

Impact

Feature Issue on Revisiting Inclusive
K-12 Education

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For high school senior Michael Sgambati (third from right), the perfect school would be a place where "everyone felt that they belonged." Michael, who has been included in general education classes since kindergarten, is part of his school's soccer team. See story on page 22.

Inclusion: A Road Worth Taking

by Jeffrey and Cindy Strully

We watched as the plane was taking off for Maui. The trip was Shawntell's 30th birthday present. As the plane took off from Los Angeles, we started to think back to when Shawn was 7 years old and what has been accomplished over the past 23 years of this journey toward an inclusive life. We also pondered upon what we have learned over this same time period, which may be worth sharing with others. We want to be perfectly upfront with all of the readers: Why go on the journey toward inclusion is not a debatable topic. It is the only way to go even though the journey is difficult, troublesome, and at times challenging.

Inclusion is not something you do just in school or at home. It is not just for some children but not others. It is not for younger children but not high school students. It is not something that happens for "x" number of hours per day or per week. It is how you live your life every day and every minute. Inclusion is a way of living – a way of thinking, believing, planning, and acting.

Twenty-three years ago, people with significant support needs were not even part of the discussion about being included in neighborhood schools and classes. The concept of mainstreaming was focused on children with less significant support needs. Mainstreaming was considered for only those children who were seen as being able to

[Strully, continued on page 27]

From the Editors

Why revisit inclusive education? It has been six years since the last issue of IMPACT dedicated to this topic. Since that time much has been learned about what inclusion means and how to make it happen. The purpose of this issue is to provide an update from a variety of informed perspectives – families, educators, researchers, and policymakers. It is hoped that the stories, strategies, and reflections shared will affirm the commitments of people who have made creating inclusive school communities a central focus in their lives and work. We also hope to encourage continued good works on behalf of today's children and youth so that they grow up and learn together well in our increasingly diverse society.

With this issue we also want to honor the legacy of inclusion pioneer Marsha Forest, who passed away June 2, 2000, after a 12-year struggle with cancer. Marsha co-founded, with her husband Jack Pearpoint, the Centre for Integrated Education and Community (now the Marsha Forest Centre), and Inclusion Press, in Toronto. Marsha waged love and battles in classrooms; living rooms; church, synagogue, and mosque basements; union halls; lecture theatres; auditoriums; court rooms; and university lecture halls to help us see and work toward the vision of inclusion and justice for all. Her message to us, then and now, is that we must build a better world for our children, and that we must never give up.

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Perspectives on the Vision of Inclusion: The Voices of Experience

by Terri Vandercook

Creating and sustaining inclusive school communities is complex and critically important. Due, in part, to the complexity of the undertaking, generating the interest, commitment, and energy required for doing so is difficult. We know from the organizational change literature that there are three primary considerations in generating the momentum for change: *dissatisfaction* with the current state, a desirable *vision* for a future state, and ideas and strategies for taking *action* toward that vision.

We know from the organizational change literature that there are three primary considerations in generating momentum for change: dissatisfaction with the current state, a desirable vision for a future state, and ideas and strategies for taking action toward that vision.

Many people have made substantial and lasting contributions in the movement toward inclusive schooling. This article reflects the perspectives of 12 such individuals – parents, special educators, general educators, principals, and university faculty – who responded to questions about dissatisfaction, vision, and action. These individuals represent many roles that are integral to inclusive school communities, and all have functioned as advocates and community builders around the vision of inclusive

schools. It is our hope that sharing these perspectives, dreams, and strategies will inspire and energize others to continue the compelling and important work of creating and sustaining inclusive school communities.

Identifying Dissatisfactions

This article was initiated because of the personal dissatisfaction felt by the author and communicated by parents and colleagues in the field regarding the discrepancy between a vision of inclusive community and the reality in schools and the broader community. All those interviewed echoed this same dissatisfaction. The most common response to the question, “How close is the reality that you see to the vision that you have for inclusive schools?” was “Not very close at all!” Responses basically followed three themes:

- There are small pockets, bits and pieces, of inclusive community, but it is not yet the norm.
- We have a very long way to go in realizing a vision of inclusive community, but we have also come quite a distance already. Less than 15 years ago, inclusion was not even a word that was used in reference to schools and individuals with disabilities.
- We have a lot of work to do related to specific visions and practices of inclusion for individual students, classroom practices, structures, and mindsets that are elaborated on in the remainder of this article.

Those questioned recognize that it is important to acknowledge that the realization of inclusive communities will be a never-ending process, something that must be constantly worked on, celebrated, and never taken for granted. And the vision toward which that process is moving was described by them in

relation to the three general areas discussed below: what inclusive school communities mean for individual students, what they mean for classroom practices that support effective curriculum and instruction, and what they mean for system-wide structures and mindsets.

The Vision for Individual Students

For students, inclusive school communities are described as places in which each student feels welcomed and valued. Community members are glad to have students included and it is taken for granted that each individual (regardless of any differences, and often because of them) will contribute worth to the school. Differences are viewed as bringing a richness to the environment that is otherwise unavailable and that promotes acceptance, valuing, and celebrating of individual differences. The sense of belonging created with this mindset is unifying, declaring to all that each has a part in the whole community. This sense of belonging goes beyond being cared for and accepted. It entails everyone feeling personally responsible for and involved in the success of all students in that school community, regardless of differences in ability, race, sexual orientation, gender, or socio-economic status. This “everyone” would run the gamut from classroom teachers, special educators, the principal, custodians, lunchroom personnel, paraprofessionals, volunteer playground aides, and parents in the PTA to members of the school board. This sense of ownership, involvement, and responsibility for each child was identified as particularly important for general education classroom teachers. It was felt that classroom teachers play a key role in a child being seen as a true member of the school community.

The Vision for Classroom Practices

In the vision for inclusive classrooms, classroom teachers lead the way in establishing classroom assumptions and practices that support an inclusive community. Decision-making is child-centered and the facilitation of student learning is done with passion and the support of others. Communication and collaboration with others (e.g., special educators, parents, related service personnel, volunteers) is done for the sake of serving each student to the best of everyone's capacity. There is an active and intentional differentiation of curriculum based upon an understanding of individual students needs. Instruction is also delivered in a variety of ways, including multiple formats and multiple choices of learning environments. The goal is to keep each child actively engaged and learning throughout the day, which is most often in the broader social context of the classroom, but can also be side-by-side, or even in a quiet, isolated space when a student's needs dictate.

The Vision for Structures and Mindsets

Structures and mindsets was another area for which respondents had a vision. Whenever anyone wants to change something, be that a personal habit or how children are served in school, there are three ongoing and interrelated aspects of change:

- **How you “see” or view the focus of change.** Your frame of reference (e.g., what you *think* about the possibility of children with significant needs for support being active members and learners in age-appropriate general education classrooms) will impact what you *do*. For example, as a parent, do you ask for your child to be placed in an age-appropriate general education class or request a more self-contained setting? As a special educator, do you work in partnership with classroom teachers in the regular classroom to meet the needs of

students or pull students out in order to provide individualized instruction? As a general educator, do you request that special educators, parents, and volunteers work with you in the classroom to meet the needs of students in your class, or ask that students be removed from the class for individualized instruction?

- **What you “do” about it, the actions you take to institute change.** What you *do* will impact what you *get* (e.g., students being served as true members of a school community with everyone feeling responsible for meeting each child's needs and working together to do so, or students with unique needs being served in more self-contained settings with responsibility for meeting student needs falling primarily to special educators). The cycle is ongoing in that what you *get* will in turn impact how you *see* or perceive students with special needs.
- **What you “get” or the results of your paradigms and action(s).** Often we recognize that what we “do” impacts what we “get.” However, seldom do we grasp the significance played by how we view or “see” a situation. In that vein, if we want to be effective in changing to a more inclusive service delivery system as described in the preceding paragraphs, then we must be willing to focus on the paradigms we have in that regard.

The respondents identified several paradigms that shape seeing, doing, and getting. These included: a) the expectation that each individual is capable of making contributions to the community; b) a sense of personal responsibility for the success of all students in a school community; c) collaboration with others to meet student needs is standard practice; and d) differentiation of curriculum and instruction as the norm. In addition, respondents identified the importance of participatory decision-making, and not just among school staff. Parents and community members need to be valued as resources for learning

[Vandercook, continued on page 30]

Inclusive School Communities: 10 Reasons Why

Educators, students, and families have found many compelling reasons to support inclusive education, including the following:

- **Preparation for Community Life as an Adult.** *Inclusive schools provide the opportunity for students with and without disabilities to experience diversity as a natural part of life in communities.*
- **A Sense of Belonging.** *Inclusive education facilitates belonging for students with disabilities.*
- **Varied Learning Opportunities.** *Students with disabilities are exposed to a wider range of learning opportunities in general education environments.*
- **Differentiated Instruction.** *Differentiation to meet diverse student needs allows educational teams to expand the ways in which they effectively teach all students.*
- **Individualized Education.** *Individualized educational programs allow students with disabilities to experience the benefits of participating with peers in general education activities, while attending to their specific learning needs.*
- **Effective Use of Instructional Resources.** *Resources, especially instructional personnel, can be leveraged to create more effective and efficient learning for all students in inclusive schools.*
- **Team-Building for School Improvement.** *The collaborative teamwork required for inclusive education builds staff relationships that support collegiality and other school-wide initiatives.*
- **Friendships with Peers.** *As students with and without disabilities interact as classmates, friendships can develop.*
- **Parental Involvement.** *Parents of students with disabilities are more involved with their local schools and communities when their children are included.*
- **Support of Civil Rights.** *Inclusion is a civil rights issue.*

Lessons Learned on the Way Toward Inclusion

by Jennifer York-Barr and Terri Vandercook

It seems hard to believe that we are nearing 20 years since the concept of “inclusion” began to take hold as a way of thinking about, designing, and putting into practice an individualized set of services and supports required by some students in order to learn alongside nondisabled peers and siblings. Specifically, a paradigm shift from largely separate to largely integrated educational experiences was occurring. Particularly emphasized at that time was the inclusion of students with severe disabilities, as they had been the most removed from mainstreamed education. What have we learned in the past two decades of this ambitious undertaking?

In this article, we describe some of the lessons learned on the way to becoming more inclusive, a journey that is far from over. We have chosen to focus on lessons learned about working toward inclusivity within the complex system of education. These lessons may seem a bit removed from students and from daily curricular, instructional, and assessment practices. Why are we emphasizing the systems level? There is no doubt about the significant increase in inclusive practices and the success thereby realized for many students. A key learning has been, however, that without a supportive system, inclusion cannot take hold. It matters not how many techniques and strategies and practices are known to be effective (and there are many). It matters greatly how individuals are able to join together in creating and sustaining the conditions that support implementation of such practices in order to create an inclusive system of education.

Lesson 1: Inclusivity is Counter-Cultural

Despite persistent, courageous, and bold efforts throughout our country’s history, inclusivity remains an espoused but unrealized value in our culture. Be-

yond disability, inclusivity is a human value and desire held in common by many individuals, especially those for whom equity has always been a struggle. When we ask, “Why is it so hard to create an inclusive school?” the answer comes from understanding that our schools reflect the broader society in which they are embedded. Examples of truly inclusive communities are difficult to find. In schools, then, we are trying to create a new culture, one that directly counters our existing culture and one with which we have little experience.

Lesson 2: The Big Picture is Really Big and Really Complex

The magnitude and complexity of change required to create a truly inclusive system of education has been grossly underestimated. An inclusive system strikes at the fundamental values, practices, structures, and funding mechanisms of our enduring standardized system of education. Our traditions of student groupings, curricular and instructional designs, and assessment practices are not well suited for a more inclusive and personalized approach to public education. Touching one part of the system (e.g., student groupings) affects others parts of the system (e.g., funding mechanisms, curricular expectations). All the parts are connected and influence each other. It is difficult to change one part of a system without simultaneously addressing many other parts. This is complicated work.

Lesson 3: Islands in the Mainstream Cannot Survive

Early inclusion efforts frequently resulted in isolated demonstrations, sometimes involving only a few children. As the children moved on, so did “inclusion.” Without intentional systemic development beyond isolated pilot projects, there is no maintenance or gen-

eralization of effort. Further, without an understanding of how “inclusive practices” can benefit more than just “inclusion kids,” the great potential of differentiated instructional practices and collaborative work between general education, special education, and other categorical program personnel is not realized.

Lesson 4: Fragmentation Thwarts Even Promising Initiatives

In this age of rapid change and accountability, the list of initiatives and mandates directed at schools seems endless. Nothing changes for students, however, until practice changes at the classroom level. This means teachers are the key. They must make sense of what is being posed and how it could be implemented before they can move forward with changes in practice. Too frequently, multiple initiatives are imposed top-down without sufficient attention to how such initiatives can be integrated and implemented at the classroom level. Coherence greatly increases the likelihood of successful implementation. Inclusive education aligns well with and can even support many other current initiatives. Ask, “How does inclusion relate to other interests and initiatives in this school?” and “How can we work together to accomplish these important works?”

Lesson 5: It’s All About the Kids, But It’s Not About the Kids

While the primary reason for school improvement initiatives (such as inclusion) is to increase student learning, to a large extent the challenge of such work is not about the kids. It’s the grown-ups who have difficulty with change, partly due to inadequate ongoing professional development and an organizational context that does not support taking risks. Taking risks is inherent to the process of new learning and change.

Lesson 6: No Personal Development Equals No Improvement

Organizational development can be thought of as collective personal development. Personal development begins with a meaningful connection to the new expectation. How does inclusion relate to the responsibilities and commitments and motivations of teachers? Further, personal development requires support for learning and growth. The opportunities to learn about, practice, reflect on, and refine inclusive ways of teaching have been woefully inadequate. In too many situations, the expectations for change have far exceeded the support for such change. Simply stated, change is about learning. Learning requires active engagement, opportunity, and support.

