Students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms

A resource for teachers

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

Overview

This resource has been written for mainstream teachers who have, or are about to have, a student with a disability in their classroom. The booklet may also be useful for teaching assistants, parents and others. The resource is based on recent research and experience in schools and classrooms across Australia.

We are very supportive of inclusive practice but we also appreciate that some teachers have concerns about teaching a student with a disability in their mainstream class. Some believe they don't have the skills, experience or resources to do a good job and wonder why the student is not in a special school or class.

This booklet simply aims to provide you with up-to-date, teacher-friendly suggestions for responding to the diversity that's in every classroom these days.

This resource acknowledges that most Australian teachers have to deal with multiple demands and that most teachers feel that time – or the lack of it – is their most significant barrier. It is not so much students with disabilities who worry them but trying to fit in everything that has to be done on a typical school day can be very stressful. That is why this resource focuses on strategies that are practical, feasible and efficient of teachers' time.

In section one we introduce the topic and briefly deal with a few big questions. How is Australian society responding to "difference" and what is the impact on schools and teachers? What does disability really involve? What is driving inclusive practice? What supports do teachers need if they are going to teach inclusively? And, what is the evidence on which this resource is based?

In section two we focus on practical strategies that all mainstream teachers can use – if they choose. We have seen typical teachers using every one of these strategies. In this section we provide evidenced-based strategies that will help you with all of your students, i.e. general and specific ways of organising your class and teaching.

Section two also deals with the difficult decision about whether you should adapt teaching and/or content, and how you could do it. Once again, we briefly describe feasible and realistic approaches.

Our research in Australian schools has shown that teachers who successfully include students with a disability in their class tend to collaborate a lot with others. So, in this section we also provide examples of how to involve others – teachers, parents, other students, teaching assistants and members of the school community.

As including students with disabilities in secondary schools poses particular difficulties, we have included a sub-section on the topic.

It would be counterproductive to fill this booklet with effective strategies that teachers don't have time to implement. Therefore we have focused on feasible strategies that many teachers around the country are already using and we have included a sub-section on how classroom teachers can find more time for planning, collaborating and/or teaching.

Section two concludes with some ideas on how you can contribute to whole school change. Although individual teachers can and do make a difference, it is certainly easier if the school community reaches consensus about goals, roles and procedures.

It is impractical for a booklet like this to try and deal with every issue about teaching students with disabilities in mainstream classes so in section three we provide additional resources, references and websites.

Section One: Students with Disabilities in the Mainstream
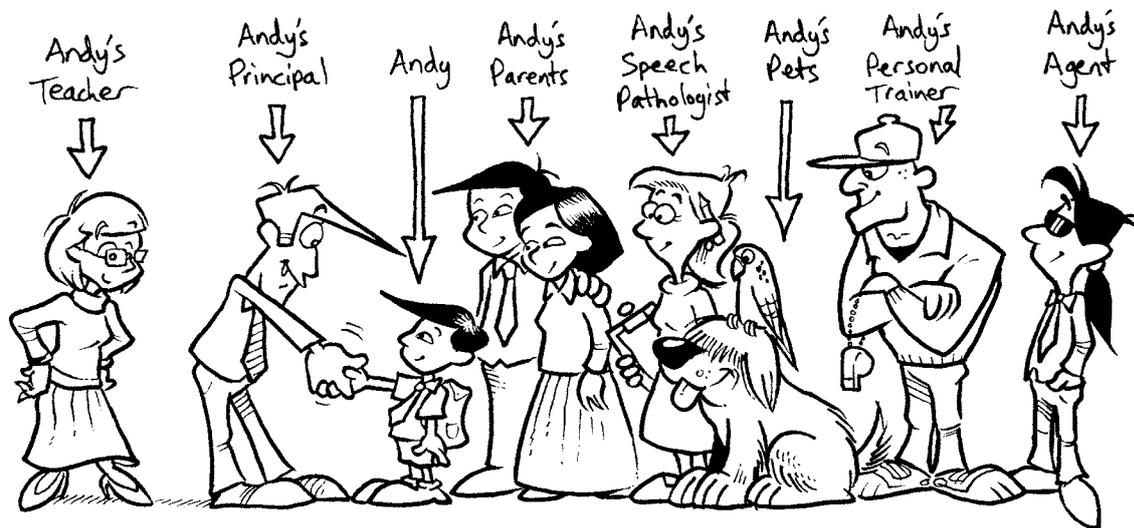
ANDY ENROLS AT A MAINSTREAM SCHOOL

