inclusive Early Childhood Education. Students in this course learn how to administer many reading assessments, as well as data analysis and instructional planning based on the assessments. A ‘case study’ child is identified by the classroom teacher- this is a child who experiences moderate struggles with reading. This course incorporates an action research project that requires the graduate student to collaborate with the classroom teacher. Together they identify the strengths and needs of a struggling reader through the administration and analysis of the assessments learned; development of a research question, analysis of relevant literature and creation an instructional plan. Together they then analyze the impact of the instruction on k-3 student learning.

Our Model

This model of field placements requires a paradigm shift from the beginning stages of observing in classrooms to active involvement and purposeful collaboration with the classroom teacher. The shift in practice helps ensure the application and evaluation of researched based methodologies that impact k-6 learners. The intricate involvement with elementary classrooms allows for effective and profound engagement in assessment-driven instruction and action research. Often, the placement process in college and universities is “outsourced” to a central administrative placement office rather than being based in departments. It often focuses on cooperating teacher availability and administrative considerations rather than what is best for the learning of the novice teachers. This, then, determines where prospective teachers are placed for their school experiences (Zeichner, as cited in Zeichner, Melnick, & Gomez, 1996).

It is our goal as instructors to work hand in hand with school administrators, building level coaches and teachers to ensure collaboration with meaningful field work directly tied to course content in an effort to maximize graduate student learning. Research has clearly shown that field experiences are important occasions for teacher learning rather than merely times for teacher candidates to demonstrate or apply things previously learned (Zeichner et al, 1996). Through years of refining this collaboration, we have been able develop a reciprocal relationship where the classroom teachers and college students share knowledge in a focused

effort to support children who struggle with reading. College faculty and school administrators collaborate to ensure that the particular needs of the faculty, graduate students and students within the elementary school are being supported by our process.

The Partnership of the Graduate Student and the Classroom Teacher Constructing Knowledge Together

It is critical that the administrators we work with understand the role of the classroom teacher in this process. This aids in teacher identification, as well as being the critical support person for both the teachers and graduate students. The intent of the relationship between teacher and graduate student is for graduate students to view their field experience as a 'learning laboratory' to practice and implement the knowledge, skills and strategies gained from their course work. The field experience is a true partnership in which classroom teacher and graduate student meet regularly throughout the semester to analyze assessments and discuss student learning. They analyze together various assessments, including running reading records, CBM, phonics surveys, the Observation Survey, and other meaningful assessments used in the classroom or discovered through research. Through this process students develop an Academic Intervention Plan for a specific child.

Additionally, classroom teachers work jointly with the Nazareth student in reviewing and critiquing the action research project. The Nazareth student is expected to determine an instructional need for specific students. Based on this need they use the latest research to help guide instruction. Together, the classroom teacher and Nazareth student decide how to best use research strategies to guide student instruction and improve student performance. We have found through conversations with administrators, that this spirit of collaboration has spread, and teachers often take what they learn from the graduate student and share this with other teachers. For example, at one elementary building, teachers have incorporated some of the assessments and inclusive strategies that are taught in the graduate class. This started when one graduate student shared her learning and new resources with the classroom teacher in hopes of addressing the needs of a struggling reader. The teacher found these resources to be valuable not only in her own classroom, with a particular student, but viewed this new information as valuable for grade level teams as they look to better address the needs of their diverse learners. The sharing of resources has become a sustained practice. Much of these resources are housed in a database built by the college faculty; the principal and staff now have access to all of this work.

We are fortunate to work with classroom teachers who open their doors to our students, and approach this as a true collaboration. One of the classroom teachers in the Rochester City School District who has participated in this model for 5 years still enthusiastically welcomes each graduate student. "Each new student brings a new perspective, and enhances my own knowledge about my students" she states. "I feel it is critical for pre-service teachers to collaborate with practicing teachers in this way. The students I work with truly internalize how assessment works in a classroom to target instruction. As well, they bring new research which I have been able to use with my students. Through this collaboration I have learned new

ways to assess students and specific fluency and decoding strategies that have greatly improved the skills and strategies of several of my struggling readers.”

