

# **INCLUSIVE TEACHING SUPPORT GUIDE FOR SPECIAL EDUCATORS**

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## ***Teaching Philosophy***

My goal as a special educator in an inclusive school is to support and facilitate the learning of all students while paying special attention to those with special needs. I hope to collaborate with the general education teacher in providing instruction and accommodations. I believe that the incorporation of best practices such as authentic learning, multi-level instruction and multiple intelligences is beneficial to all students but particularly helpful to those that struggle in the traditional, factory-system school. By employing these instructional strategies and through the creation of a family-centered, universally designed school I hope aid in the creation of learning environment that successfully includes all students.

## ***General Overview of School***

In order for successful inclusion to occur, the school itself must create an environment and atmosphere that fosters acceptance of all students. First, administrators and teachers must maintain positive attitudes towards inclusion and the students that will be included. The best-planned system of inclusion will fail if the school's staff does not support it and continues to bemoan the inclusion of students with special needs. Further, prior to inclusion the school must create structures that will support the participation of students of varying abilities, races, religions and socio-economic backgrounds; one must also remember that these structures benefit all students, not just those with special needs. Some of these vital structures are discussed below.

## ***Cohorts***

When entering high school, the fear students most often express is of "getting lost in the crowd." This can be a daunting challenge as students make the transition from the intimate, familiar setting of middle school to the often overwhelming atmosphere of high school. Students must learn to interact with a variety of teachers and peers, many outside their usual support group. This is an especially worrisome feat for students with special needs as they already struggle to feel part of the student body. Instituting a system of cohorts may alleviate some of this pressure as well as foster a sense of community and camaraderie amongst students.

Cohorts should be devised of about one hundred students, possibly more or less depending upon the size of the school. Cohorts should be divided along grade levels and maintain their composition throughout the students' tenure at the high school. Teachers and support staff should be assigned to specific cohorts as well; they, too, should make the transition between grades with their students. Teachers of special subjects such as

Art and Physical Education will not be assigned to a cohort because of limited staff; enrollment in special subjects also will give students a chance to interact with members of different cohorts and grade levels.

Besides promoting a sense of community and acceptance, cohorts facilitate successful inclusion practices. First, cohorts permit teachers and support staff to work more intimately with one another. General education teachers interact with a smaller number of special educators, and vice versa, making it easier to meet and discuss students. Further, all the teachers of a cohort may meet periodically to discuss the success of the cohort as a whole or the progress of a particular student.

Cohorts also promote peer relationships. Cohort meetings may be held in order to solve problems or to discuss a specific issue, thus imparting to students power over their own education. Peer partnering, circles of support and peer tutoring may occur within a specific cohort. While these systems of students helping students may be initiated in a school without cohorts, they will be more successful in such a small, intimate atmosphere. Students with special needs may also feel more comfortable receiving, and perhaps giving, support from peers in a cohort rather than members of the school at large.

### *Block Scheduling*

Block scheduling, while not necessary for successful inclusion, is beneficial for all students. Block scheduling lengthens the normal class period, thus limiting the number of classes students attend in one day. A lengthened class boasts several advantages over the usual fifty-five minute period. Obviously, it permits more class time, therefore making it less likely that a discussion or activity will be abruptly cut off by the bell. Block scheduling also allows for a variety of activities, including group work, to peak student interest. It also permits more teacher-student interaction, as the teacher has more time to conference individually with each student. Block scheduling may also allow students to begin homework in class and thus solicit teacher help when necessary. Finally, block scheduling allows more flexibility for class or cohort meetings. Block schedules take a variety of forms; one example is illustrated below.

<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>
1 <sup>st</sup> hour (1 _ hrs.)	2 <sup>nd</sup> hour (1 _ hrs.)	1 <sup>st</sup> hour (50 min.)	1 <sup>st</sup> hour (1 _ hrs.)	2 <sup>nd</sup> hour (1 _ hrs.)
3 <sup>rd</sup> hour (1 _ hrs.)	4 <sup>th</sup> hour (1 _ hrs.)	2 <sup>nd</sup> hour (50 min.)	3 <sup>rd</sup> hour (1 _ hrs.)	4 <sup>th</sup> hour (1 _ hrs.)
5 <sup>th</sup> hour (1 hr.)	5 <sup>th</sup> hour (1 hr.)	3 <sup>rd</sup> hour (50 min.)	5 <sup>th</sup> hour (1 hr.)	5 <sup>th</sup> hour (1 hr.)
7 <sup>th</sup> hour (1 _ hrs.)	6 <sup>th</sup> hour (1 _ hrs.)	4 <sup>th</sup> hour (50 min.)	7 <sup>th</sup> hour (1 _ hrs.)	7 <sup>th</sup> hour (1 _ hrs.)