Lesson 7: If the Adults Are Separate, the Kids Are Separate

Relationships are the primary vehicle for change in organizations. People and how they interact create and re-create the organization and how it works. Connections among the grown-ups in schools create potential bridges for students to access the opportunities and resources available in the larger educational community. This is especially important for students who tend to be marginalized in schools, such as students with disabilities. If their teachers are separate from the mainstream of educational opportunity, they will be also. Creating inclusive learning environments cannot be done alone. A web of relationships spanning the school must be created and nurtured. Special education professionals must be weavers of relationship webs that will support students throughout their educational experiences.

Lesson 8: Collaboration is Unnatural

Within most schools, the dominant culture is one of isolation, professional autonomy, and privacy. Most teachers have not experienced a collaborative way of working. Further, the exposure

involved in learning and working together can pose a perceived threat. Focused attention to developing collaborative work cultures and skills specifically focused on student learning is fundamental to establishing inclusive systems of education.

Lesson 9: There Are Many Meanings of "Inclusion"

Would the real inclusion please step forward? Since its inception, the language of inclusion has taken on many meanings, localized to particular districts, schools, classes, and even teachers. When claims of inclusion are made, there may be general understandings of meaning, but no particular meaning can be assumed. Inclusion can mean everything and nothing. Frequently, inclusion is defined structurally as a "program," with specific programs varying enormously. Sometimes inclusion relates to only students with severe disabilities, sometimes only those with mild disabilities, sometimes only young children. Sometimes inclusion is viewed as happening for most of a school day, sometimes for only a short period. Efforts to define inclusion structurally or categorically can lose meaning when applied to individual students. Always, the meaning and practice of an inclusive education should be personalized based on the unique interests and abilities of individual students.

Lesson 10: Leadership is Influence, and Influence is Everywhere

Inclusion, like every other change in practice, does not occur in the absence of effective leadership. Leadership is about influencing others to reflect on current practice, to envision a more desirable future, and to inspire action that results in improvement. Influence happens everywhere – at every level and between all levels in a system. Families who desire a more inclusive education for their children influence educators and vice versa. Teachers who demonstrate collaborative ways of solving

problems and supporting students influence other teachers in doing so. Principals who articulate a powerful vision for students learning together and who provide professional development opportunities for faculty to realize the vision influence the language, the culture, and the inclusive practices in schools. In social organizations, such as schools, each person influences others whether or not they are aware of it. Choices of attitude, language, behavior, and how to direct one's energy contribute enormously to the culture and the conditions of teaching and learning in schools, for better or worse.

The Final Lesson: There is Reason to Be Hopeful

Perhaps the most important lesson learned on the way to inclusion has been renewed faith in the possibilities for creating a more inclusive and effective system of education for all students. Truly, there are ordinary teachers, kids, parents, and administrators who have created extraordinary educational experiences to the benefit of students, teachers, schools, and communities. They have made commitments to improvement and have learned along the way. They have persevered and are shining examples of the plentiful good there is in education. They serve as an inspiration for educators and others who support continuous improvement in our system of education, and who seek to realize the values of equity and opportunity that are the foundation of strong schools and strong communities.

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But, What About...? Supporting Students With the Most Significant Disabilities

by Rae Sonnenmeir and Michael McSheehan

Julie has lived most of her 14 years in a nursing home and has many medical needs. Jeffrey has the label of autism and his challenging behaviors frequently disrupt his third grade classroom. Prior to entering second grade, Peter experienced a traumatic brain injury following brain surgery and now is not able to speak or move his body easily. Josh experiences multiple labels and a significant seizure disorder; recent evaluations suggest that his abilities are more like those

experiences. Considerations for getting students “in,” for exploring how to make the experiences meaningful, and for building confidence in the teams’ abilities to support students to demonstrate their abilities are illustrated through each of these student’s stories.

Getting “In”: Julie and Jeffrey

Prior to entering her local middle school, Julie’s educational program emphasized therapies, with no “academic” curriculum derived from the local or state curriculum standards. As her team planned for her enrollment in seventh grade, time was spent learning about “what would it take” to make her experience at the middle school successful. Through interviews, questionnaires, a review of her records, and observations, an understanding emerged of what had “worked” and “not worked” in supporting Julie in the past. Two main questions emerged as the team facilitating her transition from the nursing home placement to the middle school sorted through the information: How will we keep Julie medically stable in a non-medical environment, and how will we support Julie to participate in seventh-grade classrooms? Protocols were developed to address her medical needs. It was essential for the family and school staff to know that a plan was in place for the several “worst-case scenarios” they feared. A “question behind the question” about Julie’s participation in classes was in regard to her perceived abilities; no one really knew Julie’s abilities. Teachers and classmates alike adopted an attitude of “presumed competence” when interacting with Julie. Several team discussions focused on how challenging it was for professionals trained in drawing conclusions to “suspend judgement.” With strong leadership from the principal and other

administrators, team schedules were adjusted to include time to plan for Julie’s participation within lessons and time to debrief and reflect on those lessons. All of this work supported Julie “getting in” the middle school.

Julie’s medical needs could be met within the general education classroom, but challenging behaviors raise another whole set of concerns for teachers and their ability to support students in the general education classroom. In Jeffrey’s situation, many people on his team were unfamiliar with the label of autism. His behaviors were thought to be part of this label. His team felt that his behaviors needed to be “under control” *before* he could be included in the third grade classroom.

Jeffrey frequently rubbed his head, often upside down in his chair. A functional behavior assessment, including observations and data collection to understand the setting events and triggers, and development of hypotheses about the behaviors, revealed some interesting information for the team. It turned out that he had a toothache and once that was addressed, the behavior decreased.

Jeffrey was interested in being with his classmates but he didn’t have an effective way of communicating, speaking only a few words. He often hit and scratched others. Following the functional behavior assessment, these behaviors were thought to be one way of communicating. A communication device was introduced while he was supported in the third grade classroom, recorded with messages that other third graders would say within specific activities. Once Jeffrey had a way of expressing himself with his classmates and adults, the challenging behaviors decreased. In fact, being in the general education classroom was considered to be part of Jeffrey’s positive behavior support plan.

When you talk about including students with disabilities in general education classrooms, surely you don’t mean these students?

of an 18-24 month old than those of other fourth graders. When you talk about including students with disabilities in general education classrooms, surely you don’t mean these students? How could the general education classroom ever be an appropriate learning environment for them? How can the staff ever meet all of the medical needs and behavior challenges, let alone the learning needs of these students? Where will the resources come from? What will be considered meaningful learning outcomes for these students?

Not only is it right to include these students in age-appropriate classrooms, with the appropriate supports these students can engage and learn the general education curriculum. Supporting teams through enhancing their skills creates a setting in which students can demonstrate their learning and have improved outcomes from their educational

Making it Meaningful: Peter

Even when students with the most significant disabilities are “in” class, the question about how meaningful the experience is lingers. To change Peter’s involvement in second grade from “parallel participant” to “engaged member,” his team stepped back to explore the different ways he could communicate, such as using his eyes to make choices and using a switch connected to some voice output device. Their approach to Peter’s skill development shifted from practice using special materials with his instructional assistant to practice within the classroom activities using the same materials as classmates, and with classmates as partners in learning. The teacher’s academic lessons guided the selection of messages to be used for Peter’s communication choices in the activities. Classmates were interested and

For students who experience the most significant disabilities meaningful learning can take place in the general education classroom when the appropriate supports are in place for both the students and the teams.

willing participants during this exploration phase. A specific mode of communication was prioritized within each lesson. For example, during a writing lesson, students were asked to brainstorm topics with a partner. Choices were written on pieces of paper and presented one at a time to Peter as his classmate said them aloud (e.g., “Wanna write about baseball, going to grandma’s house, going to the ocean, or something else”). A choice of two was presented and whichever item Peter looked at was

accepted as his selection. Topics were confirmed and additional specific story ideas were presented this way. Peter was seen as an active contributor to this piece of writing by both his classmate and his teacher. Peter’s team continued to explore and describe how he used his eyes and the switch to more clearly demonstrate learning and participation in class activities. As greater clarity emerged about what seemed to be the most effective for Peter, the team was ready to move on to develop specific guidelines for how those supports should be provided.

Building Team Confidence: Josh

Julie and Jeffrey got “in.” Peter was on the road from “in” to “meaningful.” And then there was Josh. Josh had been included in his local elementary school since kindergarten. His classmates and teachers knew him well, though there were initially varied views on his abilities. After “suspending judgement” and engaging in a period of “exploring and describing” what might be appropriate supports, Josh’s team was interested in really coming to grips with “what do we know” about how inclusion is working for Josh. They wanted to feel confident in Josh’s demonstration of learning and in their own abilities to provide the supports. It became clear that Josh’s learning outcomes were intricately linked to the ways in which supports were provided. For example, Josh’s team learned that good seating and positioning was linked to the accuracy and reliability of his pointing. Without the use of a “Sit ‘n Move” cushion and positioning with his feet on the floor and his knees and hips at right angles, Josh’s pointing varied considerably, sometimes resulting in the use of his whole hand instead of his index finger. This knowledge carried over to how Josh’s classmates supported him in a math lesson involving three-digit computations. Groups of students worked on solving math problems such as $386 \times 242 = ?$ They presented Josh with choices of four possible answers to a single computation at a time (e.g., 6×2)

on a dry erase board. To the classmates’ surprise, Josh’s first few answers were “wrong.” One classmate noticed Josh was not sitting up straight and that his cushion was not in place. When the students adjusted Josh’s supports, and asked him again to answer the math questions, he gave all the right answers. The team and the classmates had confidence in Josh’s responses when he had the appropriate seating supports and less confidence in his responses when these supports were absent or not well provided.

Conclusion: Tying It All Together

For students who experience the most significant disabilities, meaningful learning can take place in the general education classroom when the appropriate supports are in place for *both* the students and the teams. Time is needed to learn about the student, the team, and the culture of the classroom to identify what types of supports are needed for the student and the team to be successful. Supports are best identified following a period of exploration when people can describe what does and doesn’t work within the activities of the classroom. Once a clear understanding of what students and teams need has been reached, plans for implementing supports can be developed. Teams need to observe and document how accurately and reliably those supports are used and review and reflect on the outcomes, reviewing when supports are provided well and when they are not. When teams have the time and receive the support that they need, students are better supported to demonstrate their learning.

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Teaching to Diversity in an Age of Standards

by Robi Kronberg, Donna Walker, and Judy Zimmerman

Differentiated instruction is a way of teaching that compels a teacher to proactively respond to a range of diverse learner characteristics. Differentiated instruction embodies a belief system as well as a skillful repertoire of teaching practices. At the core of differentiated instruction is the recognition that every learner has a unique way in which he or she learns best. A teacher who strives to achieve the art and the practice of differentiated instruction embraces the belief that every student comes to school with varying interests, learning styles, experiences, strengths, and needs. With that belief comes a parallel commitment to designing instructional approaches that are respectful of and responsive to students' diversity. As classrooms increase in heterogeneity, the importance and the urgency for differentiation are great.

Juxtaposed with today's diverse students and the need for flexibility to effectively teach all students is the simultaneous need for teachers to apply a common set of standards to all students. Differentiated instruction, when done thoughtfully and with clarity of purpose, is complex. It involves an intricate dance between holding standards steady for all students while creating multiple pathways for students to achieve those common standards. It changes the roles of both teachers and students.

In differentiated classrooms, teachers and students work together to create meaningful learning opportunities. Teachers, while maintaining clarity of the ultimate learning goals, invite students to participate in deciding how best to progress towards the goals. In such learning environments, students are taught skills of self-directedness and assume a shared responsibility for learning. Differentiated classrooms are often unpredictable, active, joyful, and vibrant. Teachers become facilitators of learning, skillful at implementing ongoing assessment that guides instruction.

Those who differentiate their teaching engage in ongoing inquiry, planning, persistence, flexibility, and reflection.

Student Response to Differentiated Instruction

The feedback from students is clear. In focus groups designed to probe student response to differentiated teaching and learning, students articulated a strong preference for differing strategies to assist in their learning. As voiced by a third grader, "It's better to have different activities and not always the same ones because if they were the same you just keep learning the same thing over and over again." A first grader, in reflecting on a recently completed differentiated unit on weather, responded, "We are all different and we like to do different activities at the stations." When sixth graders were asked about their preferences between a unit in which students were involved in a variety of learning activities versus a unit in which the students primarily read and participated in discussions about the topic, all students voiced a strong preference for differentiated learning pathways. Comments included the following:

- "If you just had to read, it would be boring."
- "You wouldn't learn anything because all you would be doing is looking at words."
- "You would just hear about other peoples' opinion if you read, you wouldn't be able to make up your own opinion like we did when we interviewed people."

Designing Differentiated Lessons: A Third Grade Example

When designing a differentiated lesson or unit, a teacher is attentive to four areas (Tomlinson, 2001):

- Content: *what* students learn.
- Process: *how* students learn.
- Product: how students *integrate* and *apply* what they have learned.
- Assessment: how students *demonstrate proficiency* in what they have learned.