Graduate students discuss the impact of this kind of experience in classrooms as the difference between being active in the classroom versus being *purposefully engaged*. Graduate students collaborate continually with their classroom teachers and apply the tenets of Response to Intervention, a topic they need to understand. These students experience immersion in an active and integrative learning process through the Literacy Assessment course and participate in both scaffolded and independent experiences that are integral to preparing future educators as lifelong learners. As graduate students apply the course content they have multiple avenues for perspective which include collaboration with course Instructor, collaborating teacher and other professionals, as well as reading research articles and the use of technological resources. A recent graduate of Nazareth College shares what she sees as benefits to this model- “Through first assessing the student to see his strengths, weaknesses, and needs, I was able to develop a plan of action for the student. This was more beneficial than just sitting in class and creating a plan for a “future student.” I was also able to see growth in the student as well. That is something that you do not have to opportunity to see during the course time. Also working with the student I was able to see what part of the lesson he did not understand. This was valuable because as a teacher you will constantly be changing your lessons and adapting them to the needs of your students. I worked very closely with the classroom teacher- together we analyzed assessment and student performance, I learned new ideas from her experiences and was thrilled that she was able to use what I learned from class with her students as well. I can see where collaborating with other professionals will be an important resource throughout my teaching career.” The relationship between the classroom teacher and the graduate student is reciprocal, in that ideas and resources are shared, resulting in new learning for both parties.

How Does This Model Contribute to Fostering an Inclusive Environment?

A critical starting place is the role of the administrator is the identification of classroom teachers. The teachers participating in this collaboration are purposefully chosen by their ability to conduct literacy assessments and connect those assessments to targeted instruction. Additionally, these teachers welcome the opportunity to mentor the graduate student and work in partnership to best understand assessment and instruction. At times, administrators saw potential connections with their staff and this project when reviewing teachers’ annual goals. Administrators would offer this collaboration as a next step in the teacher’s professional practice. Another identifier for success in this partnership is the long-term commitment. None of us approach this relationship as a short term goal. Over time, we continue to refine our process in an effort to meet the needs of all partners. The role administration plays is pivotal to our success. Their understanding of this model supports not only the classroom teacher, but the graduate student and course instructors as well. Their lens is critical in developing and maintaining this model as a working relationship. Administrators are familiar with course content, know the graduate students and assist on many levels as individual needs arise.

This long term commitment also assists in addressing some of the challenges that can occur in this kind of partnership. At times we have had graduate students who do not meet the expectations and commitments of this level of work. We also have had teachers whose philosophies and approaches to collaboration do not meet the needs of our process. These are hard conversations to have at any time, but they are made easier over time by the sustained relationships we have and the mutual commitment to the process. As school principals, classroom teachers and graduate faculty, we have a shared obligation to what Celia Oyler and Lyn Goodwinn refer to as “gatekeeping our profession” (as cited in Cochran-Smith, Feiman-Nemser, McIntyre & Demers, 2008).

School Leaders Supporting the Process

Principals and Vice Principals have encouraged the leaders among their faculty to help to develop and sustain this partnership. The administration is a constant resource in these conversations and the graduate faculty and school leaders meet before during and after each semester to continue to analyze the effects of the process and make adjustments as needed. The principal is a constant resource who serves multiple purposes:

- 1.) to foster a culture in the building that embraces this type of learning/mentoring model;
- 2.) to collaborate with college faculty to develop a protocol for selecting teachers and working collaboratively throughout the semester;
- 3.) to know the course content and serve as an additional resource to the graduate students; and
- 4.) most importantly, to serve as the common thread that weaves all parties in this collaboration together- to know what works in the building, and together craft the shape of this model to fit building specific needs.

After graduate students identify areas for instruction and investigate research-based practices for such areas, students approach the professionals to gain insight on their perspective of the research. This allows each graduate student to have a comprehensive understanding of the application of theory to practice. As a result, multi-agency collaboration allows for sharing of resources, and classroom teachers are kept abreast of the latest research, allowing graduate students and classroom teachers to apply the research consistently.

Principals must also support their teachers in this teaching and learning process. Support is provided in different ways in different buildings but the commitment to the process is universally strong. One principal at a participating school notes the important impact on teachers: “This process continues to encourage my teachers to explain what they do and why they do it. This allows all educators to continue to improve their educational practices.”

Our Role as Graduate Faculty

As graduate faculty, we find this partnership works best when we work hand in hand with building level administration. We serve in a variety of active roles that include: meeting

regularly with classroom teachers, guiding classroom visits as needed and requested, providing process time in the graduate class to consider the application of theory to practice, communicating with all parties, and most importantly, adjusting for individual needs. This support begins early. We conduct initial meetings with administrators to discuss how the partnership will look at the building and how teachers will participate. We also talk about expected outcomes.

Once the initial support is established, we meet with all involved teachers and building level administration to thoroughly review expectations for graduate students and discuss our system of support. Optimally, we are present in classrooms several times throughout the semester, and are included in weekly email communications between graduate students and teachers. Additionally, we provide scaffolding and continual feedback through coursework to guide the student in his/her action research. As with all learning experiences, the focus on differentiation for readiness, interest and learning style is a key aspect of our work. We structure our course learning experiences in a progression – large group, small group, and one on one - meeting to assist students with more specific assessments and questions. This progress is natural and we provide scaffolding along the way. We connect regularly with the building level administrators and participating teachers and continue to find ways to refine the process. This process has evolved over time, and is flexible based on the individual buildings and staff.