		6 <sup>th</sup> hour (50 min.)		
		7 <sup>th</sup> hour (50 min.)		
		STEP time (1 hr.)		

In this version of the block schedule, classes meet on “odd” and “even” days and last an hour and a half. In order for equal class time for each class, fifth hour meets everyday except Wednesday and lasts one hour. On Wednesday, every class except fifth hour meets but only for fifty minutes. The most interesting aspect of this schedule is the hour-long STEP time on Wednesday. This time may go by a variety of names, but it is designed as a time for students to meet with teachers and receive extra help. Students may also complete homework or projects, meet with groups or utilize the media center. Teachers should remain in their classrooms and be available for students; this is *not* another planning period.

### *Heterogeneous Grouping*

A successful inclusive school must ensure that students are heterogeneously grouped in classes so that segregation does not occur within the school itself. This includes not only equally distributing the students with lower abilities, but the gifted and bilingual ones as well. Staff should create student profiles which chart the academic abilities, behavioral needs, socio-economic status, race and religion of each student; they may then use these profiles to create class rolls. While still a complicated task, this should be somewhat easier if students are divided into cohorts.

Heterogeneous grouping thus mandates the dissolution of tracking. Remedial and gifted classes only recreate segregation and have no purpose in an inclusive school. This does not imply, however, that students have no choice in what classes they take. Every grade should offer students a variety of classes in each subject area; for instance, in the twelfth grade students may decide between Modern Literature, British Literature or Writing and Reading through the Arts. The staff must ensure, however, that students do not begin to perceive some classes as accelerated and others as remedial; otherwise, segregation will begin to occur.

### *“Push in” Services*

It is also vital that support services given to students with special needs primarily be of the “push in” variety. Support staff should come into the regular education classroom rather than pulling out specific students for services. This includes not only the special education teacher, but the physical therapist, occupational therapist, speech therapist and reading clinician. Further, once in the classroom support staff should work with the class as whole and not merely take the students with special needs aside. Ideally, the skills the support staff impart should be beneficial to all students; further, the

expertise of these professionals can be easily incorporated into certain classes. The physical and occupational therapists may provide services in Art or Physical Education classes; the speech therapist and reading clinician may likewise visit English, Science or Social Studies classrooms.

### *Learning Support Center*

As services in an inclusive school should be of the “push in” variety, schools must reconsider the traditional resource room that provides most of the support to students with special needs. Traditionally, these students visit a resource room at least once a school day to receive support from a special education teacher; the teacher, in turn, employs this time to monitor the students on his/her caseload. Resource rooms, however, violate best practices as students must leave the general education classroom in order to receive support. A simple solution to this problem is to open up the resource room to all students.

A learning support center functions similarly to a resource room. Staffed by one or more teachers, a learning support center should be open to any student who wants to receive extra help. The center should have an open door policy so students may enter as needed. Students may also visit the center for one period a day; this is a nice alternative to the traditional study hall.

Special education teachers may or may not see the students on their caseload in a learning support center. Hopefully these students will be members of a class in which the special educators collaboratively teach; if not, the special educator must make every effort to observe his/her students in other classes and to communicate with the staff members who interact with them.

### ***School-wide Supports***

#### *Staff Support*

Support staff and the general education staff must collaborate in order for successful inclusion to occur. Collaborative teaching teams, composed of the special and regular education staff of one cohort, should meet often to discuss issues and offer support to one another. A meeting may revolve around a particular student or the general direction of the cohort. These teams may meet before or after school, or during lunch; collaborative teaching teams ideally should meet at least once a week. The meetings need not be formal and may involve support staff such as a paraprofessional, counselor, social worker or psychiatrist.

If co-teaching, the general and special education teachers must meet often in order to plan their lessons and discuss any issues that may arise. These meetings may involve other professionals or classroom aids, but should primarily focus upon upcoming lessons and the success of previous ones. We will further discuss collaboration and co-teaching in a following section.

When an issue with a particular student cannot be resolved, a child study team may need to be formed. This team would consist of the collaborative teaching team, a counselor, social worker or psychiatrist, the principal, the parents of the student and,

preferably, the student in question. This meeting should also be informal, as to put the parents and student at ease. The meeting should begin by questioning the student about his/her feelings on the situation. The parents and various staff members can then offer suggestions, such as specific instructional strategies, to help the student. Staff should always treat the student and parents with kindness and remember to speak about the student's strengths as well as his/her weaknesses.

Support staff team meetings are also vital to successful inclusion. These meetings may involve all the support staff in the building or just those of a particular cohort. They should be utilized as a forum for sharing ideas and offering support. For members of the same cohort, staff may discuss a particular student and strategies to teach him/her. School-wide support staff meetings can be employed to discuss tactics of collaboration and instructional strategies; these meetings are also good conduits of support. If a special education teacher is struggling in her role as a co-teacher, for example, a peer who has had a successful experience may offer advice. These groups are essential for professionals to prosper in their new roles at an inclusive school.