The following example describes how a third grade teacher creates varied pathways of learning in order to assist a diverse group of students in mastering an identified standard in math. The third grade classroom is inclusive and has students with differing strengths, needs, interests, and experiences. In this third grade class, the teacher must hold the math standard constant for all of her third graders. Students make decisions about how to approach the problem and communicate their ideas (Indiana State Board of Education, 2000). In initial unit planning, the teacher identifies the "big idea" as being the use of mathematical problem solving in everyday life. Assuming that the students will demonstrate differing levels of understanding relative to mathematical problem solving, the teacher designs several pre-assessments to obtain additional information. She utilizes performance information from prior math units as well as current student performance on several different problem-solving tasks to guide instructional planning. Throughout the unit she will use daily assignments and informal observation to assess how well students are grasping the concepts and skills. The information from the pre-assessments indicates that some of the students struggle with both the problem solving as well as the communication of their ideas, while other students far exceed the third grade standard. In order to challenge all of the students at an appropriate level, the teacher will utilize several key strategies to differentiate content. She is mindful that while the overall content of the unit is the same for all students (mathematical

problem solving), the goal is to create appropriate breadth and depth of the content as well as accessibility to the content for all students. Knowing the learning profiles of the students, the teacher knows that some students access the content through reading and discussing, others through talking and working with peers, and others through technology. Given the range of student understandings, she designs the unit around a set of tiered activities (Tomlinson, 2001).

In designing the three tiers, the teacher develops problem-solving activities that are differentiated across four dimensions: complexity of the skills needed to solve the mathematical problems, familiarity of the problems to be solved, level of support needed to complete the activities, and the types of text material and resources that students will utilize to assist them in the activities. Across all three tiers, students are involved in small group and independent activities. To build skills in self-directedness, she provides students with a contract that identifies their tasks for the week, resources to use, and group expectations. For a few students the teacher also includes a step-by-step task checklist which she and the student initial at the end of each math period.

Throughout the unit, the teacher is cognizant of providing a variety of ways in which students work to make sense of the content. In addition to the tiered activities, she has students keep a math journal. On some days she varies the journal prompts, designating certain questions for certain students in order to achieve clarity of thought or to push some students to a greater depth of thinking. On other days, students respond to the same prompt. One student keeps an audio journal because writing is a difficult motor skill. Some students are encouraged to use manipulatives to assist in their understanding. Other students find the use of a graphic organizer helpful as it allows them to see connections between the steps of the problem. A few students learn better if they can act out their problem-solving task or

make models representing their math problem. As the unit progresses, the teacher continually monitors student learning. When necessary, she might facilitate a whole class lesson on a particular skill. More often, the teacher works with small groups and individual students.

In planning for differentiated products, this teacher utilizes the eight multiple intelligences to guide her choice of product options (Lazear, 1999). So as to not overwhelm students with too many choices and also to allow students sufficient time to understand expectations for quality products, she provides four options. Students can integrate what they have learned by a) writing and illustrating a book of four ways a third grader uses mathematical problem solving in his or her life, b) creating a flowchart that displays a step-by-step process for solving a mathematical problem, c) making a board game that explains how to approach and solve a math problem and communicate the solution or d) creating a math rap or rhyme about problem solving. Additionally, all students submit a portfolio of work examples from the math unit.

In addition to the formative assessment that the teacher uses to inform the instruction plans throughout the unit, she also utilizes summative assessment at the end of the math unit. This assessment focuses on students' abilities to accurately use problem-solving skills to solve mathematical problems and resembles the types of problems that students will encounter in the district assessment. The completed projects provide an authentic demonstration of student learning. Regardless of the product selected, all students are assessed using specific criteria on a rubric. The indicators on the rubric are designed to assess how well students utilize problem solving skills as well as how accurately the students are able to communicate how they solved their math problems.

Conclusion

The classroom described previously typifies how teachers are responding to the diverse needs of students while simultaneously holding a common set of standards. The journey of differentiation is a challenging one. Teachers face daily demands on their minds and their hearts as they strive to meet the needs of each learner. It is challenging to create "working with" learning environments in which both students and teachers have a voice and everyone is a teacher as well as a learner. It is time-consuming to proactively plan instructional units that are responsive to the needs, interests, and experiences of a classroom of students. It is frustrating to cope with external pressures pushing towards greater standardization when students cry out to be known as unique individuals. It is essential to do our collective best to provide a differentiated learning experience for the many students like this fifth grader who said, "You know that a teacher really cares about you when they know you well enough to know how you learn and then they try to teach you that way."

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Meaningful Learning (and Good IEPs) Amidst the Learning Standards Movement

by Linda Davern, Roberta Schnorr, Alison Ford, and Merry Staulters

Learning standards have redefined school life for many of today's public school students, as well as their teachers. One definition of learning standards is "the core of what all people should know, understand and be able to do as a result of their schooling" (New York State Education Department). In many elementary and secondary schools, standards now drive decisions about curriculum and assessment – and therefore are having a significant impact on day-to-day classroom practices. What does this mean for a student with a significant disability?

While learning standards may have benefits for many learners, such as more emphasis on high expectations for all students, team members who serve students who have significant disabilities must plan thoughtfully to maintain a focus on individual outcomes. The following guidelines are offered for consideration as you parent, teach, or advocate for such a student, and join with other team members to design and implement an individual education program.

Maintain a Focus on the Individual Student's Priorities

While educational priorities for most learners may flow from a broad framework of learning standards, planning for a student with a significant disability may require a more focused starting point. Learning standards must not override the requirement to develop an appropriate individualized educational program for a student. While districts and states are taking different approaches to learning standards (e.g., curricular areas affected by standards, the degree of specificity of the standards), the planning team still needs to consider the question: Which educational outcomes are of highest priority for this individual student?

While the team should discuss links between IEP goals/objectives and learning standards, a "standards only" frame should not be used at the cost of meaningful and relevant outcomes for a student. In other words, IEPs should not become a long list of goals related to every standard, but should offer a clear framework of individual educational priorities. Excellent tools such as *Choosing Options and Accommodations for Children (COACH)* can be used to guide the identification of priorities (Giangreco, Cloninger & Iverson, 1998). Specific frameworks, such as the following, can be helpful when considering areas of IEP focus for a student with a significant disability (Ford, Davern & Schnorr, 2001, p. 218):

- Language and Literacy (communication, reading, writing).
- Mathematics (math understanding and problem solving, money and time management) and Technology.
- Personal/Social Development (self-awareness, decision-making and self-determination; health and wellness; interpersonal skills; self-management and organization; arts and leisure).
- School, Community and Work Participation (classroom and school routines; community access; career/vocational/college experience).

Many states will have standards related to these areas of focus, even though they may use different language to express them. For example, "Language and Literacy" may be linked to English and Language Arts Standards; "Mathematics and Technology" may be linked to Math, Science and Technology; and "Personal/Social Development" may be linked to Career Development standards. In other words, priorities determined by parents, advocates, and school personnel do not need to be sacrificed or diluted due to a

state's or district's desire to make these links. After individual priorities are determined through IEP planning, the team can discuss how individual goals are connected to broader learning standards.

Ensure Priority Attention for Foundation Skills Development

A helpful way to think about priorities is to consider which skills are *foundation skills*¹. These are:

...skills that open doors for people.

They provide the basis for interacting with people and information in a multicultural society, successfully navigating the tasks of living, solving problems, making contributions and doing so within an ethical framework" (Ford, Davern & Schnorr, 2001, p. 217).

Examples of foundation skills include literacy/communication, self-management, and interpersonal skills. Literacy is of particular importance. According to Erickson and Koppenhaver, "People with severe disabilities can learn to read and write. At the very least, they can benefit linguistically, cognitively and communicatively from regular and predictable interactions with others around print" (1995, p. 63). Foundation skills can be addressed through a broad range of activities. Development in these skills is relevant for all students, and may be of particular importance for a student with a significant disability.

The first planning question for the team may be, "Is this a student who will need ongoing formal instruction and support to develop critical foundation skills?" Most learners will acquire many

¹ Note: We have borrowed the phrase "foundation skills" from the 1991 report from the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS). We use this phrase since it seems to capture the essence of setting priorities, but use it in somewhat different ways than used in the SCANS report.

communication, self-management, and interpersonal skills incidentally from experiences in home and family routines without ongoing formal planning or explicit instruction. Many students will acquire literacy skills very early and relatively quickly in their education. However, there will be a very small number of students for whom these foundation skills are central to their education for an extended period of time. Rather than starting with a broad-based “standards” framework for these learners, it may be necessary to determine individual priorities in foundation skills first and then link the priorities to learning standards.

For purposes of discussion, we will consider a hypothetical student, Tyrone, who is a second grader with a significant disability. His educational program is grounded in foundation skill development. As a full member of an inclusive second grade class, Tyrone participates in most of the same instructional and class routines as his second grade classmates. However, the instructional focus for Tyrone throughout those routines is on his IEP priorities in foundation skills areas such as using a communication system, participating in shared activities with peers, following class and school routines, and increasing his independence in personal and health routines (e.g., using the bathroom, mealtimes). While the instructional emphasis for most of the second graders is on literacy standards related to reading and writing independently, one of the central goals for Tyrone is developing and using his communication system. Unlike his peers, he had no functional communication system at the beginning of the school year. This year he has made significant gains using the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) to respond to and make requests (Frost & Bondy, 2002).

While Tyrone’s priorities may or may not emerge directly from the learning standards which are applicable to his district or state, the teaching team notes logical connections. For example, “English and Language Arts” standards for elementary learners may include “to

read, write, listen and speak for understanding.” Therefore, Tyrone’s goals to use PECS to respond to others (listen) and make requests (to speak) are clearly related to some of the broad English and Language Arts standards for all elementary learners.

Because all team members understand and communicate frequently about Tyrone’s IEP priorities in foundation skills, teaching and learning are grounded in outcomes that are most critical for him. The teaching team analyzes daily class routines and ongoing opportunities for Tyrone to practice using his communication system as the focus of his participation. Many of these routines are rich literacy activities where Tyrone, like classmates, is listening to books, working with words (and related symbols) and constructing messages. Teacher-made materials that match his picture communication symbols with print are often utilized within shared activities. Some supplemental activities are planned for Tyrone’s priorities (e.g., occupational therapy, tutoring time with speech/language therapist) which include the participation of some of his classmates.

Tyrone’s individual education program within his second grade class is much more than “being there for socialization” or “partial participation in class routines.” Team members must have a clear focus on the individual student’s priorities and use these to guide daily and weekly instructional planning. For Tyrone, developing identified foundation skills (as opposed to solely “adapting” a broad range of learning standards) will be central to his education. These skills are addressed primarily within rich activities with peers without disabilities, not in a series of separate pull-out activities throughout a fragmented day.

See How Individual Priorities Fit With Standards-Based Activities

Colleges and universities are now beginning to prepare new teachers to acknowledge variation in learner profiles

and to see the rich opportunities for learning that can exist within a single educational activity. What may be viewed primarily as a social studies activity can be a vehicle for progress in many areas for any child (e.g., communication/literacy, social skills). This possibility of multiple outcomes being addressed within a single activity is not always readily apparent to teachers who are accustomed to viewing a learning activity through a particular “curricular” lens. When viewed only as a standards-based social studies activity, a class member with a significant disability may be viewed as “failing.” When viewed as a rich class or small group learning activity, team members can learn to recognize (and structure) opportunities for the student with a significant disability to make progress on vital priority skills. Such opportunities are expanded when teachers use highly active and interactive approaches such as cooperative learning, activity-based instruction, and approaches that draw on multiple intelligences. Teaching can be designed to accommodate varied academic and social objectives within a shared activity.

It takes ongoing communication and team planning to build a shared understanding of how individual student priorities can be addressed. Such an understanding needs to be explored continually, in an explicit way with all team members who then actively work on these individual goals, rather than simply hoping they will be achieved. One way to support such team discussion is a tool called a “program-at-a-glance.” This tool was originally proposed by Giangreco, Cloninger, and Iverson in COACH (1998). This tool is a one to two page document on each student who has an IEP. It contains the most essential information on an individual student – with a concise listing of educational priorities. Team members cannot focus on priorities unless they actively carry these priorities around in their day-to-day awareness. A visual reminder is of benefit to busy personnel and can greatly enhance the effectiveness of the team.

[Davern, continued on page 31]

Decision-Making in Inclusive Education: The Role of Special Education Directors

by Chris Sonenblum

Directors of special education at the school and district levels have a key role in facilitating the inclusion of all learners in typical learning environments. There are several facets of the director's role that are important in protecting the rights of individuals while promoting healthy educational systems. The recent emphasis on quality and accountability in public education further highlights the significance of the director's work with both individualized and school and district-wide decision-making.

Adapting the Environment

In the early stages of implementation of inclusion, special education directors committed the resources to adapt learning environments. That meant joining in facilities-planning by school districts and communities to form new assumptions about what classrooms might look like and how much space might be needed to accommodate unique equipment and additional staff to address the needs of students with severe and multiple disabilities in typical schools. Prior to the subsequent advances in building codes and the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act and revisions to Section 504 related to accessibility, directors and others were necessarily preoccupied with the physical adaptations to buildings. Ramps, changing tables, and other adaptations of toileting facilities were added. Some of the discussions that took place among the maintenance engineers and custodians and electricians who made these adaptations were as critical to increasing community awareness of the rights of individuals with disabilities as the professional development activities and student awareness programs designed to facilitate inclusion.

Creating the Culture

With the changes to physical environments came the shift in expectations for student participation. The responsibility for children with special needs expanded to the whole school community. Custodians who installed swings suggested ways to make more room for wheelchairs in cafeterias. Receptionists involved in activities as rewards for student behavior such as "helping" in the office became committed to seeking additional opportunities for students to participate in the school as a whole. Co-curricular activities were considered and resources applied to supplement the standard coaching and supervision requirements. Gradually, school climate and culture were enhanced by the involvement (not just the mere presence) of students with particular learning needs. Special education administrators had significant impact through observing and acknowledging the commitments of all staff (not just those working in special education) in advancing inclusion. Building relationships in which the value of all children was clearly demonstrated as vital to promoting the success of teachers and others in adapting to unique needs. Directors nurtured a culture of respect for differences.