Concluding Thoughts

Effective principals are those who promote change through practices that are collaborative, intentional and supportive (Fullan, 1993, Lambert, 1998, as cited in Salisbury, C, McGregor, G. 2002). Principals who use our model do just that. Our collaboration allows for change in the learning for young students, change in processes in elementary classrooms and ultimately in school culture. We all embrace the continual analysis of what teachers do to help struggling learners and how the process of analysis and evaluation helps teachers make sound decisions regarding the next steps in student learning.,

In order to make inclusive education work, attention must be given...to the instructional strategies employed, the classroom management techniques used, and the educational collaboration that occurs among faculty. (Voltz, 2001) We have found that when principals support this model, the educational collaboration is at a premium. This has positively impacted teacher collaboration, and has given graduate students first-hand experience in collegiality in diverse settings.

When sharing our processes with colleagues in other districts and with other colleges, we are often asked if we provide compensation to classroom teachers for their collaboration. We do not – we cannot. Instead we look to form true partnerships where all stakeholders benefit from the process. The administrators who invite us and our students into their schools are clear about our mutual commitment to mentoring future teachers, collaborating with higher education for the advancement of graduate students, classroom teachers and elementary students. When we continue to reflect on our profession- why we do what we do

and how we are grounded in research based practices- we can continue to develop as a profession.

In closing, we would like to offer the following points for administrators to consider as they work with local colleges:

1. What is your role in working with local colleges to place students in your school?
2. How are teachers selected? Is there an internal process in place?
3. What are your teachers' thoughts on taking field experience students?
4. What types of conversations do you have with the college level students working in your building?

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Creating and Sustaining Partnerships with an Inclusive Childhood Graduate Program
Learning from our Journey

Extended Learning Opportunities

1. The authors state that we have an obligation to act as "gate keepers" for our profession. What is your interpretation of this statement? How do you determine the line between mentor and gate keeper? What are your roles and responsibilities relating to mentor and gate keeper?
2. Why is it important for schools and colleges to collaborate? What are the benefits to both parties?
3. How can a college/ school partnership support inclusive practices and work to increase opportunities for students with special needs?

Additional reading:

Ferrier-Kerr, J. L. (2009). Establishing professional relationships in practicum settings. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 25*(6),790-7.

Buitink, J. (2009). What and how do student teachers learn during school-based teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education 25*(1),118-27.



Reading 10: Exploring Disability in Young Adult Literature

Introduced by: Jennifer Ashton, Ph.D., University of Rochester

As an alternative to the dominant deficit-oriented representations of disability in our society, Disability Studies in Education (DSE) recognizes the value of human diversity and foregrounds the socially just tenets of inclusion in educational settings. Having recently completed my dissertation on co-teaching using DSE as a theoretical framework, I see the need for this type of re-conceptualization and often think about how we can broaden DSE's reach and improve inclusive education for all students. Dr. Ware and Ms. Wheeler's work illustrates the potential impact of infusing DSE principles into standard curriculum and transforming perceptions of disability among students and teachers alike. This chapter presents a practical model of conceptual transformation that highlights the spaces for administrative support for teachers and students as they negotiate a re-conceptualization of disability, human diversity, and inclusive education.

Exploring Disability in Young Adult Literature¹

Linda Ware and Natalie Wheeler

This essay considers the importance of administrative support in the maintenance of inclusive schools at the level of classroom curriculum. We focus on an eight day instructional unit that explored disability as human diversity presented through popular young adult literature taught in Natalie's 6th grade general education classroom in the Honeoye Falls-Lima Central School District (Spring, 2010). Both the principal and the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum/Instruction provided the administrative support to enable Natalie to partner with her former professor (Linda) and seven undergraduate pre-service teachers² in the development and delivery of this instruction in Spring, 2010.

Centering disability

Our instruction explored various cultural meanings of disability in three popular works of young adult literature: *Stuck in Neutral* (Treuman, 2000), *Freak the Mighty* (Philbrick, 1993), and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* (Haddon, 2002)³. These award-winning works of fiction are endorsed by the American Library Association (ALA) and readily featured on numerous teacher lesson websites linked to both the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and to state literacy learning standards. For our purposes, the literature served as a springboard to consider: 1) the lived experience of disability recounted in first person narratives; 2) the fact that disability as human difference troubles normalcy; and 3) the meaning of inclusion in schools and society. Each of the above was readily linked to the HF-L mission statement that makes explicit the development of an appreciation for *human diversity* (www.hflcsd.org). By locating our instruction in a general education setting we encourage readers to recognize the need to locate conversation on disability and inclusion within the general education curriculum.