### *Community Support*

Schools do not exist in a vacuum and must consider the communities that they serve. The surrounding community can be an excellent resource and means of support. Volunteers from the community may tutor students or offer their own expertise on a certain subject. For instance, many companies arrange for their employees to tutor students during the work-day; this is not only beneficial for the students, but the employee who may contribute to his/ her community. Community members also possess different experiences and areas of expertise that they may bring to the classroom. A survivor of the Holocaust may be a guest lecturer in a Social Studies classroom or a local author may discuss literary tactics with a writing class. Bringing the community into the classroom will not only engage students but legitimize their education.

Community organizations such as colleges, hospitals, businesses, art galleries and libraries are also valuable tools for an inclusive school. Representatives may visit the school or students may travel there and utilize their resources. The school's media center may, for example, organize an exchange with the community library or students in an Art class may travel to a local art gallery.

### *Partnering with Parents*

While students are a school's top priority, staff must consider the whole family when providing services. Family-centered schools emphasize that "the priorities and choices of the family drive the delivery of services." This applies to all students but is particularly important for parents of students with special needs as they have historically received the worst treatment from well-meaning teachers and administrators.

### *Communication*

The first step towards a successful and mutually beneficial relationship with parents is how we communicate with them. As educators, we must treat the parents of

our students with respect and kindness. This seems obvious, but in the rush to complete the IEP form we often forgot to do so. Here are some helpful hints for communicating with the parents of students with special needs:

1. Listen to and respect parents' thoughts, feelings and opinions.
2. Offer emotional support and a friendly ear.
3. Focus upon the strengths of their child; do not concentrate upon weaknesses.
4. Avoid professional jargon; speak in common terms.

Communication with parents should be positive and frequent. Teachers may call, write or even email parents, depending upon which method the family prefers; they should also make available their work and home phone numbers so that parents can reach them. In an inclusive school, the general education teachers should also communicate with parents; this not only demonstrates to families that their children are welcome in the classroom, but offers parents another view of their child's experience in school.

We should also accommodate parents so that they have every opportunity to meet with us. As a family-centered school, we should offer child-care for families while parents are in meetings. Further, we should arrange IEP and other meetings based upon the family's schedule, not just our own; this communicates that we value and appreciate parent input.

Communication with parents can take a variety of forms. A classroom newsletter is a nice way of informing parents about the day to day events of a specific class. These newsletters should be written and designed by the students themselves; this project is, further, accessible to all students and one that a student with special needs may contribute to. Imagine the pleasure a parent might feel upon receiving a newsletter in which their child is listed as an "editor". Figure 1 contains an example of a classroom newsletter.

### *Parent Involvement*

Parents may wish to be further involved in school life. Early in the semester, teachers should create a survey for parents asking about the degree to which they wish to be involved. This form may also ask about the best time for meetings and preferred method of communication. Parents should be offered various means in which to become involved:

1. Joining a school-wide committee.
2. Volunteering in the classroom.
3. Guest lecturing on an area of expertise.
4. Joining a parent support group.
5. Attending team meetings occasionally.
6. Mentoring a parent new to the school.
7. Being mentored by another parent.
8. Offering techniques that have been helpful with their child.

This list is by no means exhaustive and as educators we should always be conscious of new ways in which parents can become involved in our classroom. Soliciting such

involvement from parents of students with special needs only further welcomes them into our school.

### ***Support and Collaboration Role***

#### *Collaborative Teaching*

Collaborative teaching may be the biggest obstacle for educators to overcome in an inclusive school. General education teachers may resent sharing their classrooms with other professionals and special educators may bemoan the loss of their own rooms and small student rosters. However, collaborative teaching is essential in order for inclusion to prosper within a school as one cannot fully include students who still receive separate services.

Collaborative teaching may take many forms and involve an array of professionals. As previously discussed, “push in” services are the preferred method of delivery in an inclusive school. Support staff such as occupational, speech and physical therapists should deliver services in the classroom and to the entire class. The special education teacher, too, should service the entire class, but on a more regular basis than other support staff.