Modeling the Leadership

Today, as school administrators, directors have the responsibility of modeling the philosophical and practical underpinnings of inclusive education among peers and colleagues. This means acknowledging the challenges faced by other administrators such as building principals and directors of curriculum and instruction, and acting as a catalyst for productive change. It is critical that the administrators of special education be perceived as school administrators who shoulder their share of the work of

running the organization in addition to responding to the specific needs of students, staff, and parents concerning those with learning challenges. Often the presence of a director in a meeting may serve as a visual reminder that the implications of any action taken must be analyzed in terms of their impact on education of all students, including those with disabilities. Participation in ongoing management of the school district is critical to maintaining influence and promoting productive growth and systemic change. This approach to inclusive administration sets a tone within the organization that promotes inclusion and values diversity.

Facilitating Balance

The director also serves as a model for facilitating balance. While reminding others of the obligations to facilitate inclusion and adapt to unique needs, a director's ongoing approach to decision-making in groups will reassure others that the organization is not susceptible to unreasonable demands and costly requests. Children and young people with developmental disabilities are entitled to individualized decision-making about their educational needs. This process dictates that the particular circumstances of each point in the child's schooling be considered in making annual decisions about the program and services most likely to stimulate progress toward goals. The construct of "least restrictive environment" extends our thinking beyond physical inclusion in a typical classroom by requiring that services be "reasonably calculated to confer educational benefit." Individualized Education Program (IEP) planning teams must consider the environment that is most appropriate for addressing specific goals at each stage of the child or young adult's education. These deci-

sions are not easy. The special education director must facilitate this work.

Ensuring Accountability and Results

One of the goals of Congress in 1975 was to alter the assumptions generally made about disability and education. Education couldn't be denied to those with unique needs just because we didn't know in advance how much learning might take place or what impact it might have. There are many indications that the action of Congress did, in fact, alter important assumptions made in our society.

The recent work of the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education demonstrates that a shift has been made. Access is an expectation, but the Commission's report also removes the emphasis from services to results. The focus on accountability in public education has been brought into the foreground. Individual ability testing is not recommended, and the potential for shifting public resources to private providers has been raised as a remedy to less-than-satisfactory performance by public schools. Again, the role of the school administrator in special education is going to be a key to figuring out what "quality" services are and how to measure "adequate" progress among students with disabilities. Balancing the need for "appropriate" services on an individual basis with the application of standards that are applied to a group is the essence of special education administration.

Managing Scarce Resources

Specialized environments still have a place in delivering services under IDEA. In times of scarce resources, the question of how many different environments can be maintained at the same time rises to the surface. Educational planning teams, including parents – and the student as appropriate – face a tough challenge in choosing the right location for learning at each juncture in the child's educational career. Practical

guidelines can help in this decision making process, but directors will still have to rely on "economies of scale" in designing and maintaining specialized environments or providing the additional staff support to general education.

A more recent challenge may be to assure that the required supplementary aids and services aren't provided at the expense of typical instruction. Until the needs of every individual are given the same comprehensive evaluation available through IDEA, "equal" opportunity may not be achieved. The boundary that separates those entitled to specialized instruction from "everyone else" will not disappear until the resources are distributed in another way. The compelling need to accommodate disability by providing enhanced resources has not diminished. The boundary exists, but hopefully it blurs from time to time, and the outcome of ultimate success in the business of living applies to all.

Informed and compassionate leadership can't alter every attitude, but it can create new expectations and ongoing problem solving. Hopefully scarce resources or shifting political agendas will never jeopardize the enriched learning environments that we now take for granted. The expectation of meaningful participation must be further examined in light of the shift toward results in education. Deeper analysis of appropriate standards and outcome measures for all students, including those with disabilities, is needed. Highly skilled and thoughtful leaders will take on these challenges in the next 25 years in the role of director of special education.

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The Paraeducator Role in Inclusive Schools

- **National Clearinghouse for Paraeducator Resources Web Site** (<http://www.usc.edu/dept/education/CMMR/Clearinghouse.html>). This resource operated by the Center for Multilingual, Multicultural Research at the University of Southern California offers an extensive collection of online full-text articles addressing various aspects of the paraeducator role in education, abstracts from the ERIC Database on paraeducators, a description of numerous paraeducator-to-teacher career ladder programs, additional paraeducator resources, and an opportunity to subscribe to a listserv electronic discussion forum on paraeducators.

- **National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals.** The center offers training events and materials for paraprofessionals, teachers, and administrators; technical assistance to facilitate development of state and local systems and infrastructures that support the work of paraprofessionals; publishes a newsletter and Web site; and sponsors an annual national conference. For more information visit the Web site at <http://www.nrcpara.org> or call 435/797-7272.

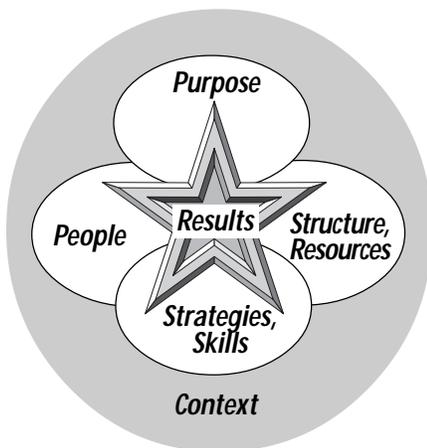
- **IDEA Practices Web site** (<http://www.ideapractices.org>). The Web site is designed to answer questions and provide information about the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and support efforts to help all children learn. A search of the site by the term "paraprofessional" yields over 50 resources, including *The Paraprofessional's Guide to the Inclusive Classroom*; the *SpeNSE Fact Sheet – The Role of Paraprofessionals in Special Education*; and *IDEA Practices – Knowledge and Skills for Teachers Supervising the Work of Paraprofessionals*.

What's Working and What's Not for Your Team?

by Jennifer York-Barr, Gail Ghere, and Jenny Sommerness

If collaborative teamwork is an essential ingredient for inclusive education, why isn't it standard practice in most schools? Teams can be a source of great energy, creativity, and support for educators – resulting in a high quality education for students. Teams can also be a source of great energy drain and frustration. Working on a team has the potential to both enhance and impede practice.

What does it take to work well as a team? The *Framework for Analyzing Team Effectiveness* (see figure) can be used to reflect on what's working and what's not for many different kinds of teams, such



as student-specific teams, grade level teams or special education teams. It can also be used to guide the formation of new teams. There are six components in the framework. Following is a description of each component with related questions to guide reflection and planning for team effectiveness.

Purpose: What and Why?

Purpose is the foundation upon which effective teams are built. The purpose is the reason a team exists and is what gives meaning for its members. Meaning drives motivation and effort. A primary motivator for educators is student growth.

Purpose is operationalized by estab-

lishing specific outcomes or goals toward which team members can focus their energy and contribute their expertise. Too often, team members are not clear about the purpose or expected outcomes for their work. In reflecting on a team's purpose, consider the following questions:

- Why was the team formed? What were the intended outcomes or goals?
- What goals require a team effort? What goals could be effectively addressed by individuals?
- Does everyone on the team understand the purpose?
- How is the team's purpose directly or indirectly related to improving practice and student learning? Which students are likely to benefit from the work of the team?

People: Who?

People are the essence of effective teams. The greatest resource for learning is within and among the individuals who reflect, create, and work together. Involvement increases ownership and a sense of responsibility for outcomes. Joined by common purpose, strong relationships and different strengths among team members create interdependence to enhance goal achievement. In reflecting on the people component of effective teamwork, consider the following questions:

- Is there an existing team that could effectively accomplish the goals? Should an existing team be reconfigured or a new team formed?
- How does each member contribute to the purpose of the team and toward the achievement of its goals?
- Are the members of the team the same individuals who will be responsible for carrying out plans created by the team?

- Are there others who will be expected to carry out plans who should be part of the team or who should serve in an advisory capacity to the team?
- Is there sufficient diversity in perspective, knowledge, and skill regarding the goals to be addressed so as to generate well-informed, effective solutions? Who else might offer a valuable perspective?
- Do team members know one another? Have they developed positive working relationships and a sense of trust within the team?

Strategies and Skills: How?

Strategies and skills are the means by which team members productively learn and work together to accomplish team goals. Strategies are the ways of approaching group process; for example, the steps involved in generating ideas, analyzing problems, understanding conflicts, making decisions, and planning for action. Skills are the ways of thinking and behaving that promote effective communication, such as dialogue, listening, paraphrasing, using nonjudgmental language, asking questions, balancing input, and assuming positive intentions on the part of other team members. Difficulties experienced by teams sometimes result from a lack of opportunity to learn about and practice effective strategies and skills. Consider the following questions:

- Has the team learned about specific processes for working as a group? Do they use these processes?
- Do all team members use effective communication skills?
- What roles do individuals play? Would assigning or rotating specific group roles result in more productive interactions? For example, would a desig-

nated facilitator assist in clarifying strategies and ensuring more balanced participation among group members?

- How does the team create continuity from one meeting to the next? For instance, shared minutes, a log of decisions, a listing of follow-up responsibilities.

Structure and Resources: Support?

Structures and resources are the tangible supports for getting the work done. The primary structure required is the opportunity to meet as a team. Related to this are resources such as additional personnel, funds to purchase materials or to at-

The absence of any one of these six components inhibits team effectiveness.

tend staff development opportunities, space, and equipment. Reflection questions for analyzing team structure and resources include:

- Is time allocated such that all team members can attend meetings?
- Can team members easily access one another between face-to-face meetings (e.g., physical proximity, voice-mail, e-mail)?
- Is there a budget to support equipment, staff development or other resources necessary to address the team goals?
- Can the team articulate what types of resources would support their work? Do they know who to contact to access or inquire about such resources?

Context: Where?

Context refers to the surrounding conditions that influence team effectiveness. Context is often overlooked because it is

viewed as existing outside the boundaries of the team. Realistically, however, it significantly affects what happens within the team and what can be accomplished by a team. Even effective teams can hit a ceiling if their work is not supported in the larger school context. There are two major and inter-related context variables: school culture and leadership. For example, if there is a history of punishing initiation or failed attempts at improvement, a culture of low trust develops and team members are not likely to engage in the creative thinking and risk-taking required to address complex problems. Context can also involve power and politics not readily apparent at the team level. Here are some questions to reflect on context and its potential influence on teams:

- Does the work of the team align or conflict with high profile school or district goals?
- Are administrators supportive of the team's purpose and goals? How is this support communicated to the team and to the rest of the school?
- Are there key individuals who oppose or block the work of the team?
- Is the school a place where innovation and creativity is encouraged?

Results: So What?

Results are the products and outcomes of the teamwork. Results are what sustains the interest and energy of the team members. Results can be intrinsic and extrinsic and include outcomes for students as well as outcomes related to team effectiveness. Reflecting on the following questions can assist in gauging progress toward results:

- Has the team grown in its capacity to work effectively? Have working relationships improved? Has the team learned to consider a wide range of issues that influence accomplishing goals?
- Have individual team members grown from their participation on the team? Have their communication

skills improved? Do they think about students differently? Have their practices changed?

- What are some indicators of progress toward accomplishing team goals?
- How have students and student learning been affected by the work of the team?

Tying It All Together

The absence of any one of these six components inhibits team effectiveness. Without shared purpose and meaning, there is no reason for expending effort. Without key people, expertise and ownership for accomplishing goals are missing. Without process strategies and communication skills, the potential for learning and for addressing issues is lost. Without structure and resources, team members are blocked from doing their work. Without a supportive context, the conditions are insufficient for taking the risks inherent in team learning and trying new ways of doing things. And, without results, team members will eventually disengage from the process – first psychologically and then physically.

Embracing the many opportunities and challenges facing today's educators requires learning together and coming up with new ways of thinking about and engaging in practice. Teamwork is the key energy source for learning and continuous improvement. High functioning teams, however, do not just happen. They emerge from intentional design and development efforts.

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Special Educators as Teacher Leaders in Inclusive Schools

by Jennifer York-Barr, Gail Ghere, and Jenny Sommersness

Notions of leadership have evolved over centuries from a focus on individual “great men” considered born for leadership to a recognition that leadership is shared by many individuals throughout all levels of an organizational or community context. In education, recent research suggests that teachers are the cornerstone of any initiative that improves teaching and learning. They are largely responsible for creating the conditions that result in high levels of student learning. In effect, they function as *leaders* in the continuous process of educational improvement. Nowhere is this more evident than with special education teachers in inclusive education programs.

High quality inclusive education programs cannot exist without special educators who serve as teacher leaders. These teachers not only demonstrate excellence in instruction, they build bridges to connect students with disabilities to the broader education community and its learning and social resources. They understand that if as teachers they are isolated or marginalized in a school, so too will be their students. Stated differently, *if the adults are separate, the kids will be separate*. To be effective, special educators serve as advocates, connectors, and collaborators.

By observing and interviewing special educators identified as effective in inclusive settings across numerous schools and districts, we have identified four primary roles and related responsibilities that offer insight about the complex nature of special educators’ leadership practice:

- **Developing Individual Student Programs.** Related responsibilities:
 - Developing and updating the IEP.
 - Assessing student performance.
 - Advocating for students and supporting student self-advocacy.
 - Designing personalized instructional plans and student schedules.