Implications for Inclusion

Specific to inclusion, our project embraced Sapon-Shevin's metaphor of "widening the circle" (2007), where equity considerations are taken up in schools to include disability and with particular emphasis on disability studies scholarship embedded within the K-12 curriculum (Ware, 2001; 2003a; 2003b; 2006). Disability studies promotes understanding inclusion as a

¹ The work reported here is a product of collaboration between the classroom teacher, Natalie Wheeler and Linda Ware who share co-authorship of this article, and the SUNY Geneseo preservice teachers. We would like to acknowledge the participation of Rob Sanford (Grade 6), who teamed with Natalie throughout the academic day, his contribution to our project was invaluable. We also acknowledge the brilliant participation by Ms. Wheeler's Wizards and Mr. Sanford's Stars!

² The SUNY Geneseo students who participated in this instructional unit include: Michael Cornell, Mindy Benamati, Sarah Burke, Erin Zalewski, Rachel Pierce, Meaghan Werther, and Sami DeWitt. With the exception of Michael, all were junior level students enrolled in a three-credit course taught by Linda. The course has disability and inclusion as its focus, and it culminates with a community based project created by the student (s).

³ The HF-L students were assigned to groups by their teacher(s) to read only one book over the eight-day unit. The students had the option to read all three books once the project concluded.

broader conversation about diversity in schools and society in much the same way that race, class, and gender are considered beneath the umbrella of multiculturalism and human diversity (Connor, 2009; Ware, 2006; 2010; Ware & Valle, 2010). In this way, when the emphasis shifts to consider disability as a value added experience rather than a problematic experience, understanding is no longer bound to remediation, rehabilitation and charity discourses. Although it is rare to find disability taken up in K-12 curriculum as we discuss it here, classroom-based discussions of disability in K-12 classrooms appear in the literature as beneficial to disabled and non-disabled students alike (Ware, 2001; 2003; 2006).

A Note to the Reader

Several aspects of this project cannot be fully detailed due to the limitations of space and given the conditions that gave rise to its implementation. The collaboration between Natalie and Linda began when Natalie was a student at SUNY Geneseo (2006-2007). Then, Natalie was new to the disability studies scholarship, a topic of study that is paradigmatically incongruent with content common to traditional special education programs⁴. Disability studies offers a radical departure from special education coursework in that it does not locate the “problem” of disability in the student, rather it implicates institutions, systems, and the built environment. As well, disability studies asks educators to imagine a future beyond schooling for disabled students so that their efforts move beyond the symbolic conformance to schooling rituals. For Natalie, the patriarchal approach to “servicing students”—the common parlance in her coursework—provoked her chagrin as she held fast to the goal of becoming a teacher who would encourage her future students to develop as confident and “willful” self advocates (advanced by the poet and disability activist, Eli Clare (2004) encountered in Linda’s coursework). As a teacher (first in New York City, and later in HF-L), Natalie acted on those beliefs by privileging independence and autonomy in all of her students, including those schools identify as disabled⁵. Tensions between everyday schooling practices in both general and special education that marginalize children with disabilities were a recurring concern for all who participated in this project given our shared commitment to ensure equity in the classroom (Hamre, Oyler & Bejoin, 2006; Sapon Shevin, 2007).

The Literacy Project Overview

Our literacy project spanned eight days of instruction in two sixth grade classrooms (n =45). The SUNY Geneseo pre-service teachers (n=7) developed instruction and led small group instruction with support from Natalie and Linda. We met as a team for over thirty hours of preplanning discussion and independent revision of our instruction based on the selected texts. In addition, we organized large group presentations that combined both classes for an

⁴ When special education teacher preparation programs are rooted to rehabilitative and medicalized strategies focused on cure, care, and intervention, traditional coursework is not easily aligned with disability studies scholarship. The ideological and paradigmatic disconnect often proves problematic and as such, outside the program knowledge base (see Ware, 2010). Although some colleges have renamed their coursework beneath the banner of disability studies, in the absence of conceptualizing it’s disjuncture at the level of ideology and of praxis, they accomplish little more than a meaningless “lexical” change critiqued by Slee (1996) in the example of mainstreaming and inclusion.

⁵ Use of “person-first” language is purposefully inconsistent throughout this chapter to stress that the political status of disability need not be minimized by a nod to language use that elides the reality of disability as an identity marker.

introduction to disability studies that featured representations of disability art and culture presented by Linda. In addition, another SUNY Geneseo student participated as a guest speaker, reading from an essay he wrote for Linda's interdepartmental seminar, "Disability in America" (also structured to address disability through cultural lens). Keith described his experience growing up with a twin brother with developmental disability at a point in the unit that invited the HF-L students to consider exclusion in schools and society. Keith recounted the impact of his brother's experience in segregated schooling and the injustice he felt powerless to interrupt, and to extend one of the identified themes in the YA literature, that of disability as a family experience.