Special education teachers within a cohort should be assigned a schedule of classes similar to their general education counterparts. This schedule may cover an array of subjects or one or two specialized areas; the exact design depends upon the preferences of the collaborative team. Likewise, collaborative teaching can take a variety of forms, some of which are discussed below:

1. *One teach, one observe* – one teacher handles instruction and management while the other observes one or more students to measure the effectiveness of instructional strategies. Teachers should switch roles.
2. *One teach, one drift* – one teacher handles instruction and management while the other travels around the classroom, offering support to students. Teachers should switch roles.
3. *Station teaching* – the classroom should be arranged into three heterogeneous groups. Two groups receive different instruction from the teachers while the third group works independently. Students should alternate groups during the class period.
4. *Parallel teaching* – the class is divided into two heterogeneous groups, with each teacher taking one group. The teachers teach the same material, at the same pace but to smaller groups of students. Teacher should alternate between groups each day.
5. *Alternate teaching* – while one teacher conducts large group instruction and management, the other takes aside a small heterogeneous group for enrichment. The member of these small groups should vary.
6. *Teaching together* – both teachers instruct and manage the class simultaneously.

The form of collaboration employed depends upon the preferences of the teachers. When first beginning, the special education teacher may wish to take a more passive role until he/she masters the subject matter. This does not translate, however, into becoming a gopher for the regular education teacher; the new collaborating teacher may observe or drift around the classroom, or take a small group aside for enrichment. This transition period should not last long, however, as it is vital that students recognize both professionals as their teachers. Further, the special education teacher should not merely service the students with special needs, as the regular education teacher should not ignore them in favor of the typical students. Both teachers should take equal responsibility for the entire class.

Collaborative teaching joins together two individuals who may or may not compliment one another. For this reason, partnerships sometimes do not work out. The two teachers may simply possess too disparate philosophies to successfully join together. If this happens, however, do not look upon it as a failure but a learning experience. With time you will discover what sort of learning styles you can work with and which are futile to collaboration.

### *Planning for Collaboration*

Often, collaborative teaching results in many individuals working intimately with one another. This can make planning for instruction extremely difficult as staff members can have widely disparate schedules. School-wide support and some creative planning can alleviate this problem, however. Some possible strategies include:

1. Floating substitute
2. Common planning period
3. Common lunch
4. Before or after school meetings
5. Support-services (OT, PT etc.) cover classes
6. Administrators cover classes
7. Additional planning hour per week
8. Student teachers cover classes
9. Intermittent early dismissal
10. Planning during school-wide events

Finally, it is important to be flexible when organizing planning time and to respect the schedules of other staff members.

Once a schedule for planning is in place, the real work begins. For successful collaboration to occur, the special and general educators must meet often, at least once a week. During these meetings, the two professionals should share ideas and techniques from their respective fields. The special education teacher, in particular, should reveal methods that facilitate the inclusion of students with special needs. These methods cover:

1. Multi-level instruction
2. Instruction for multiple intelligences
3. Adaptations

4. Building community in the classroom
5. Dealing with behavioral challenges
6. Universal design of the classroom
7. Accommodations for students with physical and sensory challenges

Each of these methods will be explained in following sections of this guide.

When working with the general education teacher, it is again important to be flexible. The teacher may not be ready to fully abandon his/her old format of teaching and may need to witness the benefits of these good practices prior to accepting them as their own mode of instruction. The special educator must, however, have the courage to offer suggestions and thus become a full member of the teaching team.

The support staff can also learn from the general education teacher. Collaborative teaching demands that both professionals be well versed in the material. This may not happen all at once, but the special education teacher must make every possible effort to learn from his/her general education counterpart. Once you know your schedule for the upcoming school year, meet with your co-teacher and ask for the curriculum guide and any pertinent textbooks. Study these over the summer and begin thinking about possible lesson plans and instructional strategies. Further, do not be afraid to ask questions of your co-teacher; he/she is your main means of support. The real learning, however, will occur in the classroom as often the best way to learn a subject is to teach it.

### ***Authentic, Multi-Level Instruction for Students of Diverse Abilities***

Many educators feel that successful inclusion can only occur if the existing curriculum and instructional strategies are adapted for students with special needs. While this may be true in some instances, creating authentic, multi-level instruction requires less accommodations and benefits all students as well.

#### *Authentic Instruction*

Students often complain of boredom in the classroom and claim that instruction contains no relevance to their daily lives or future. This is particularly detrimental to students with special needs as they already lack motivation towards schoolwork that caters towards the “mythical middle” and ignores the varying abilities present in the classroom. Authentic instruction, on the other hand, makes connections between the classroom and real life by considering students’ interests and the surrounding community. When creating authentic learning experiences, teachers must consider the topic of focus and the method of instruction.

Authentic topics directly relate to students’ lives and their community. Possible examples include:

1. Students may study local government by working for an election campaign.
2. When studying different countries, invite students and their families from these particular countries to guest lecture.
3. Ask students to write letters to the editor of a local newspaper expressing their opinions about an issue that concerns them.