- Accommodating and modifying class work, testing, and graduation standards.
- Planning for student transitions.
- Collaborating, communicating, and coordinating with parents, related service personnel, and agencies.
- **Providing Instruction to Students.** Related responsibilities:
 - Teaching students through flexible, targeted, multi-level approaches, including: a) personalized instruction (multiple instructional modes and strategies); b) individual instruction (tutoring); c) small group instruction (homogeneous and heterogeneous); d) large group instruction (e.g., in general education); and e) co-teaching (e.g., with general education, second languages).
- **Coordinating Program Implementation Across Many Students.** Related responsibilities:
 - Coordinating the entire special education program and service delivery for all students.
 - Providing direction, generating support for the program with administrators and special and general education colleagues.
 - Collaborating with instructional team members.
- **Directing the Work of Paraprofessionals.** Related responsibilities:
 - Participating in hiring decisions, orientation, and induction process.
 - Developing and adjusting schedules.
 - Directing student program implementation.
 - Providing ongoing development specific to student, classroom, school.
 - Providing input into paraprofessional evaluations.

To carry out these many and varied roles and responsibilities, special educators work as informal leaders across many levels in a school: student, collegial, and organizational. In doing so, they harness and direct resources toward developing and implementing quality individualized educational programs. The nature of this work could be described metaphorically as air traffic controller; they must simultaneously keep the big picture in view *and* address the smallest of navigational or implementation details. They must also continuously coordinate and communicate with the many others involved in providing services to students with special education needs.

Recognizing, validating, and supporting the informal leadership work of special education teachers could go a long way in improving the quality of educational services for students with disabilities and other students as well. The call for such support, however, falls not only to educational administrators but on teachers themselves. Most teachers balk at the idea of being considered a leader, in part because of strong egalitarian norms in schools that result in leading as a teacher being viewed as “out of line” by peers. It is in an evolving context of leadership shared among many members of a school community, therefore, that the potential of teacher leadership to significantly improve educational practice has a hope of being realized.

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Each Belongs: 32 Years of Full Inclusion

by Jack Pearpoint and Gary Bunch

Few of us know about the first school system that made inclusion a policy for every child in its care. This remarkable system started including all children three decades ago. Before most of us imagined inclusion. Before some of us were born. It is a remarkable story, worth telling and celebrating.

Over three decades ago, when isolated families, teachers, and human service professionals wanted to “see” inclusion in action, there were very few

Few of us know about the first school system that made inclusion a policy for every child in its care – the Roman Catholic School Board in Hamilton, Ontario.

examples anywhere. Thus, many of us from around the world visited the Roman Catholic School Board in Hamilton, Ontario, and talked with Jim Hansen, Phil DeFrancesco, Betty Browne, and other members of their team. As we toured, we listened in awe and disbelief as Jim, the superintendent, raved with passion and eloquence about a *system* where *all* children were welcome. And he meant “All Children.” Thousands of visitors came. Jim engineered school time so students led people to witness the impossible happening without trumpets and fanfare, almost invisibly. When camera crews came, they often left disappointed. There was nothing “special” to video. The “cute” kids in the special ed rooms weren’t there at all. They were hidden in regular classes, with all the other cute kids. Most people just couldn’t find them without guidance.

That was 30 years ago. Now, there are

wonderful examples of inclusion in thousands of schools and communities. Many of the institutions that once hid the potential contributions of people far from our consciousness are closed. But the work is not done. There are still people who want to reactivate those old institutions and create new ones. That is why we must listen to our own stories, our own history, so we can continue to learn and move forward.

It began simply in Hamilton with a man who was driven by a vision – uncompromising, outrageous, relentless, and brilliant. Critics were infuriated because there seemed to be no length that Jim Hansen wouldn’t go to in including a child. They were right. There was only one boundary that could not be crossed: Thursday nights were poker nights. That was sacred. And so were Jim’s principles. He believed it was very simple: Everyone belongs. That translated into the system’s mission statement: Each Belongs. He accepted no excuses where the welfare of children was concerned. He bent rules and dented boundaries with his unwavering commitment to full inclusion for all children. Jim did things for which some people labeled him a tyrant. Others consider him a hero. For example, he chose staff. He picked people and promoted people for their values. If they supported Each Belongs, they could move forward quickly. If they were blockers, they were blocked themselves. It wasn’t a secret. Jim ruffled feathers everywhere, but no one questioned his motives or his integrity.

All this was done early on, before the word “inclusion” appeared on the education horizon. “Integration” was the term of the day. Other leading systems were experimenting with allowing children across the threshold of schools into segregated special rooms and facilities. In Hamilton Roman Catholic, Jim led an assault on segregation. Without a Jim Hansen, we doubt that Hamilton would

have been the pioneering program that it has been. Jim is bashful about this and quickly shares the praise with the remarkable team he created. He is right. He could not and did not do it alone – but he was the leader.

There are a thousand stories in this school system. Every school, every principal and teacher, every parent has favorites. The band that included everyone, and sounded just about as good as most other high school bands is one of mine. There were difficult moments when a child with complex needs pushed everyone to the limits. The difference was that there was an “emergency response team.” They didn’t have extra money, but they would support people morally, ethically, professionally, practically – and if that meant the principal put on rubber boots to clean up the mess, that is what happened.

With all this remarkable achievement, one might think that all children would now be included in Ontario schools. Would that it were so. There are two parallel school systems, both funded by the Provincial Ministry of Education. One is “public – nondenominational” and the other is Catholic. Both Boards cover the same territory, with the same per student granting structure. But they have different belief systems. One system operates a separate system for labeled children, and the system Jim shaped welcomes all children. The registration process at the beginning of each year is telling of the difference. In the Hamilton Catholic, if you register as a Catholic, and move your taxes to the Catholic system, your child is welcome. There is no “determination” process to decide *if* your child can come. There is a process of getting to know each child and their family, to determine what supports every child needs to maximize his or her learning. There are constraints. The budget is never adequate. Support for teachers’ aides has been cut back province-wide. But this is not an

[Pearpoint, continued on page 29]

Inclusive Urban Schools: The National Institute for Urban School Improvement

by *Dianne Ferguson and Elisabeth Kozleski*

Inclusion is happening throughout our country and around the world. Roughly half the students in special education spend at least 80% or more of their time in general education classrooms. Students with all types and degrees of disability increasingly receive their education in a general education classroom. But where a student lives is still the most salient factor in where they are placed for special education services. A student in Oregon, for example, is five times more likely to receive their education in a general education classroom than a student in New York state (McLeskey, Henry, & Hodges, 1998). One of the reasons for this difference is urban schools.

Urban schools and systems continue to serve more than 44% of the nation's school-age population in fewer than 4% of the nation's schools. Students attending urban schools are the most culturally and ethnically diverse in the country. Yet, many of the teachers in these schools lack the professional training and experience to teach students effectively, and urban children and youth continue to perform poorly on measures of learning that benchmark their performance against state and national standards. The focus of the National Institute for Urban School Improvement has been to facilitate change toward inclusive education for all students (Ferguson et al, 2001). We are happy to report that despite bleak situations in many urban schools, there are also many examples of success.

Sammy

Sammy attends his neighborhood school in a predominantly Latino portion of his city. Sammy was born with spina bifida and has never been able to walk. His intellectual disabilities have made learning to speak and read very difficult. Now in fifth grade, Sammy uses

his wheelchair to move from his home-room to the lunchroom, the gym, and the playground. A paraprofessional comes to remind him to attend a resource room tutorial session after lunch where he works on language skills for about an hour each day. Otherwise, Sammy's peers work with him in his 5th grade class, where his teacher has organized her class into a series of learning centers that use problem-based learning to teach math, reading, science, and social studies.

Previously, Sammy's teacher taught all 30 of her students from the front of the class. As more and more bilingual and English language learners joined class, she realized that she needed to provide more individualized attention. Through a series of teacher inquiry groups, she developed her center approach. Her district uses an individual reading inventory twice a year to chart student progress and improve curriculum alignment with the state standardized test. Data from these tests help her make sure that her learning center problems are focused on the skills that her students need to learn. Sammy's successful participation in her class occurs partly because many students who need differentiated instruction created the context for his teacher to change how she teaches. In doing so, she expanded the ways that she could individualize instruction for students with many kinds of diversity. Sammy's success is not only measured by the degree of involvement and participation that he achieves in her class but also by his performance on the alternative assessment that his state has instituted to ensure that Sammy too is making progress on the state's learning standards for all students.

State Test Success

A large elementary school of nearly 1000 students in a rapidly growing urban community along the Mexico border learned last year that their student achievement on the state mandated tests earned them "exemplary" status. All but seven students with more significant disabilities who attend this school participated in the state tests. A rating of "exemplary" means that at least 90% of all students passed the state test in reading, writing, and math; the school has 1% or lower dropout rate and at least a 94% attendance rate across all ethnic and socioeconomic groups. This status was earned in part because of the school's capacity to ensure that students with disabilities and students from different language and cultural communities achieved along with everyone else. Only 37 students have received special education labels, and about half of these receive their schooling full-time in general education classrooms. The others move to resource classrooms for a few hours per week with other labeled and nonlabeled students for additional instructional support. This school is able to achieve these kind of learning outcomes because they have worked together as a faculty to align the curriculum within and across grades, develop six-week assessments keyed to state standards and operate a "core team" that focuses on seeing students succeed by changing what happens in the classroom. If one idea doesn't work or work well enough, the team tries another.

Reform From Within

Ongoing learning and teacher professional development is crucial for schools to improve instructional practices that are inclusive of diverse students. But there is a great deal of evidence suggest-

ing that traditional forms of teacher professional development (workshops, conferences, university courses) do little to help teachers fundamentally reshape their instructional practice. There is also evidence that teacher practice changes most often when the schools in which they work focus on specific and particular practice issues and sustain teacher skill development over time and publicly (Elmore, 2002). One hallmark of inclusive educational practices is the use of universal design principles in planning curriculum and instruction. This kind of work requires attention to planning and assessing of student performance on a scale that many teachers are unprepared to do. The Institute's work in one district helped central administration bring together a design team of teachers from several buildings to deliver a set of leadership academies that created a vision, a set of skills, and a process of inquiry for

leadership teams in 10-12 buildings to work on for a sustained period of time. The Institute used information sets from the buildings to encourage them to innovate against their own data. This information helped track the number of poor readers, the number of students who were being referred to special education, the number of free and reduced lunch students who were being referred to special education and the number of students of color who were being referred to special education. Discussing these data against the degree to which they believed their instructional reforms were being implemented helped to fuel greater and greater consensus and focus on the strategies teachers were using to effect change in practice. You might say that both thinking in new ways about how to change practice and using information to see how close they were getting to their goals were synergistic.

Changing practice needed information to fuel change.

These stories reflect real and fundamental changes that are happening in urban schools. The momentum is growing, but there is much still to be done.

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Web Sites With Inclusion Resources

- **www.inclusion.com**. The Web site of Inclusion Press, Inclusion Network, and the Marsha Forest Centre, in Toronto. The Web site includes books, videos, articles, planning and training tools, and many other resources. It offers *Making Inclusion Work*, a free Ezine on working with inclusion that highlights new developments, tools, and stories that might be helpful, along with contact information for network associates who can offer assistance.
- **<http://ici.umn.edu>**. The Web site of the Institute on Community Integration at the University of Minnesota. It includes a catalog of over 300 publications (many available for downloading at no cost); specialized Web pages about transition, e-mentoring, paraprofessional development, educational policy, social inclusion, and person-centered supports; information on Institute projects, listservs, and training; and links to disability resources nationwide.
- **www.nichcy.org**. The Web site of the National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities. It includes a wide array of publications for teachers, parents, students, and others, in English and Spanish. Categories include information on specific disabilities, IDEA, news for parents and educators, research briefs, resource lists, student guides to the IEP process and jobs, transition, and resources from other organizations.
- **www.familyvillage.wisc.edu**. The Web site of the Waisman Center at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. The site includes information and resources for persons with disabilities, their families, and those providing services and supports across the lifespan. The Family Village School section includes resources on early intervention, assistive technology, IDEA and other education laws, inclusive/special education, IEPs, educational advocacy, and more.
- **<http://www.asri.edu/cfsp/brochure/abtcons.htm>**. The Web site of the Consortium on Inclusive School Practices. It contains resources for building capacity of state and local education agencies to serve students with and without disabilities. Its focus is on systemic reform, and it includes publications, contact information for state-level systems change network participants nationwide, and links.
- **<http://rushservices.com/Inclusion>**. The Web site, titled "Inclusion... Yours, Mine, Ours", sponsored by the Florida Inclusion Network. It includes information for parents and classroom teachers, co-teaching models, success stories, strategies for challenging behaviors, and an extensive list of books and journal articles.
- **<http://www.uni.edu/coe/inclusion>**. The inclusion Web site of the Department of Special Education, University of Northern Iowa. It is for general and special educators, parents, and school staff, and includes information on teacher competencies, teaching strategies, preparing for inclusion, legal requirements, and inclusion resources.

Leading Social Change in Collaborative and Inclusive Practice: One Middle School's Journey

by Alice Udvari-Solner

Installing collaborative and inclusive practices has required significant social change in our nation's schools. In many, the path to achieve inclusive education has paralleled other social justice and human rights movements. In schools where inclusive education has taken hold, individuals begin change by questioning existing models and replacing them with alternative visions that promote equity and opportunity for all students (Keyes & Udvari-Solner, in press).

This article features the actions of one middle school principal who has guided collaborative relationships among staff to create shared commitment to the membership and achievement of the school's learners. His leadership decisions illustrate how a social movement can begin and be fostered in our learning organizations.

Kennedy Middle School (KMS) in Germantown, Wisconsin, serves 875 students in sixth through eighth grade. It is organized in a "house" structure, with three- to five-member teams typically staffing "houses." When Steve Bold became principal in 1998, special education was characterized by categorical assignments and reliance on pull-out or self-contained services. Within five years, he put into motion a noncategorical service approach in which special educators were teamed with specific grade level houses. Special class spaces and the resource room were dismantled. Separate programming was minimized and replaced with team teaching or consultative support in general education. Access to individualized instruction now occurs for any student in an all-school learning center. At the heart of these changes was an administrator who envisioned special education as "a service not a place" and who sought a unified service system that would serve all students well.