The preservice teachers and Linda also led large group conversations with support from Natalie who utilized dialogic discussion as a teaching strategy to promote literacy. Her facility with this instructional strategy provided excellent mentoring for the preservice teachers as none had prior exposure to its use. In addition, the HF-L students provided remarkable insight, educating us about how young children come to associate disability with a devalued life experience (Shapiro, 1999).

"Dialogic discussion" as Inclusive Pedagogy

Natalie's instructional pedagogy merged the hybrid influences of "shared authority" in the classroom (Oyler, 1996); making room for all students regardless of ability (Kluth, Straut & Biklen, 2008; Sapon-Shevin, 2007); and a belief that inclusion was more than a set of practices reserved for students with disabilities (Valle & Connor, 2010; Ware & Valle, 2009). Natalie was a vigilant proponent of disability studies even though she recognized there was no "skills set" to apply towards those ends. That is, the direct teaching of disability studies as she experienced the content in her undergraduate preparation did not ensure a straightforward or "ready-made" application for her sixth grade students. As a teacher, she advanced understanding disability as human difference in conversations with her peers and in her teaching whenever possible, but actual disability-related content this year was haphazard. However, in 2009-2010 HF-L adopted Petey⁶ (Mikaelsen, 1998) for instruction in all grade 6 classrooms. Natalie taught Petey prior to our disability studies literacy project and coincident with her introduction of dialogic discussion (Adler & Rougle, 2005). This strategy was framed as a tool for lifelong learning (Adler & Rougle, 2005; Alexander, 2008), and was one of several instructional approaches she utilized in an effort to create an inclusive classroom community. A handout, pieced together from multiple sources was distributed to students with the following beliefs outlined in a rationale for its use:

- Believe you have the right (and need) to understand things and to make things work;
- Believe that problems can be analyzed; that problems are solved through analysis; and that you are capable of that analysis!

⁶ Petey begins in 1920 when he is born with cerebral palsy to a family who made every effort to care for him. He ultimately became a ward of the state and spent his life in an institution. The novel recounts his life through 1990 when he is befriended by a teen that defends him from neighborhood bullies. The book jacket reads: Petey is a touching story of friendship, discovery, and the domination of the human spirit over physical obstacles.

Expectations for student learning were made explicit through the development of the skills that would enable the students to: ask questions, develop logical reasoning, think about an issue from multiple lenses, cope when things are unclear and ideas conflict, seek complexity rather than simple answers, challenge another's opinion or viewpoint, think flexibly, and listen for unusual perspectives. Natalie also specified the norms for participation that would ensure that students learned "listening" behaviors and rules for discussion. These included learning how to: state your opinion; acknowledge an idea/give credit to another person; agree/disagree; interrupt/offer suggestions; get a response; clarify positions; paraphrase; share the ideas of others; summarize learning; and convey enthusiasm and respect for people's comments. With our focus on disability as a cultural experience "dialogic discussion" as a pedagogic tool proved invaluable.

In the example of Petey, dialogic discussion provoked questions across a broad spectrum of concerns including the origin of asylums and institutions at the turn of the century; the impact of communication on understanding human difference; the acceptance of social practices that enforced isolation of disabled people; the potential for friendships across difference; the meaning of family responsibility; the meaning of inclusion; and the impulse to bully people with disabilities. The breadth of the HF-L students' questions, concerns, and the perspectives they espoused prompted Natalie to recall a central tenet in early coursework with Linda—that despite the presence of disability in schools and society—disability, remains an under explored topic in the curriculum. In combination with Ben Mikaelson's author's note at the end of Petey that, "public misunderstanding continues to be one of the greatest obstacles faced by any person with this condition" (Cerebral palsy), Natalie was more than willing to collaborate on the development of this disability studies literacy project.

Instructional Aims

During our initial planning to identify instructional aims, Natalie reflected on her experience teaching Petey, and as a consequence, she hoped that her students' would be encouraged to explore disability "beyond the labels and such." She believed her students could increase their awareness of disability as a general goal, however, the broader goal—to consider the cultural intersections of disability, identity and society—held much pedagogic appeal. According to Natalie:

I want my students to really examine disability as something that is made up. I know *it's real*, but at the same time it's not. I think they can handle that conversation.

After teaching Petey she realized that the students possessed compassion, however they also expressed status quo, ableist misunderstandings of disability. She hoped to probe their views through dialogic discussion, even though her own starting point was not fully outlined in advance. Such a goal was consonant with Linda's research supporting teachers in the

development of disability infusion in the curriculum⁷ and as they came to realize the very real consequences of marking difference as “problem” on the bodies of disabled children.