4. If the economy takes a sudden turn for the better or worse, students study the causes and consequences.

Authentic instruction involves meaningful activities that engage the students' interest. Students do not merely fill out worksheets but do projects that stimulate interest and emphasize student choice. Authentic instruction also promotes group learning as many activities require a team of students to work together. Group activities further include students with special needs as they may contribute at their ability level to a larger product. Generalization is also expedited as students transfer knowledge easier when engaged in authentic learning. Some examples of authentic instruction include:

1. Students are given choices for reading material on a particular topic.
2. Micro-societies
3. Process drama
4. Problem-based learning
5. Community-based learning
6. Journal writing
7. Students practice letter writing by communicating with students from another state or country.

Figure 2 contains an example of authentic letter writing. In this example, tenth graders wrote to their peers in Ichikawa, Japan; students described their hometown, school and daily activities. This activity is authentic as students practice letter writing through forming a pen pal relationship with a teenager in another country; this is far superior to practicing letter writing skills by penning a note to an imaginary recipient. It is further authenticated by the fact that students discuss their own lives and community rather than focusing upon a teacher-generated topic. This project can be adapted for students who struggle with writing as well.

For instance, a student may decide to tape record his/her letter and send his/her pen pal the cassette recording. Or, a student may include pictures describing his/her life with only a few descriptive sentences. Finally, students may act as peer editors and thus assist those who struggle with writing.

### *Multi-Level Teaching*

Another obstacle to successful inclusion is the notion that students of a particular age should all perform at the same ability level. Thus, most classrooms cater towards the "mythical middle" and offer instruction and activities at only one level. This is not only detrimental to students with special needs, but gifted students who complain of boredom as well. If we consider the varying ability levels of our students, and design our curriculum accordingly, students will not only become more engaged in the material but will amaze us with their accomplishments.

Multi-level teaching, thus, considers the ability of each student and challenges him/her accordingly. Students all work on the same topic, but we vary our instruction and expectations. When designing a multi-level curriculum, one must consider the learning goals, learning activities and the demonstration of learning by students.

The learning goals, simply, are what we expect students to learn about a given topic; our expectations should vary according to the student's capabilities. For example, in a science class studying bacteria growth, a student with severe mental impairment might be expected to identify and use the tools employed in an experiment. A gifted student, on the other hand, may be expected to learn about an array of bacteria and their specific effects upon different organisms. The more we get to know our students and their ability levels, the easier it will become to fashion disparate goals.

The learning activities employed should flow naturally from the learning goals we devise. For example, the student with severe mental impairment previously discussed might be expected to help set up a laboratory experiment and to perform some simple tasks; the gifted student may be expected to not only participate in the experiment but to further investigate the research of scientists on bacteria growth. Thus, students with widely varying abilities can work together on a mutual project yet achieve quite different goals.

The demonstration of learning or assessment that follows an activity should again be based upon each student's specific goal. This negates the notion that standardized tests are the fairest method of assessment; these tests not only cater towards the "mythical middle" but provide no meaningful measure of student achievement. The student with severe mental impairment, for example, may be evaluated during a laboratory experiment based upon his/her contributions to the group; his/her team members should keep note of the student's recognition of certain tools and ability to employ them. They may then report their findings to a teacher who will chart the student's progress. The gifted student, on the other hand, may write a paper about his/her research or give a presentation to the class. The demonstration of learning employed should thus depend upon the ability level of the student.

Multi-level teaching is, hence, extremely individualized for each student. However, some general strategies may be employed in the instruction of diverse learners; these include:

1. Provide books at different levels on the same topic.
2. Individual writing and reading goals.
3. Laboratory experiments with specified roles.
4. Dramatic role play in a Social Studies or English class.
5. Group projects with specified roles.
6. Allow for different modes of communication – written, spoken, drawn, etc.
7. Journal writing.
8. Create a newspaper on a designated topic with different roles for each group member.

Figure 3 contains an example of a newspaper from a World Mythology class. This newspaper, loosely based upon Homer's *Iliad*, was completely created by students. The newspaper not only chronicles the events of the Trojan War, but describes the culture of ancient Greece. Such an assignment illustrates multi-level instruction as it offers a variety of roles for students; students may research articles, write articles, edit articles, draw or photograph pictures for the articles, create political cartoons or comics, type the articles, and format or photocopy the newspaper. Further, students may select an aspect

of the newspaper to work on that personally interests them; for instance, many of the young men who worked on this newspaper were interested in the sports of ancient Greece and thus researched chariot racing and the Olympics. Following completion of this assignment, it is vital to allow the students to evaluate their team members; this not only gives students full control over the assignment, but ensures that they receive proper credit for their work.

### *Multiple Intelligences*

Creating authentic learning experiences and devising multi-level instruction are just two steps towards satisfying best practices and successful inclusion. One must also consider the different intelligences of students. People often speak of “left brain” and “right brain” thinking, assuming that one side is dominant in each individual. Howard Gardner took this theory one step further and postulated that individuals actually possess eight forms of intelligences which interact with one another.