In his book *The Courage to Teach* (1998), Parker Palmer offers a helpful

framework for understanding the evolution of social movements and identifies four definable stages that occur to prompt change. Through the lens of this social movement framework some of the influential actions taken by the principal of KMS will be highlighted.

Stage 1: Living "Divided No More"

The momentum for a social movement begins when isolated individuals recognize a disjuncture between their own core beliefs and the institution's prescribed conditions. People experience a spiritual division when they sense one imperative for their lives but outwardly accept one that is contradictory.

When differences in personal and institutional imperatives are irreconcilable, some individuals make a conscious decision to honor their core values and "live divided no more" (Palmer, 1998, p. 167). A movement takes shape when people, one by one, bring their personal actions into accord with their values around a social issue.

Steve Bold's decision to live divided no more began when he was still a teacher in the Milwaukee Public Schools. Initially working alone, he invited a special educator to join him in the classroom to experiment in blurring the lines between general and special education. When Steve became principal at Kennedy he expressed his beliefs about the power of collaborative teaching. He lead faculty to re-examine the school's mission statement, determining if it reflected people's core beliefs about students, teaching, and learning. He challenged staff to question whether anything in the mission justified separateness. An imperative was written into their school plan to critically examine the alignment of current practices and articulated beliefs. By revealing and discussing outward incongruities, the next

step of a social movement was set into motion, which was to create a community of congruence.

Stage 2: Communities of Congruence

In this stage, like-minded people gather in communities to support newly expressed beliefs and reinforce the integrity of individually-held values. Communities of congruence form to harbor new ideas, translate a movement's vision into a common language, and experiment with novel models and skills.

The principal at Kennedy established structure for a community of congruence by forming an action research team whose charge was simply to study ways to meet the diverse needs of all students. Initially, the team was comprised of a parent, an administrator, and five teachers who represented special education, coordinated arts, and each grade level. In this group, like-minded people came together to discuss transformations in teaching and gather data about alternative service delivery models.

Within a year this group became permanently installed in Kennedy's site-based decision-making. Renamed the Collaborative Resource Team, membership rotated, allowing staff to volunteer or be nominated by their colleagues or the principal based on expertise. This team consistently revisited the language of the mission to determine what should be occurring, collect evidence to show it was being done, and then determine what additional data from students, parents, and teachers were necessary to rationalize change.

In this think-tank, initial ideas were generated to realign special educators with grade level teams and houses, create an all-school learning center, allocate a half-time support person to work within the coordinated arts block, and examine achievement issues associated with

gender. Revised staffing configurations resulted in a new collaborative instructional delivery model, and the next communities of congruence were built. Within these teams of general and special educators who came together daily to support a cross-categorical mix of students with disabilities, conversations on best educational practice had to be negotiated and converted into daily instruction. To encourage congruence building-wide, staff were asked to identify what they needed in order to achieve their new vision. In response, Steve arranged a multi-year plan to bring experts in the field of collaboration, differentiated instruction, and positive behavior approaches for on-site professional development. These school-wide gatherings offered a common language and tools for addressing student needs.

Stage 3: "Going Public" With Values

After individuals have garnered strength in communities of congruence it is essential that they bring their ideals into the public eye. Going public is vital because it allows the movement to be critiqued by the larger community. Unless the movement's vision is expressed and tested in a larger arena, understanding and persuasion cannot be gained and the movement may stagnate among the same loyal supporters. In the case of creating an inclusive school culture, going public may mean that the small communities of congruence come forward in building-wide forums to face critics.

At least four vehicles to "go public" were part of Kennedy's plan for change. First, during the action research phase, the planning group scheduled information sharing sessions with the district's Director of Pupil Services, sought feedback from parents, and presented ideas to the local special education agency, Kennedy's Building Leadership Team, and ultimately its entire faculty. Second, the Collaborative Resource Team by design had the responsibility to take ideas back to respective subject areas, grade levels, and coordinated arts staff for reactions and feedback. Third, before

implementing new staffing configurations, visits were made to other school districts to communicate ideas, gather additional strategies, and check decisions. Fourth, after engaging in the new service model for one year, Steve enlisted a team of outside evaluators who observed and met with staff to assess the collaborative instructional delivery model. Recommendations and next steps for improvement were provided by these "critical friends" to create a cycle of renewal.

Stage 4: Alternative Rewards

In the final stage, the collective energies used to create the movement return to the institution to alter its logic. One of the inherent reasons movements begin is that the institution defines the reward system and therefore has significant control over people who are a part of it. Consequently, the movement must develop new rewards around activities that people value. Some of these rewards are natural outgrowths of participating in the movement itself and foster a renewed sense of integrity and higher level of social consciousness.

In KMS, as in most schools, time to teach well and engage in collaboration with sufficient monetary support were highly prized rewards. Greater shared planning time was achieved in several ways. The master schedule was reorganized to create a consistent planning block across subject area teachers and special educators at each grade level. To allow coordinated arts teachers to join their colleagues at this time, one time per month their classes are taught by Steve along with the superintendent, Director of Pupil Services, Director of Curriculum, and a hired floating substitute. In addition, Steve has reduced his monthly staff meetings to quarterly, returning unused time to teachers.

The principal routinely solicits staff about their monetary and professional development needs. In his yearly planning, he consistently reserves 10% of his operating budget for the purpose of addressing these needs. In addition to

these tangible rewards of time and money, KMS staff expressed the intrinsic value of seeing student progress. In response, Steve makes concerted efforts to help staff see these gains by gathering and reviewing formal and informal student progress data. Staff are encouraged to share publicly their personal stories and breakthroughs. These reviews are communicated as celebrations that remind educators of their positive influence on learners.

Conclusion

The dramatic changes for students with and without disabilities achieved at KMS began with personal values that were translated into action. The journey of this school reinforces the need to create forums in which educators can perceive their work as part of a larger social reform. The dedication of time to articulate beliefs, consider multiple viewpoints, and celebrate successes is critical in supporting individuals to initiate change. The words of Parker Palmer (1998) provide both a closing for this article and a proposal to begin envisioning social change toward inclusive schools:

By understanding how movements work, we may discover that we are already actors in a movement for educational reform. We may discover that if one is on an inner journey, one is on the threshold of real power – the power of personal authenticity that, manifested in social movements, has driven real change in our own time (p. 167).

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What Matters Most: Ensuring That High School Students With Disabilities Are Members of . . .

By Cheryl M. Jorgensen, Douglas Fisher, Carol Tashie, and Michael Sgambati

Nearly twice as many students with significant disabilities¹ are included in the elementary grades as in high school (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). Among the reasons most commonly given for this discrepancy are the perceived difficulty or irrelevance of curriculum content and the belief that the need to learn functional skills precludes inclusion. How have inclusive high schools resolved these concerns? From research in diverse high schools, the following beliefs, practices, and organizational structures have consistently been found to be important to successful high school inclusion (Fisher, Sax, & Pumpian, 1999; Jorgensen, 1998).

The Value of Diversity

At the heart of successful high school inclusion is the belief that heterogeneous grouping and inclusion prepare students for responsible citizenship in a democracy where they will live and work alongside people who have different cultural, racial, and political identities and opinions (Oakes, 1985). In inclusive high schools, administrators and teachers acknowledge the clear benefits of inclusion for students with significant disabilities (McGregor & Vogelsberg, 1998; Miranda & Erickson, 2000; Peterson, 1996; Rubin et al., 2001; Tashie et al., 1996) and the dangers of segregation (Hunt & Farron-Davis, 1992; Stokes & Baer, 1977; Strully & Strully, 1992). Furthermore, they know that the general education classroom is the only place where students can learn some important life lessons through exposure to the “hidden curriculum” (comprised of expectations, routines, behaviors, relationships, and culture) that is significantly different from that in the special education classroom (Apple, 1979).

¹ Students with “significant disabilities” are those who have traditionally been given labels of mental retardation or intellectual disability, autism, deafblindness, traumatic brain injury, and/or multiple disabilities.

High Expectations and Least Dangerous Assumptions

The second foundational belief of an inclusive high school is holding high expectations for student achievement. For students who experience significant disabilities, this often means applying the “least dangerous assumption” principle (Donnellan, 1984, 2000) that states that when professionals must make decisions about students’ educational programs in the absence of clear evidence about their capabilities or the merits of various options, they should make the decision that would have the least dangerous consequences to the student, should that decision ever be proven wrong. In other words, we ought to assume that all students understand, that all students are capable of learning. To do the opposite risks grave consequences.

Intentional Community for All

In an inclusive high school, celebration of diversity and authentic social relationships are nurtured by intentional acts. At Souhegan High School in New Hampshire, teachers embedded content about diversity into the curriculum (Jorgensen, 1998). For example, in a biology unit, students considered the science and ethics of prenatal testing for conditions like Down syndrome or muscular dystrophy. The presence of students with significant disabilities in these classes ensured that the human element in the topics they were studying was addressed.

Another way that high schools intentionally support diverse community is to invite students to participate in development of support networks for classmates. At Souhegan, students who were in class with a student who had been socially isolated were asked to help identify and remove barriers that stood in the way of his developing friendships.

Full Inclusion in General Education

In an inclusive high school, students are enrolled in the same courses as their peers without disabilities, on a path towards graduation at the age of 18. They do not ride special transportation or check in to the resource room at the beginning of the day. Their names appear on class rosters and their lockers are in the same location as those of typical students. They do homework and get grades. If typical students perform community service during the school day, so do students with disabilities. If typical students go to an academic support center for assistance, so do students with disabilities. If typical students join the chess club, so do students with disabilities. In an inclusive high school, there are no places or programs just for students with disabilities and likewise, all courses or extracurricular activities open to the general student body are open to students with disabilities.

Students with significant disabilities march with their classmates at graduation, but oftentimes continue to receive special education services outside the school building until their eligibility expires. During the 18-21 years, they work, volunteer, and develop skills for living independently. Many students with significant disabilities will always need help getting dressed, counting their change, eating, and taking care of their personal hygiene needs. But in an inclusive model, rather than focusing on those things, more time is spent on what really matters in the quest for a typical life: figuring out how to get to work on time, sending an instant message, choosing between draft and bottled, asking someone for a date, ordering a pizza, or downloading a tune to an MP-3 player. When we open students’ worlds to these typical experiences, the skills that need to be taught will be obvious.

Ownership and Collaboration

In an inclusive high school, general and special education staff collaborate every day, not just at IEP meetings or three-year evaluation time. General education staff view themselves as students' primary teachers and special education teachers shift their role to that of "inclusion facilitator" fulfilling the roles of advocate, liaison with families, facilitator of peer relationships and natural supports, coordinator of instructional supports, and team leader (Tashie et al., 1993).

Curriculum and Instruction That Accommodates Student Diversity

In Ms. Camacho's ninth grade English class, the syllabus is organized around six themes that represent the American Experience from the perspective of diverse cultural groups. Students engage with these themes by reading novels, short stories, and essays. They hear presentations from guest speakers whose ancestors came over on the Mayflower and speakers who fled a totalitarian regime to come to this country, reenact scenes from their reading, and dissect critical passages from the text through Socratic dialogue. Student work is published on the class Web site and entered into a variety of literary competitions.

Our work with many different kinds of high schools has shown that inclusion can work in classrooms taught by more traditional teachers, but is certainly easier when teachers like Ms. Camacho frame instruction around real life issues, questions, and problems; use differentiated instructional methods; and use authentic and varied assessments (Onosko & Jorgensen, 1998).

Quality Supports and Accommodations

Finally, a successful inclusive high school uses a systematic process for planning the supports and accommodations needed by students with significant disabilities. Teachers don't ask, "Should this student participate in this lesson?" but rather, "What supports does this student need in order to participate and learn?" The following can be used separately or in com-

ination to help students fully participate in different types of academic routines and social situations: physical, emotional, and sensory supports; modification of materials or provision of technology; personalized performance demonstrations; personalized instruction; and unique evaluation and grading plans (Onosko & Jorgensen, 1998).

Final Word: A Student's Perspective

Michael Sgambati, a high school senior at a public school in New Hampshire, has been included in general education classes since kindergarten. He offers a student's insight into what's important to achieve inclusive education:

My name is Michael Sgambati and I am a high school senior at a public school in New Hampshire. I am on the JV soccer team and also in chorus. I am learning to play the bass guitar and enjoy playing video games, paint ball, and probably have gone to every school dance we have had in high school. My best friend Dan just got a new car and we have a great time hanging out.

If I could dream what the perfect school would look like it would be a place where everyone would be respectful and not pass judgment on people with disabilities or because of the way they dress or look. There would not be any special ed rooms and all teachers would help all kids. Classes would be interesting and teachers would make learning fun. For any student who needed extra help there would be teacher aides who would also be there to help. It would be a place where everyone felt that they belonged.

In school I have had to struggle a lot and sometimes didn't feel like I was worth much. The classes that I did the best in were when the teacher made me feel like I could do stuff on my own and when I felt that everyone thought that what I had to say was important.

I expect to graduate in June and one day I may go to college. I know I will do well because I will work hard

and have lots of support from my family and friends. I hope that you teachers who are reading this will be able to make sure that all students in your classes feel like they can be successful.

