

NYC Task Force For Quality Inclusive Schooling
“Creating an Inclusive Environment for All Students”
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Inclusion, General Ed & Special Ed Working Together: how does it feel?

Submitted by Mayer Reiz & Natalie Katzourin

Presenters:

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Presenters' Background:

Maria Crowe is a Special Education teacher with Region 3/District 75. She is licensed in the areas of Special Education (K-12), Bilingual (Spanish), and Early Childhood (N-6). Maria Crowe has been teaching for the past 30 years. She is currently working as a Special Education Teacher Support Service (SETSS) at the Queens High School of Teaching. She is also the designated lead inclusion teacher for the District 75 program, a unique and successful program of which she is very proud.

Matthew Schatz is a second year inclusion teacher working for P.S. 811Q in Queens. Last year, Mr. Schatz worked at the elementary level at P.S. 221 in Queens and this year, he is an educator in The Queens High School of Teaching. Mr. Schatz is a NYC Teaching Fellow and is currently attending Queens College for a double Masters degree in special education and elementary education. Mr. Schatz is also a MetLife TNLI (Teachers Network Leadership Institute) Fellow and is a member of Americorp.

Workshop Objectives:

- To help the participants understand what it feels like to have a disability.
- To introduce tools that can help Students with disabilities be part of the general education world.

Topical Outline:

- The District 75 Inclusion Model
- Activity: Writing the “Star Spangled Banner” with one’s non-dominant hand.
- Video: Student Conversations on Inclusion
- Integrating Students, Video Role Modeling
- Classroom adaptations and modifications

Content of Session:

Upon walking into the workshop, participants were instructed to only sit at the desks, which had a piece of paper and a pencil. To start the session off, the participants were instructed to complete the Star Spangled Banner in two minutes using their non-dominant hand while their dominant hand was covering one eye. This was nearly impossible to accomplish. The point of this exercise was to have the so-called “normal” people experience what it is like to be “special”.

After the exercise, Ms. Crowe and Mr. Schatz played a video of general education and special education students discussing the pros and cons of inclusion. The video showed that the benefits weren't just academic but there were also social benefits both for the general education students and the special education students. Furthermore, the video showed how culture and sensitivity can also impact whether the inclusion model works within the school system.

Ms. Crowe and Mr. Schatz then described the high percentage of special education students in NY who are separated from general education students. This is a problem since it not only has an impact on the academic process, but just as importantly, it has an impact on the students' social development. Ms. Crowe and Mr. Schatz explained that the best role models for children are their peers, and showed how they actually apply this idea by using small vignettes of typical social situations, which were created by general education students. In these vignettes, the general education students demonstrated simple social skills such as saying “hello” or asking for notes, which the special education students can then view and practice these gestures.

Ms. Crowe and Mr. Schatz described several other techniques that could be helpful to assist children in learning as well as develop appropriate social skills such as peer modeling or peer tutoring. They also introduced accommodations, which they use to help special education students in an inclusion setting such as using artwork to demonstrate understanding of concepts and adapting questions on an exam through use of pictures.

Relevance to Inclusion:

Within the inclusion classroom, there are both students with and without disabilities. This session was meant to help the participants see things through the eyes of the children who have disabilities. The session also introduced the pros and cons of an inclusion classroom through the perspectives of regular education and special education students who actually learn within such an environment. In addition, this session introduced actual techniques that are used to assist special education students within an inclusive environment, from socialization skills learned from other children to test accommodations so that students with disabilities can take the same test. The focus of the session was not only on the importance of having an “inclusion classroom”, but also on having an altogether inclusive environment within the school system.

Goals, Concerns and Issues for Future Work:

Ms. Crowe and Mr. Schatz both share similar goals and concerns for the future, which include desensitizing the so-called “normal” population in the world regarding disability and inclusion. Furthermore, they emphasized that the general education students need to feel that the special education students are “normal”.