Gardner agrees with the left brain/right brain theory that some intelligences are stronger in certain individuals and further reasoned that all must be addressed in good schools. Doing so not only strengthens weaker intelligences, but permits the flowering and expression of advanced ones. Gardner’s eight intelligences consist of:

1. Linguistic
2. Logical-mathematical
3. Spatial
4. Bodily-kinesthetic
5. Musical
6. Interpersonal
7. Intra-personal
8. Naturalist

Linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences are those most often addressed in traditional schools, yet many students do not excel in these areas. Students with special needs, particularly, may possess deficits in these intelligences; if the usual method of assessment measures ability in just these two areas, students are more likely to fail and thus lose even more interest in their education. A good curriculum should attempt to cover several intelligences in one activity.

Figure 4 contains one example of an activity that addresses multiple intelligences. Students in an American Literature class were in the midst of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s The Scarlet Letter. In order to understand the disgrace Hester felt when forced to wear a scarlet “A” students were first asked to write in their journals about a personal weakness. Following this writing, students created their own “scarlet letter” representing this weakness with construction paper and markers. The following day, students were asked to wear their letter to each class. Finally, they were asked to write one paragraph describing the reactions of others to the letter and how they felt while wearing it.

This project addresses a variety of intelligences. First, students tap their linguistic mind as they write in their journals. Spatial intelligence is employed when students create their letters. Interpersonal skills are tested when students analyze the reactions of

others to their letters; intra-personal intelligence results when they write about their feelings while wearing the letter. Such as assignment stirs up interest and creativity as students employ intelligences which may have been ignored for much of their school careers.

### *Accommodations and Adaptations*

Even the best-designed instruction does not always satisfy the needs of every student. For this reason, a major responsibility of the special educator is to suggest and recommend adaptations to the general education teacher. Adaptations, like instruction, should be considered on an individual basis. There are three different areas where one may adapt curriculum: teaching strategies, support and scaffolding, and methods of evaluation.

#### *Teaching Strategies*

The methods of presentation and activities in a classroom may need to be adapted. Accommodations may be necessary in such areas as:

1. *Presentation* – employ multi-media techniques such as overhead, chalkboard and videos. Read a variety of texts including fiction, non-fiction, poetry, newspapers, magazines. Employ guest lecturers and conduct field trips. Vary activities to include drama, art and music.
2. *Expectations* – same content but vary difficulty, amount, time allotted, degree of participation.
3. *Instructional materials* – same content but vary difficulty, amount, mode of communication. Make more concrete.
4. *Methods of obtaining information* – adaptive technology, sign language, Braille, note-taker, peer buddy/tutor.
5. *Instructional formats* – more small group work, peer buddy/tutor.
6. *Methods of performing tasks* – adaptive technology (alternative and augmentative communication, typing vs. writing), sign language.

#### *Support and Scaffolding*

The amount of support given to a particular student may also need to be adjusted. Areas for adaptations in support include:

1. *Peer support* – small group work, cooperative learning, peer buddy/tutor.
2. *Information and materials available* – extra set of classroom materials at home, alert students of assignments in advance.
3. *Teacher scaffolding* – teacher aware of zone of proximal development through questioning.
4. *In-class support* – support staff work with student in general education class.

### *Methods of Evaluation*

Finally, the way we assess students may need to be adapted. Possible methods of adaptation include:

1. *Methods of demonstrating learning* – portfolios, plays, posters. Standardized tests do not effectively illustrate learning!
2. *Adjusted grading* – maintain individual goals for each student, refer to IEP goals, grade based upon effort and improvement.

Again, adaptations need to be done on an individual basis. However, some possible adaptations for various impairments are given as examples in figure 5. The first lesson is the original instructional plan for Willa Cather’s short story “A Wagner Matinee”. Following it are possible adaptations for students with learning disabilities, severe mental impairment and emotional impairment, respectively.

### ***Building Community in the School and Classroom***

A sense of community in the school and classroom is essential in order for inclusion to prosper. As previously discussed, a system of cohorts facilitates the feeling of community within a school as it creates smaller support groups for students and teachers. However, a sense of community must permeate the entire school as well as travel into the classroom. When facilitating a community, one may first consider the five fundamental needs of human beings as proposed by William Glasser and discover how these needs may be met in the school:

1. *Survival* – students should, above all else, feel safe in school. This safety translates not only to their physical well being but their emotional as well. In a school with a strong sense of community students should feel respected and cared for; cliques and bullies should be virtually non-existent.
2. *Love and belonging* – students should also feel like a part of their school. Belonging may be especially difficult for students with special needs to feel in they attend separate classes and have little interaction with their peers. An inclusive environment, along with circles of support, peer buddies and collaborative learning groups helps all students feel that they belong.
3. *Power* – in a true community, every member has the right to make decisions and exert some influence over his/her environment. This rarely occurs in a traditional school but in an inclusive school students are given choices and responsibility. Students should help devise classroom rules and have say in possible punishments. They should have input to school-wide functions such as assemblies and dances.
4. *Fun* – if authentic and engaging learning occurs, students should have fun in school.
5. *Freedom* -- as in a community, students should have choice in the classroom. They may select topics that engage them and the method of evaluation.