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Strategies for Supporting Friendship for All Students

by Carol Tashie and Zach Rossetti

Most of us agree that friendships are important for all people. So then, why do so many students with disabilities still not have the meaningful relationships they deserve? When we ask adults this question, we often hear concerns about students' lack of social skills (or language skills, or personal care skills...), discrepancies between students' interests, and/or information about labels and developmental ages. However, when we ask students, we hear a very different story. From them we hear of classmates being pulled out of classes, taken to rooms where "no one knows what really goes on." Of students being over-supported by paraprofessionals who sometimes make it difficult for "kids to just be kids." And of classmates going to the back of the room when the "real work" begins. In short, we hear of barriers embedded in the very systems set up to support students with disabilities.

We have discovered a great deal about friendships by listening to students. We have learned to pay close attention to the ways students with disabilities are educated and treated in schools. We have learned how important it is to avoid and overcome the barriers to friendship these practices erect. And by far the most important thing we have learned is that friendships are much more likely to occur when all of the people in a student's life truly believe that he or she is someone who is valued and valuable and would make a wonderful friend. For when you believe that the world is a better place because this student is in it, you can begin to help others see and believe the same thing.

What follows are some strategies that students, teachers, and families in New Hampshire have found useful to value and support all students to have the rich and enviable social lives they deserve.

Difference not Deficiency

We often hear how friendships between students with and without disabilities happen more easily when children are young, but become more difficult as students age. A commonly accepted explanation is the growing discrepancy between students' interests, abilities, needs, and desires. We believe a different interpretation is in order. Inherently, young children see disability as a difference – just as any other difference within and among people. Thus they respond to classmates with interest, honesty, and curiosity. Friendships result based on shared interests, playthings, location, and respect. As children grow older, they begin to realize that much of the adult world views disability not as a *difference*, but as a *deficiency*. They see their classmates with disabilities being pulled out of classes, given different materials and lessons, talked to in ways more appropriate for younger children, and being over-supported by paraprofessionals. From these actions, they learn that the student with disabilities does not simply have unique ways to move, dance, talk, and learn, but that those ways are less valued by the world around them. Thus, the discrepancy that grows as children age has less to do with student personalities and interests, and more to do with society's beliefs and conventions.

Person-First Language

Through respectful language ("Trey, who loves Led Zeppelin, soccer, and has cerebral palsy"), you can model for others that the student with disabilities is a "person first." By talking to and with the student in ways respectful to his or her age, you will show the world that all students must have age-appropriate expectations. You can model your belief that

the student with disabilities is not deficient but simply moves through the world in different ways.

True Inclusion

It certainly goes without saying that students need to be together in order to develop respect, mutual interests, and real friendships. However, for too many students with disabilities, even those who are in general education classes, school days still consist of pull-outs and separate lessons. Reject the notion that some students must leave the classroom in order to learn. Object to inclusion in name only by exposing the hypocrisy of "inclusion rooms," "inclusion teachers," and "inclusion students."

Support Communication

All students have the ability to develop effective ways to communicate their thoughts and knowledge. For students who do not speak or do not speak easily, advocate for augmentative or alternative means of communication. Make it clear that you presume competence in all people, and never assume a student who is not able to speak is unable to understand and learn. Learn to listen to all of the ways a student communicates and recognize that some students use "behavior" as their only way to get their points across.

Ask the Most Important Question: Who Is This Person?

An essential step to facilitating social relationships is to get to know the student. What is her story? What are her interests and dreams? What does he like? What does he dislike? What are her gifts and strengths? Most importantly, what does he want? Let the student's dreams and desires fuel the process. How you

gain this information is almost as important as the information itself. While many educators are accustomed to looking into student's educational records for information, the answers to these questions are better obtained by asking the people who know the student best: the student, family, classmates, teachers.

Talk and Listen to Kids

As adults it is impossible for us to truly know what it is like to be a student. However, the solution to this dilemma is close at hand. Schools and classes are filled with students, all brimming with ideas, suggestions, and unique perspectives on our questions. Therefore, when working to improve the social life of a particular student, it is extremely valuable to ask classmates to tell you what you need to know. A student's classmates can give you information about what friendship is like for students their age. They can tell you how they meet, where they go, why they like to hang out together. They can inform you about opportunities for social connections and let you know what students with particular interests do to get together. Students can advise you on who a student may want to spend time with and can serve as inside connectors to introduce one student to another or to a group.

Pay Attention

One of the greatest barriers to the formation of relationships is missed opportunities. Too often, the adults in a student's life have difficulty paying attention to the natural relationships that are forming or the natural opportunities for these relationships to develop. A valuable strategy involves the commitment to spending the time to observe the natural opportunities for friendship, and then stepping in and supporting those to happen. When paying attention to what is really going on, the process becomes easier and common sense can fuel decisions.

Regular Communication with Families

Families know their children best and are invaluable resources when trying to understand a student's interests and gifts. Families can provide information about the things their children do at home, which may translate into how a student can get involved in school. Families can also provide a historical perspective, such as which classmates a student has known for years and ways in which relationships were developed in earlier grades. Likewise, teachers can let families know which classmates have budding friendships with their children as well as inform them about extracurricular activities and potential social outings. Teachers can also offer families ideas on how to support friendship at home.

Conclusion

The search for the perfect strategy to facilitate relationships between people with and without disabilities is an impossible quest. There is no perfect strategy; there is simply the one (or two or five) that works for a particular student. Accordingly, we have offered a handful of approaches people have found to be most successful in enhancing reciprocal relationships. This list is by no means exhaustive, but it is diverse and designed to provoke thinking outside of the box. As you think about strategies, it is crucial to keep in mind that unless a student is truly valued, fully included, and consistently treated with the highest of expectations, well-meaning strategies can easily result in relationships based on benevolence and pity, not mutual respect and appreciation.

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Resources for Identifying and Meeting Social Needs

- **Yes I Can Social Inclusion Program.**

Developed at the Institute on Community Integration, this year-long, 20-module curriculum fosters the social inclusion of junior and senior high school students with disabilities. Students with and without disabilities gather for weekly classroom instruction and community experiences that increase understanding of the social inclusion needs and challenges of persons with disabilities. During the program, each student with a disability who desires to be more socially included is paired with another student who serves as an inclusion facilitator; through weekly outings planned by each pair they learn to identify and remove or minimize barriers to social inclusion and create social opportunities. Available from the Institute on Community Integration at 612/624-4512 or <http://ici.umn.edu/products>.

- **The All Means All Pack.** *A video and book combination that offers an introduction to person-centered planning processes for use with students (Maps and Path), and Circles of Friends. The "All Means All" video shows a beginning Circle of Friends in a Canadian high school, and also goes through Maps and Path processes with students. The "All My Life's a Circle" booklet provides guidance in using Circles, Maps, and Path. Available from Inclusion Press, Toronto, 416/658-5363, info@inclusion.com, or www.inclusion.com.*

- **Student-Led IEPs: A Guide for Student Involvement.** *A practical guide supporting educators who are interested in increasing the involvement of students in the IEP process. A joint publication of the Institute on Community Integration and the Council for Exceptional Children. Available from the Institute at 612/624-4512 or <http://ici.umn.edu/products>. Also may be downloaded from the Web at http://www.cec.sped.org/bk/catalog2/student-led_ieps.pdf.*

Inclusion at Birch Grove Elementary

by Lois Nordling

Birch Grove Elementary School is a culturally diverse school in Brooklyn Park, Minnesota, with a population of 720 students in kindergarten through sixth grade. One-third of the students participate in the free or reduced lunch program. Approximately 10 percent of the students qualify for special education services, primarily through the Full-Service Special Education program. Full-ser-

Special educators become part of the grade level teams and establish the relationships that are core to a successful inclusion environment.

vice special education is a cross-categorical service delivery model in which special education teachers serve students with a wide range of disabilities. At Birch Grove, the students' disabilities include learning disabilities, emotional-behavioral disabilities, developmental disabilities, and other health disabilities.

Implementation of the inclusion model at Birch Grove has evolved over time. The school hosts one of its district's Cooperative Kindergarten classrooms where a general educator and a special educator licensed in early childhood education co-teach together all day. In addition, three full service special education teachers implement the current inclusion model to provide special education services for students in grades 1-6. As part of the model, they spend part of each day teaching in the general education classrooms. Their instructional roles and responsibilities vary and include teaching leveled reading, implementing an alternative reading curriculum with a group of 15 students, team-teaching whole group math

lessons with the general education teacher, or teaching research skills to a small group. Having participated in the weekly planning meeting and being aware of the upcoming curriculum, the special educators can increase the skill and confidence level of students with disabilities by pre-teaching skills during small group sessions.

The system for assigning the special educators to grade levels is a significant element in the school's inclusion model. In kindergarten, for example, a general educator and special educator co-teach together all day. In grades 1-6, each of the three special educators is assigned to two different grade levels – one primary and one intermediate grade. There are several benefits to this strategy. First, each special educator needs to learn only two grade-level curricula rather than several. Second, the schedules for the two assigned grade levels become the basis of the special education teacher's daily schedule. Third, the classroom teachers in each grade work together to develop a schedule that is consistent and that allows special educators to be present in general education classrooms at high instructional need times. Most significantly, the special educators become part of the grade-level teams and establish the personal and professional relationships that are the core to a successful inclusion environment.

Teaching can be a "lonely" position. At Birch Grove, classroom teachers view the opportunities to plan with another professional and to watch another adult teach as ways to strengthen their own teaching. The special educator becomes a source of intervention ideas for other struggling learners. The special educator also becomes an advocate for the students and the classroom teacher when additional resources are needed, such as alternative curricular materials or additional assistance from a paraprofessional.

What is the role of the principal in an inclusive special education program,

such as Birch Grove's? Here are some ways principals can provide support:

- Articulating and affirming the value and role of the special educators in the school.
- Being actively involved by participating regularly in due process meetings as well as special education team meetings. Such meetings are a means for staying informed of student issues and concerns.
- Ensuring ongoing staff development so that all staff remain current. Topics the Birch Grove staff have found beneficial for all students include brain research, multiple intelligences, differentiated instruction, and research-based teaching strategies. The information gained from these sessions benefited all students.
- Providing training for non-licensed staff since they play a significant role in meeting student needs.
- Creative problem solving on issues related to learning, behavior, or family involvement.
- Assisting in securing resources to meet the needs of all learners, such as technology or additional personnel.

Most importantly, the principal needs to support the efforts made by classroom teachers and special educators in creating different learning options for students. Meeting the learning needs of all students is a challenging responsibility for teachers. Educating students with a wide range of abilities and backgrounds in general education classrooms adds to this challenge. While an increasingly diverse student body creates new challenges for schools, it also creates new opportunities and enriched learning environments for both students and staff.

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“benefit” from being involved with “regular education students” and the “regular education curriculum.” Children with significant support needs were and unfortunately continue in many areas to be educated in self-contained schools and classes. They were not even on the “radar screen” for being considered to be included in the regular education curriculum and with regular education students.

Of course, there were exceptions to this scenario where a few lucky students with significant support needs had their classrooms physically housed in the regular education building, but had a separate school schedule, and a separate bus to pick them up and drop them off at different times, minimizing opportunities for interaction with typical children. Any involvement with typical children was a pure coincidence. In addition, there were examples of students with autism being included in some preschool programs alongside their non-disabled peers, but other students with other types of disabilities being segregated. The landscape was pretty dismal.

Over these past two decades much has changed for children and adults with significant support needs. At the same time, so much has remained the same. There are far more children today who are being included than ever before. There are far more schools and educators who are working and struggling to figure out how to include a specific child in a specific class. This is wonderful. Yet it is a little premature for us to declare victory just yet because too many children continue to reside in segregated classrooms and schools. There are also far too many students who receive their instruction in the regular education classroom, but are not members of the regular education classroom. Physical presence is important, but not the goal. Inclusion is the goal!

Shawntell's Story

Shawntell started her educational journey the way so many other children with significant support needs at that time used to do, which was to receive services in a self-contained classroom in a church. Shawn received her physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, and early intervention training from a group of very kind-hearted and concerned educators. She was only two-and-a-half years old at the time.

When we moved to Pennsylvania, we were able to have Shawntell receive her schooling in a self-contained classroom in a regular education school. While there were some interactions with non-disabled students for some parts of the day, for the most part it was children with significant disabilities being in a self-contained classroom. However, we got our first glimpse of what could be accomplished when children with and without disabilities learned together.

When we moved to Kentucky in 1979, we were offered three choices – all self-contained schools. This was not an acceptable option, especially since we had just left a school district which had at least had Shawntell in the regular education building. After some fighting and threatening with the school district, we were able to secure a neighborhood school placement for Shawntell in a special education classroom. While the self-contained classroom was housed in the regular education building and there were many opportunities for typical children to come into the self-contained classroom to help out, the idea of being included in the regular education curriculum was not initially considered.

In 1980, we went to Toronto to attend a conference regarding people with disabilities. Our friend, John O'Brien, had told us about a woman named Marsha Forest who was working to include children with significant support needs in regular education classrooms. While at the conference and stuck in an elevator, we met Marsha. We talked about inclusion, invited her to Kentucky to spend time with us, and developed our thinking of what was possible.

Initially, we used our new knowledge and insights to help build an inclusive school for our son, Alex. Alex is Shawntell's older brother and is a person with Down syndrome. Using the information we gathered from Marsha as well as thinking these issues through ourselves, we worked with the school district to include several children with moderate support needs to be fully included in an alternative school for children from first grade to high school. The principal believed in the worth of all children and the importance of celebrating diversity. She provided the leadership and stewardship to foster the development of a fully inclusive school for all children. This “experiment” led us to think about how to make this happen for Shawntell, as well.

With Alex being fully included, we turned our attention to Shawntell. While Shawntell was in the regular education school, she was not fully included in the day-to-day fabric of life in the regular education program. However, gradually over time with the support and mentoring of a wonderful teacher and of course fellow students (typical students – and specifically Tanya), Shawntell started spending more and more of her time out of the self-contained classroom with Tanya – going to classes, and hanging out in the lunchroom, gym, library, and other high-use areas. As time went on, Shawntell stopped spending time in the special education classroom and began spending more and more time in regular education. She got to know more of the kids in the school and started to have other children calling and coming over to the house to play with her after school and on weekends/holidays.