The pre-service teachers were less certain about what to expect as they too were new to conceptualizing disability studies in the context of the classroom given that only one course in their teacher preparation program addressed disability through a cultural lens. Linda encouraged a lesson planning process that was more organic than the standard template mandated in their preservice education courses. Instead, she urged open exchange that was less didactic. That is, rather than “tell” the HF-L students what to think, they were encouraged to “listen” to the students and to remain attentive to their sense making. Nonetheless, the demand for a more prescriptive scripted teaching approach was difficult to dispel among the SUNY students. One student explained:

In all honesty, I don't really know how I might begin to teach from a disability studies perspective. I don't really know how soon we can challenge medical views—or if the students even hold a medical view on disability. I'm still wondering, *Will my future students even 'get it'?*

Another pedagogic issue for the preservice students was how to teach books that were, with the exception of the Haddon novel, fairly stereotypical and somewhat negative portrayals of disability. One asked: “How do we teach the book along with the problem representation of disability in the book?” Another observed, “I want to teach about disability the way we talk about it in our class—as just one part, but not the only part—of a person's identity, but will the HF-L students grasp this content?”

Linda assured her students that the unit would take shape if they were poised to listen to the students and to isolate signs of sense making. She advised them to set aside their prior training and the expectation that they “over-prepare” instruction as it would compromise the spontaneous exchange of ideas, beliefs, and perceptions—and their ability to listen to the students as they engaged the texts.

Due to the limits of space, we consider only a fraction of the instruction prepared for this unit so as to highlight excerpts of powerful classroom engagement that followed. We have not provided specific steps in a lesson plan format because to do so in the absence of grappling with a disability studies orientation would undermine our purposes for teaching this content in the first place.

Instead we begin with a brief synopsis for each book taken from the website, Bookrags.com. These excerpts are intended to serve as “non-examples” given their consistent medicalization of disability and their unreflective reliance on ableist language. We believe that the emphasis on disability “ailment” in these plot outlines operates in much the same way that labeling operates in education to effectively “misread” people with disabilities as the product of

⁷ A disability-infusion approach was initially described by Linda in her work with K-12 educators who participated in a six week National Endowment for the Humanities disability studies seminar co-directed by David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder at the University of Illinois, Chicago, 2003 (see Ware, 2006).

misfortune and less worthy lives (for a more elaborate discussion of media influences see Elman, 2010; Solis, 2004). We also provide text samples that point to the bold and rich narrative possibilities contained in these works, which even as non-examples, reveal the potential to be mined for deep meaning in the classroom. The instructional themes taken up in our instruction are also included for each novel.

Stuck in Neutral (Treuman, 2000) is the heartbreaking tale of a young boy, Shawn who has cerebral palsy and who is profoundly developmentally delayed. However inside his broken body, Shawn believes himself to be a genius, due to his ability to remember everything he has ever seen or heard” (www.bookrags.com).

Sample Text:

[I]n the eyes of the world, I’m a total retardate. A ‘retard’ Not “retard” like you might use the word to tease a friend who just said or did something stupid.... everybody who knows me, everybody who sees me, everybody, anybody who even gets near me would tell you I’m dumb as a rock (p. 4).

I do sometimes wonder what life would be like if people, even one person, knew that I was smart and that there’s an actual person hidden inside my useless body; I am in here, I’m just sort of stuck in neutral (p. 11).

In my father’s eyes I’m a vegetable, a human vegetable, I’ll never be able to enjoy life or be productive (p. 25)

When people first meet me, they usually do their Annie-Sullivan-meeting-Helen-Keller-in-The Miracle Worker routine. ‘HI SHAWN, NICE TO MEET YOU...MY NAME IS ALLY WILLIAMSON...HOW ARE YOU?’ For some reason people always speak real slowly and loudly when they’re introduced to me (p. 55).

Instructional Themes: Perceptions of suffering, perceptions of competence; perceptions of communication exclusive to speech; the impulse to pity people with disabilities, disability in the schooling context, medical versus cultural meanings of disability, and claiming disability as a source of strength and power.

In Freak the Mighty (Philbrick, 1993) the “primary characters are friends Maxwell Kane, a large, very slow, but kind-hearted kid and his friend Kevin Dillon, nicknamed ‘Freak,’ who is physically crippled but very intelligent (www.Bookrags.com).

Sample Text:

I never had a brain until Freak came along and let me borrow his for a while, and that’s the truth, the whole truth (p. 1).

I got my first look at Freak [in] that year of phony hugs. He didn’t look so different back then, we were all of us pretty small.... (p. 2).

I feel real bad for Freak, because he hates it when people try to rub his head for luck. . . (p. 72).

The only reason I got passed from seventh grade is because they figured this way the big butthead can be—quote—someone else’s problem, thank God, we’ve had quite enough of Maxwell Kane—unquote (73).

Instructional themes: Family relationships when disability is present; perceptions of self vs. society’s perceptions; friendships across differences; accepting difference, disability in the schooling context, bullying disabled people, and claiming disability as a source of strength and power.