The foundations for a community should grow from these five basic needs. The three foundations are: democratic decision making, support for teachers and students, and parent and community connections. Let us explore all three and see how they contribute to the community of the school.

### *Democratic Decision Making*

A school, like a community, should be democratic in nature and not the totalitarian empire of an over zealous principal. The entire staff should work together and contribute to the community of learning. This not only creates a pleasant atmosphere but models appropriate collaboration for students. Further, the staff should not control the school but share power with the students. Students should be allowed a voice in the running of the school; they should all agree upon its mission statement, rules and procedures. Students should also have input into school-wide events, classes and extra-curricular activities.

Democratic decision making translates into the classroom as well. When collaborative teaching, both team members should have equal say in how the classroom is run; the special educator does not work for the general education teacher and should be allowed to exercise his/her own will. The students, too, have power in the classroom. They should have the freedom to move about the classroom and go to the restroom as needed. They should collectively determine classroom rules and handle, as a class, deviance from those rules. Further, they should be involved in the organization of the classroom, the decorations that adorn the wall and the resources available. Students should be questioned as to what they want to learn over the course of the semester; likewise, they should be offered choice in the method of presentation and evaluation. Classroom meetings are good conduits to discover what students want and how they feel their classroom should be run.

### *Support to Teachers and Students*

Successful communities offer systems of support to their members. The school should have in place similar means of support for its teachers and students. Collaborative teaching teams, child-study teams, support staff teams, cohort teams and subject area teams all offer support to professionals. Students need support as well and may find it through their cohorts, circle of friends, peer buddies, peer tutors and mentors.

The classroom itself is also an excellent means of support for students and teachers. The bond between co-teachers is often quite beneficial as the professionals may exchange ideas and offer support to one another. Classroom meetings are wonderful ways for students and teachers to communicate what is working in a classroom and what is not. Peer buddies, peer tutors and collaborative learning groups are also excellent means of support within the classroom.

### *Parent and Community Connections*

Finally, the school cannot forget the surrounding community when forming its own. A family-centered school best accommodates the outlying community as it focuses

upon the needs of the entire family. This includes involving parents in the running of the school and offering parent support groups. The school may also wish to form connections with community resources such as the local library, community college and art gallery.

The classroom community should also involve the community at large. Teachers should maintain a frequent, positive dialogue with parents; they should also invite them into the classroom as guest speakers, volunteers and tutors. This communicates to students that the school accepts them and their families as members of the classroom community.

### ***Dealing with Behavioral Challenges***

If you have built a sense of community in the school and classroom, behavioral challenges should already be at a minimum. Other preventative strategies include:

1. Engaging, authentic instruction.
2. Cooperative learning groups.
3. Multiple activities in one class period.
4. Freedom to move around the classroom and school.
5. Students help to make and enforce classroom rules.
6. Students helping students.
7. Student choice.
8. Classroom culture of respect and caring.
9. Toleration of “constructive” noise.
10. School rules described desired, rather than prohibited, behavior

Such strategies aim to further extinguish behavioral challenges before they even begin. They do so by offering students choice, power and freedom. However, behavioral problems may still occur; the key to dealing with them is to discover why they happen.

Behavioral challenges typically occur because some fundamental need is not being met. It is helpful to again consider Glasser’s five needs:

1. Power
2. Freedom
3. Fun
4. Love and belonging
5. Survival

Behavior is, essentially, a form of communication. If a student feels bored in the classroom he/she is not having fun and may consequently act disruptive. This disruptive behavior is a means for the student to fulfill a basic human need. Rather than punishing the behavior, we should look for ways to prevent it from happening in the future.

We can do this by making every effort to meet student’s needs; this is favorable to a system of punishment and rewards which only reinforce negative behavior. Begin this process by questioning what the behavior is attempting to communicate; in the previous example, a teacher may extinguish the disruptive behavior by engaging students in

interesting, authentic instruction. This will make the classroom fun and thus fulfill one need of the student.

Recognizing and meeting student needs is perhaps the best way to deal with behavioral challenges, but often more in-depth interventions are necessary. Some ways to proactively deal with behavioral problems include:

1. Use “I” statements.
2. Listen to students.
3. Let students create their own goals for behavior.
4. Use class meetings as a method of intervention.
5. Use circles of friends, peer mediation and peer support.
6. Professional support (counselor, social worker, etc.)
7. Involve the parents.
8. Let the “punishment fit the crime” (a student who draws graffiti on the bathroom wall must clean the walls).