In this section you can read about …

✓ Teachers' concerns about students with disabilities in the mainstream (1.1)

✓ "Students with disabilities" or "student diversity"? (1.2)

✓ What's driving the move to include students with disabilities in the mainstream? (1.3)

✓ What is inclusive practice? (1.4)

✓ What supports inclusive practice? (1.5)

✓ The project on which this resource is based (1.6).

"Indeed the needs of students with disabilities may be proxy for those of all other students who experience mainstream schools as unresponsive or even alienating"(M. Traynor, November 17, 2005).

1.1 Teachers' concerns about students with disabilities

In writing a booklet to support inclusive practice we are well aware that many teachers have concerns about students with disabilities in the mainstream. We appreciate the perspective that teaching one or more students with a disability in a typical class is just one of a number of challenges that include changes to the curriculum, public scrutiny of your students' performance in basic subjects, and the requirement to meet the needs of students from diverse cultural, linguistic and social backgrounds. However, we remain positive and optimistic about teachers' capacity to respond to diversity and many are doing it with great success.

Funding is an issue that concerns many teachers because funding criteria have not always included the students who are most challenging – those students who may not have a diagnosis of anything but whose

learning and/or behavioural needs dominate time, attention and energy.

Some teachers are concerned about additional administration and paperwork, the lack of time for necessary consultation with colleagues, and insufficient support for providing an appropriate curriculum, particularly in secondary school.

What research shows

Australian research consistently finds that the most frequently reported concerns of teachers are their lack of time and the demands on instructional time (e.g. Forlin, 2001; Westwood, 2003).

Furthermore, although only a small proportion of students with disabilities behave in ways that are dangerous or demanding of teachers' time, some teachers are concerned about OH&S issues, e.g. they fear that students with disabilities will increase their workload and pose "duty of care" burdens.

What teachers say

"I feel (inclusive education) teaches children patience, understanding and respect that transfers out to their parents and the wider community."

The other students are taught patience, respect and caring towards students with a disability. They take great pride in these children's successes."

"Inclusion is important for all students but it does place an increased burden on teachers."

Some teachers are also worried about students' behaviour and/or the effect of their disability, the impact on the learning of other students and the demands of coordinating and supervising additional personnel, particularly teaching assistants.

What teachers do

Many teachers adopt creative ways of responding to students' difficult behaviour and try to understand what function the behaviour might serve for the student. One primary school teacher who has a student with autism in her class has set up a yurt in the classroom. The student – and others as well sometimes – go into the yurt for a short time if they feel they are going to lose control or have an outburst.

Finally, many mainstream teachers report that they do not have the time, training, experience, personal resources and/or access to professional development that they need to feel confident about teaching students with a disability in a mainstream class.

As teachers have been expressing these concerns for some time, we have taken their views on board and have focused this resource booklet on practical and feasible approaches that any classroom teacher can use. We also discuss the general supports that mainstream teachers will find helpful when they are including students with disabilities. Although we mainly deal with techniques and strategies that teachers can use in their classrooms, we know that successful inclusion requires much more than teachers having technical skills – teachers also need the right conditions to demonstrate their skills.

1.2 "Students with disabilities" or "student diversity"?

What teachers say

"I try to approach them as 44 exceptional individuals"(Team teacher).