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time (2002, Haddon) is a story about a unique young man setting out to solve an unusual crime and to record his progress in a novel. The young man is Christopher John Francis Boone, and he is unique because he is severely autistic” (www.Bookrags.com).

Numerous lesson plans are available on-line for classroom use of this widely acclaimed novel, many of which consider autism the focus. Ironically, Haddon made no specific mention of autism in the novel; in fact, Haddon went to great lengths to explain why he did not label Christopher as autistic (McInerney, 2003; Noonan, 2003; Ware, 2006). In keeping with Haddon, Linda encouraged the preservice students to make every effort possible to avoid characterizing Christopher as autistic. However, on the first day of instruction after reading through the first few pages, the HF-L students demanded verification that Christopher was autistic. The impulse to root out Christopher’s disability worked to our advantage as our instruction turned on the ability of these sixth grade students to consider medical and cultural meanings of disability. The demand to know Christopher as autistic rather than the richly layered character the narrative offered was a brilliant starting point, and one that we could never have anticipated in advance planning.

Sample Text:

All the other children at my school are stupid. Except I’m not meant to call them stupid, even though this is what they are. I’m meant to say that they have learning difficulties or that they have special needs. But this is stupid because everyone has learning difficulties because learning to speak French or understanding relativity is difficult... (p. 43)

So I took deep breaths like Siobhan said I should do when I want to hit someone in school and I counted 50 breaths and did cubes of the cardinal numbers as I counted like this .. 1, 8, 27, 64, 125, 216, 343, 512, 729, 1000, 1331, 1728, 2197, 2744, 3375, 4096, 4913 ... etc. (p. 213).

Instructional themes: The search for order and stability, perceptions of social behavior as an indicator of intelligence/ability; social injustice; Christopher’s perception of ability; his

perception of disability, disability in the schooling context, and claiming disability as a source of strength and power.

Discussion

The HF-L students responded to these texts and to our instruction with a mix of reactions: some accepted stereotypes on face value, some saw past the stereotypes and responded to the characters as more like themselves than they initially imagined; and others made bold connections to disability and to the world around them. For example, in discussion of Stuck in Neutral, Shawn's interpretation of his eminent death at the hands of his father was probed, questioning: "Is this a plausible plot?" By posing a question (consistent with dialogic discussion) the students grappled with various responses including those related to Shawn's cognitive capacity given his inability to speak. Discussion touched on assistive technology, the meaning of intelligence, and the misperception that due to the absence of traditional speech one could not communicate wants, needs, and abilities. Another student laughed aloud as he read Shawn's depiction of his "condition" because the details were witty, sarcastic, and intentionally self-mocking—attributes many of the HF-L middle school students shared with Shawn. Students agreed these "personality traits" were clear signs of Shawn's self-awareness and his humanity, and in discussion, they redefined intelligence and questioned the meaning of normalcy and their own neurotypical status.

The HF-L students readily identified the negative perceptions of Shawn held by others as dehumanizing and infantilizing (vocabulary that emerged from our instruction). They debated how others, especially Shawn's father could view him as an object of pity and as less than human. In one assignment they wrote poems about Shawn informed exclusively by his self-narration and without focusing on his impairment and his disability. In a prewriting session students debated whether Shawn's physical appearance was or was not an indicator of his intelligence, and this led to an in-depth conversation about the social pressure to judge appearance. In dialogic discussion, one student outlined the many ways that stereotypical appearances are perpetuated by society. His list included: bullying in schools, fashion trends, advertisements in the media, and racism that was previously abolished but still exists today. Such exchanges in small and large group discussion revealed the complex thinking that Natalie knew her students possessed, however, their ability to link disability discourse to larger social issues was surprising to the preservice teachers. The parallel to their own coursework with Linda became more apparent as this unique mix of disability related content proved to be yet another long overdue conversation on disability, exclusion and social injustice.

In early discussion of Freak the Mighty, students focused on Maxwell's placement in an LD class, the meaning of LD, everyday usage of "retarded" and speculation about Kevin's claims to a robot identity rather than a "crippled" identity. Discussion of disability and ability encouraged students to speak freely, to ask honest questions, and to not be judged. Discussion on the historic context of language usage prompted one student to refer back to Petey. He wondered if contemporary use of the word "demented" would be considered offensive, noting that in the novel, it seemed acceptable. We probed the obvious link to contemporary use of the "R" word, inviting further discussion that was again, much more sophisticated and nuanced

than students anticipated. One HF-L student wondered about contemporary use of LD, asking: “If the LD class is for students who learn differently, why isn’t it called the ‘Learning Differences’ class?” Students rallied to justify this as a proposed change because, as one student observed, “learning disability implies no ability, which isn’t true.” Another reasoned that he would support a name change to learning differences because society is too quick to put the label of disability on a person. Another commented that similar to wheelchair users⁸ students with learning disabilities did not choose to have them and they should not be seen as “learning problems.” The students suggested that, at least in their school, they re-appropriate the meaning of LD.