It is vital to realize that punishments and rewards have no intrinsic value and thus are meaningless to students. Meeting students’ needs and responding proactively to behavioral challenges proves to be much more effective in an inclusive school.

### ***Physical Design of the School and Classroom for Diverse Learners***

An inclusive school and classroom should physically reflect the idea of integration. A school, for instance, that claims to be inclusive yet assigns students with special needs all lockers in the same hall way is not truly inclusive. When considering the design of our school and classroom, we should ask ourselves if it follows the notion of Universal Design.

Universal Design postulates that space should be organized so that it is accessible to all people, not merely the average. This design style negates the need for accommodations as structures are already structured, to the greatest extent possible, for universal accessibility. The principles of Universal Design can be applied to both the entire school and individual classrooms.

#### *The School*

A universally designed school should, first and foremost, be physically accessible to all individuals. Every entrance should have wide enough berths for wheelchairs and ramps if necessary. Each doorway within the school should likewise be wheelchair accessible. If the school contains multiple levels, ramps should exist alongside stairways in addition to an elevator. The cafeteria should boast tables that a wheelchair may fit under and the dials on lockers should be properly placed as well. The outdoor resources such as the track and football field should also be accessible through well carved pathways. Signs should be large, clear and possess a Braille and picture interpretation beneath the written explanation.

Universal Design also considers the atmosphere of the school. At the front of the school a welcome area should be designed where staff and students greet visitors.

Teachers should stand outside their classrooms during transitions time and greet students as they enter. Rather than displaying trophies and other extrinsic rewards, the hallway should be a composite of student work. The school, simply, should exude a feeling of support and caring.

Finally, Universal Design dictates the resources of a space. The media center, gym and pool should be accessible to everyone. The media center should possess adaptive technology and different ability books; the gym and pool should likewise boast resources that allow all students to participate.

### *The Classroom*

The classroom should reflect the Universal Design of the school. Its door should be wheelchair accessible and students should sit at tables, rather than desks, to permit universal accessibility. These tables should be arranged in learning groups rather than rows; the tables, further, should be arranged so as to permit large aisle ways through which a wheelchair or walker may travel. Any computers in the classroom should also be universally accessible. The teacher's desk should not be the focus of the room but pushed to the side.

The atmosphere of the room should be equally welcoming. Students will have distinct work spaces, but will be reminded that no one seat "belongs" to a specific student; the teacher should likewise welcome students to use his/her desk and computer. The walls should be covered with student work that reflects the ability levels of all students and should not merely pay tribute to "perfect" assignments.

Finally, the resources of the classroom should accommodate learners of varying abilities. Different ability books should line the shelves. Assistive technology devices such as talking computer software, speech to text software, sound amplification devices, FM receivers and visual magnification devices should be made available as needed. Each classroom should also be equipped with a television, VCR, computer and overhead.

### *Accommodations for Students with Physical and Sensory Challenges*

So far, our discussion has mostly centered about adaptations and accommodations for students with academic deficits. We must also consider, however, the challenges that students with physical and sensory needs face.

#### *Accommodations for Physical Impairments*

1. Accessible tables, shelves and computers
2. Wide aisles and doorways.
3. Modified grippers that attach to pens or pencils.
4. Paper or object stabilizers.
5. Mouthsticks and head pointers for manipulation of objects.
6. Reachers to grasp objects.
7. Switches and environmental control units.
8. A couch or bean bag chair so student may switch positions for comfort.
9. Communication boards.

10. Adapted computer keyboard and mouse.

*Accommodations for Visual Impairments*

1. Seat student near the front of the room.
2. Always alert student prior to changing the organization of the room.
3. Employ a peer buddy to aid movement around the classroom.
4. Use enlarged texts for students with partial vision.
5. Display overheads in contrasting colors.
6. Allow student to tape record lecture.
7. Magnification devices, such as closed circuit television to enlarge texts, worksheets, outlines and notes.
8. Books on tape.
9. Brailers.
10. Reading systems.

*Accommodations for Hearing Impairments*

1. Seat student near front of room.
2. Speak clearly and enunciate if a student is reading lips.
3. Employ headphones that allow students to listen to tapes at an increased volume.
4. FM transmission devices which increase the volume of the speaker.
5. Classroom amplification systems.
6. Sign Language interpreter in the classroom.
7. Other students learn some Sign Language.
8. Provide notes or have peer buddy take notes.

Examples of accommodations for students with physical and sensory challenges are listed in figure 6. A lesson about Willa Cather's "A Wagner Matinee" is again adapted, but for a student with severe multiple impairments but no cognitive impairments, a student with visual impairment and a student with hearing impairment.