When Shawntell graduated elementary school and went on to middle school she had a wonderful teacher who worked very hard to ensure that she spent her entire day in the regular education classroom alongside her non-disabled peers. While the level of instruction was not what it should have been, Shawntell's relationships and growing friendships with typical children and

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adolescents continued to grow and develop. Part of the success was because there were children from the elementary school who went on to the same middle school and had known Shawntell. Shawntell spent the next two years in the middle school learning some good things and developing some very wonderful relationships.

We then moved to Colorado in 1986 and had to deal with another school district and our effort to continue our journey for inclusion. We were able to point to the previous educational supports and experiences that Shawntell had and the school district agreed to continue Shawntell being included, first in middle school and then high school. While the school district never fully embraced the concept of full inclusion for all children, it did allow us to continue Shawntell's educational journey and provided some wonderful teachers and support staff.

Shawntell spent four years at that high school. Overall, it was one of the best experiences in Shawntell's life, especially in her senior year. Over the four years of high school, with the support of an outstanding integration facilitator, Leslie, Shawntell became a true member of the school community. Her friendships and relationships were, as usual, the high point of her school experiences. However, Shawntell also had some outstanding teachers who supported diversity and believed in educational excellence for all children.

After four years of high school, Shawntell graduated and went on to Colorado State University for the next few years, with the support of the local school district, the university, funds from the state educational agency and the Developmental Disabilities Planning Council, and her parents. Shawntell attended classes, lived in her own house with roommates, was involved in the recreational life of a college student, traveled, and continued to develop some great relationships.

In 1994, Shawntell moved to California. Today, she lives in her own house with her housemate of seven years. She

has support staff that assist her to be active in the community working, taking classes, and volunteering. She still travels and sees friends from elementary school, high school and college. Life is pretty good – not perfect of course. Shawntell continues on her journey and those of us who care about and love her continue to stand with her to achieve this goal.

What We've Learned

What are the lessons we have learned? After 23 years of working and struggling to build an inclusive life for Shawntell, we have learned the following:

- It starts with a dream. The dream must be vibrant, robust, and exciting. The dream must not be easily reached. It must continue to evolve over time.
- It is about common, ordinary experiences. What we have always wanted for Shawntell was common, ordinary experiences. We wanted her to live in a wonderful home, attend school with all of the children in the neighborhood, have friends, have a social life, move out at age 18 to her own place, have a job and then a career, travel, to have a relationship with God whomever he or she might be, be a good citizen, find love, and enjoy life. These are not extraordinary experiences, but just common, ordinary experiences that we want for all of our children.
- In order to make this happen, it takes a circle of support. While membership in the circle will come and go, it is important to remember that having a circle to get together, discuss, think out, problem-solve, and support one another during the journey is critical. No one can do this work without others standing with them and walking with them.
- As our late friend Marsha Forest once said, "Good teachers should teach everyone and bad teachers should sell life insurance." We have had some of the most wonderful teachers over the

course of Shawntell's educational journey. Teachers who believed in the worth of each and every learner. Educators who figured out specific instructional strategies to include Shawntell in each and every lesson. At the same time, we have seen teachers who should not be teaching any of our children. When you experience great teaching and great teachers, you realize that all children can learn together and that schools can be places that celebrate and embrace diversity. These schools do become caring communities for all learners.

- When we first battled for inclusion, it was based on the issue of social justice. Over the years, we discovered that while social justice is an important concept, it is equally important to fight for quality education for all learners. In the beginning, we settled for presence in the classroom rather than for valued educational outcomes. Over time, we learned that one should not have to sacrifice one for the other. Both are possible and both are important.
- First things first. It is important and even critical for quality education to be taking place for all learners. However, the one thing that continues to haunt us and even sadden us has been the lack of true friendships for people with significant support needs. We are not talking about peer tutoring, mentorship programs, best buddies, etc. We are talking about true friendships, especially between children with and without disabilities. As our friend Carol Tashie has said, "If it is so important, why isn't it happening?" To this day, the most important educational outcome achieved in school has been and will always be Shawntell's friendships.
- Person-centered planning is the key. As Alice learned from the Cheshire cat, if you don't know where you are going any road will take you there. It is very important for everyone involved in someone's life to know where they are headed on their jour-

ney and for everyone in the circle to make a commitment to helping the person getting closer to fulfilling their dreams.

- Flexibility in the use of resources is important. Whether it is money, time, or people, it is critical to have flexibility in the utilization of all resources. Many of the challenges we faced were about systems and structures being in place that were not flexible and “user friendly.”

The issue has never been whether inclusion is a good idea or a bad one. Inclusion is and will always be a way of life for our family.

- The journey evolves over time. You start out headed in one direction and then make mid-course corrections. You need to remain flexible and willing to reconsider, rethink, alter, and change the way you are going and what you are doing.
- People with significant support needs require outstanding supporters and allies. Without Leslie, Cheryl, Janette, and many others Shawntell would not have experienced life in the way she is currently experiencing it. These wonderful people believed in Shawntell. They believed in the concept of inclusion. They worked each and every day to make it happen. We thank them for what they have done.
- Learn to listen. People who don't speak or use any communication system consistently need to be listened to in many different ways. We need to pay attention with all of our senses. When we do, we usually discover that people who don't talk actually communicate the loudest.

- When Shawntell was about 10 years old, we told everyone around her to treat her as if she understands everything that people are saying, whether or not she is able to tell us back what she is thinking. The concept of presumed competence is an important one. We just don't know what people are thinking when they have no reliable and consistent communication system. One day maybe Shawntell will have a communication system/method which will allow her to tell us what she is thinking. Until that time, we want everyone to talk to her and act “as if she understands” even though we may not know for sure. This is the “high road” to take on behalf of Shawntell.

When Shawntell was about seven years old, we woke up one morning and decided she wasn't broken. She didn't need to be fixed. She didn't have to earn her way to the “American Dream.” This was a very enlightening and important experience for us. When we realized that Shawntell's life was not something to cure, fix, repair, or overcome, we focused on providing the support and assistance that was needed to live a valued life and to get closer to living her dream.

Why do we work, struggle, facilitate, advocate, and everything else? Because Shawntell is a wonderful daughter whom we love very dearly and in order for her to reach the “American Dream” we need to take this road. There is no other way to live if you want to achieve the outcomes we have discussed in this article. The issue has never been whether inclusion is a good idea or a bad one. It is and will always be a way of life for our family. We wish you the best on your journey as well.

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“admissions” criteria. The questions are simply, what type of supports does this child need to maximize their learning potential, and what can we do to achieve that standard of excellence? Does it all work perfectly? Smoothly? Of course not. But in provincially imposed standardized tests, *all* children in this system do as well or better than those in other comparable systems. Academics don't suffer. And when we think about the lives that have been altered, the accomplishments are beyond measure.

Some of the early pioneering families in the Hamilton Roman Catholic system are witnessing the rewards of the seeds they planted so long ago. Children who would have been segregated have graduated. Now they live and work in the community. For their former classmates it is “normal” to see them in church, at the gym, in workplaces as employees and colleagues. There is no “pity” factor. They learned years ago that their fellow students were fully human. They got to know them as people, not as labels.

Diversity in Hamilton, Ontario, is more diverse and more inclusive than it used to be because one man had a vision. He seeded it relentlessly, and people came on side. And one by one, he and his colleagues figured out how to welcome every student who arrived at their door into full inclusion in their school system.

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and their involvement welcomed. Furthermore, as people work together and approach the challenges inherent in creating and sustaining inclusive schools, their work is advanced when they approach those challenges from a problem-solving for growth and improvement perspective versus just a problem perspective.

A common premise underlying the ideas presented thus far is a focus of time and energy to the work of building trusting relationships. When this is an intentional and overt priority of the members of the school community it contributes to the successful collaboration necessary for creating inclusive school communities.

Lastly, as eloquently stated by a school principal, people in schools are encouraged to discover how to validate the different realities and focal points of teachers, parents, administrators, and students, seeking to find the themes, common purposes, specific agreements, and individual actions that unite them as they struggle toward achieving an evolving shared understanding of what it means to be an inclusive community. These discussions are broadened when the concept of inclusion extends beyond special education and embraces what and how people want to be for each member of the school community, regardless of the diversity each contributes.

Moving From Dissatisfaction to Action

When respondents were asked, “What do you think is needed to energize or re-energize a commitment to creating and supporting inclusive school communities?” their responses fell into four categories: share student contributions, move beyond special education, attend to internal and external practices and mindsets, and celebrate successes. These strategies, described in the remainder of this article, can help people persevere when progress toward the vision of inclusion seems too slow and difficult.

Share Student Contributions

It was felt that if others were to hear more about what students can do, if people’s awareness were raised of the positive contributions that students with disabilities can make, there may be more energy given to working for the breakthroughs and to focusing on a student’s potential, rather than on his or her deficits. If the stories of contribution are circulated beyond parents and special educators, others in the school community may develop a mindset and a sense of responsibility regarding the importance and possibility of fostering each student’s gifts.

Move Beyond Special Education

Inclusion is often viewed solely as a special education issue. This paradigm leads to two negative results, one being that members of the school community feel that inclusion has nothing to do with students outside of special education. Therefore, if I were not a special educator or the parent of a child with disabilities, why would I put any energy toward supporting inclusive schools? The second negative response is that special education gets painted as a villain who takes away funding that could be used on students “who can really achieve.” Therefore, expanding the focus of inclusive community beyond special education is essential. Embracing a sense of belonging, contribution, and active learning for each child and aligning with practices such as differentiated curriculum and instruction will bring a more collective energy to the task.

Attend to Internal and External Practices and Mindsets

Other suggestions for energizing or re-energizing a commitment to inclusive school communities follow. These ideas fell roughly into two broad categories: specific practices and mindsets that can be adopted *within* a school, and practices *outside* of pre-K-12 schools that will have an impact.

Let’s begin from the outside in. Two primary influences on inclusive practices that need to occur outside the school community were identified, the first being a commitment from the educational and political leadership at the national and state levels. A school psychologist framed the commitment in this way: “The same kind of collective commitment that has been given to issues of civil rights [for people of color], equal rights [for women], and multicultural diversity needs to be applied toward inclusive schools. Even though there has not been complete success in these areas, there have been sustained efforts over time, and there is less argument about ‘whether,’ even if the ‘how’ is not always agreed upon.”

The second identified influence outside of pre-K-12 schools involved teacher preparation programs. The suggestions in this area varied, with some calling for a requirement that all teachers be certified to teach both general and special education. Underlying all suggestions was the recommendation that teacher preparation programs focus on teaching skills needed for working effectively with heterogeneous groups of students and that this training be ongoing throughout an educator’s career.

The suggestions for energizing or re-energizing a commitment to inclusion that could occur within a school community were numerous. The following bullets illustrate the range of ideas:

- Support leaders within school communities that would be somewhat like traveling principals, whose job it would be to provide resources, training, and technical assistance in the classrooms.
- Look at new programs, strategies, or personnel changes as opportunities to re-energize a commitment to inclusion.
- Throw out the term “failure” when deadlines are not met. Longer timelines do not indicate that good people failed, but that the job was harder than expected. Wise words from a school principal!

- Stay focused on why you want an inclusive school community and find partners who affirm and support you when the struggle feels overwhelming.
- Make the time to reflect upon practice and share both successes and lessons learned from misdirected or ill-informed strategies with others.

Celebrate Successes

Last, but certainly not least, respondents recommended focusing on what is working and moving the school toward more inclusive practices. Celebrating successes in an ongoing fashion can bring energy to the daunting task of creating and sustaining inclusive school communities. The magnitude of change that has taken place needs to be honored and acknowledged. That is not to suggest, in any way, that we become complacent. However, we can see the glass as half-full or half-empty, and how you “see” the situation will have a powerful influence on the energy you have for maintaining both a personal and collective commitment to the complex and critically important job of creating inclusive communities.

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[Davern, continued from page 11]

Don't Let Learning Standards Justify Exclusion

As school personnel struggle to align their teaching with standards and new assessments, some families, teachers, and advocates may find that their struggle for meaningful inclusion for a student seems to become more difficult. A climate of “high standards” – and a heightened focus on testing – cannot be used to justify exclusion of a student. Team members may need to be reminded that the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) still requires that all students with disabilities be educated in the least restrictive environment. Placement decisions do not require that individual students share the same goals or perform at the same academic levels as classmates – only that they can make progress on their individual goals as defined within the IEP.

Many of the skills a student with a significant disability will learn are not easily measured by standardized assessment procedures. This does not mean that these skills are unimportant or cannot be measured in other ways. Team members may need assurance that the student with a significant disability can be assessed on individual outcomes through alternative assessment procedures. Student achievement information can be gathered through varied means such as videotapes (demonstrating student participation in classroom projects, plays, presentations, debates, experiments) and samples of student work gathered through a portfolio process. Assistive technology can aid teams in documenting student progress.

Students with significant disabilities can learn and grow within inclusive classes throughout the elementary and secondary school years, given appropriate services and supports. Indeed, decades of experience and education research have shaped best educational practices for students who have significant disabilities. These practices continue to emphasize that membership and participation in typical school

classes and routines are central to a quality education.

As is sometimes heard in discussions of the standards movement, perhaps it is our schools (administrators and faculty) who need to set higher standards for our own performance – with support from communities in terms of needed resources. As a nation, we still have a ways to go in meeting the standard of educating each child as a valued individual whose membership is unquestioned.

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