The exploration of disability-related content prompted by these novels, combined with students’ life experience, and the regard for their ability to manage an open-ended conversation on disability revealed how critical it is to approach disability as an experience that can illuminate our shared humanity. In the Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time, students responded to the question, “In what ways are you like Christopher?” Recall that initially some of the HF-L students insisted on knowing whether Christopher was autistic. Days into our instruction one student responded:

I am like Christopher because he does not like being touched. I like to have my own space. I also think that Christopher is very independent. I would also prefer to be independent.

Another noted: “I know what it’s like to be away from someone you love. My dad is in Afghanistan and I miss him the way Christopher misses his mom.” For our purposes, it was not necessary that the students consider disability in their response as much as it was to consider similarities in lived experience.

Conclusion

This essay represents a fraction of our instruction in which we attempted to teach that students with disabilities can be “valued members of our schools and classrooms—not because we are charitable, but because students with disabilities, like all students, have a lot to offer” (Ferri: 2008, p. 427). This curriculum exploration of disability in YA literature at HF-L would not have been possible in the absence of an administrative vision that maintains the belief that “all students have a lot to offer.” The importance of locating the goals of inclusive education squarely in the curriculum for consumption by all students challenges disability as a taboo topic. Until schools address the omission of disability history, art, and culture in the curriculum—where the real work of inclusion begins—society will continue to reify disability as a devalued experience. This project was one step toward the larger goal of recognizing that in order to allay the stigma associated with disability, children and youth must be permitted to appreciate disability as another aspect of human diversity made explicit in the curriculum of inclusive schools.

⁸ Students learned the meaning of several new terms during this project including: Neurotypical, wheelchair-user, abelist, ableism, infantilization, etc. The terms were readily applied in their exchanges with one another and with us.

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Exploring Disability in Young Adult Literature

Extended Learning Opportunities

1. How can “dialogic discussion” be used as a learning frame for inclusive education across curricula (i.e. in areas other than literature)?
2. How might the explicit introduction of norms for participation in classroom conversations influence the development of an inclusive classroom community?
3. How does “dialogic discussion” support the notion that “all students have a lot to offer”?
4. As an administrator, how can you encourage your teachers to examine their own conceptions of normalcy and embrace the value of human diversity?
5. What role would school administration need to play in order to make discussion of disability as a "value added" experience a priority at the classroom and school levels?
6. Problematizing traditional conceptions of disability through the use of literature clearly invoked the 6th grade students to challenge their own conceptions of normalcy. How might continued use of “dialogic discussion” shape the ways in which these students approach disability in other aspects of their lives?

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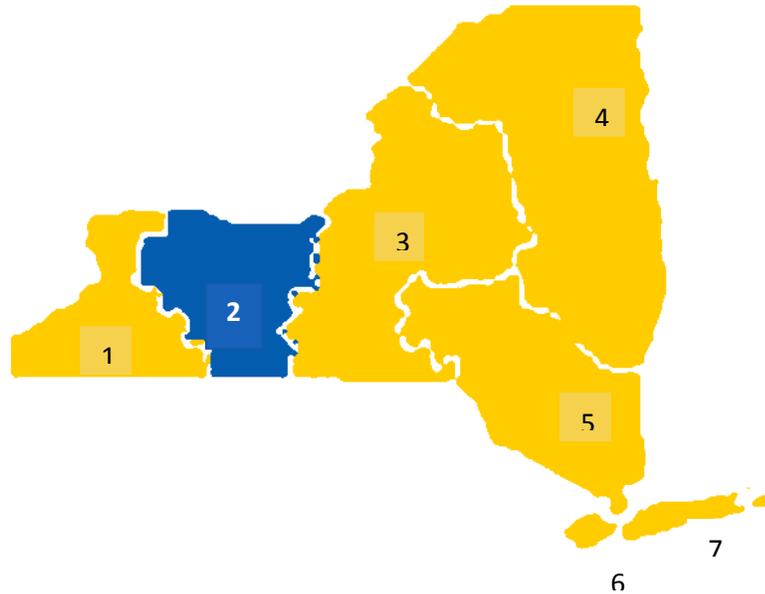
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NY HESC for SystemsChange Regional Sites

Much of the work of The Task Force on Quality Inclusive Schooling is done at the regional level in each of the seven regions of New York State.

1. Western
2. **Mid-West**
3. Mid-State
4. East
5. Hudson Valley
6. New York City
7. Long Island



*Higher Education Support Center for Quality Inclusive Schooling
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