"The things that have helped me are a sense of humour, flexibility and support from team leaders, incredible assistants, admin support, support from parents and an incredibly empathetic class."

"This week for Maths we have decided to adopt a curriculum adaptation that will benefit all students."

Did you know?

- A student's disability may impact on learning – but it may have little impact at all.

- Students with the same diagnosis experience their disability in unique ways.

- Although children who have the same diagnosis, e.g. Down syndrome, are alike in some respects, they will differ in personality, temperament, skills, interests and capacities.

- A disability diagnosis tells you something about a student but may not tell you much about his or her educational needs.

- Although students with diagnosed disabilities may attract special funding, they are not the only students for whom adaptations may be required.

- Disability is only one of many possible sources of individual need in contemporary classrooms.

What research says

We carefully studied 20 Australian teachers who were highly successful in including students with disabilities in their mainstream. These teachers tended to see all of their students as having individual needs – not just the students who had a disability (Shaddock, Hook, Hoffman-Raap, Spinks, Woolley & Pearce, 2007).

1.3 What's driving the move to include students with disabilities in the mainstream?

Including students with disabilities in the educational mainstream is neither an Australian nor a recent phenomenon. International agreements have confirmed the rights of students with disabilities to be educated in mainstream schools and Australian legislation supports that choice.

Although not without its critics or tensions, this type of legislation reflects the way many western societies are tending to view themselves these days – acknowledging and celebrating diversity in the population, being more careful about what is considered special or different and attempting to be inclusive of all citizens in the services that are provided.

Australia's Disability Discrimination Act (1992) and the Standards for Education (2005) are exerting a major influence on schools as they focus on the rights of students with a disability to access education *on the same basis* as students without a disability and with *reasonable accommodations* or *adjustments*.

Accommodations and adjustments are measures or actions that teachers and schools make in relation to learning environments, teaching and learning activities and assessments that enable students to access and participate fully in achieving curriculum outcomes.

The Disability Standards specify how the Disability Discrimination Act should be interpreted in relation to enrolment, participation, curriculum access, use of support services and freedom from harassment. For more, see http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school_education/programmes_funding/forms_guidelines/disability_standards_for_education.htm

1.4 What is inclusive practice?

Inclusive practice describes any and all efforts made by a school and its community to make students and their parents feel welcome. Inclusive practice implies that if participation becomes an issue for any student, whether arising from disability, gender, behaviour, poverty, culture, refugee status or any other reason, then the desirable approach is not to establish special programs for the newly identified individual or group need, but to expand mainstream thinking, structures and practices so that all students are accommodated.

Maybe the real change is in our heads!

Inclusive practice involves a change in mindset about how society, schools and students work together to allow all students to achieve meaningful individual and group learning outcomes.

For students with recognised individual needs that are related to disability, inclusive practice requires new ways of thinking about disability, difference and interdependence. It means that students who previously would have been educated in separate settings have a right to be educated in the company of their siblings and peers at their local schools or in their schools of choice.

Inclusive practice requires school leadership and vision that foster a sense of community and emphasise the importance of relationships.

Inclusive school culture is one nurtured by constant development of staff capacity to include students, collaborate with other professionals and work in partnership with parents. Such a positive culture also fosters team planning, collaborative teaching, cooperative learning and transition planning for students as they progress through their schooling.

What teachers say

"Inclusion should strongly depend on the needs of the student, not the school's or the parents'."

"The best support for inclusive practice is to have belief and support from the top (principal and executive)."

"I guess the main thing in our classroom to include special needs students is extra assistance with activities."

Inclusive practice begins with each teacher's understanding the importance of being personally inclusive of students, parents and others; treating each student as an individual; disregarding labels; learning from good practitioners and best practice research; and reflecting on their own performance as teachers.

Inclusive practice describes a host of strategies that support the inclusion of students with disabilities. Teachers' willingness to engage in co-teaching and to find creative ways of working together with others to support students with disabilities in the mainstream are hallmarks of effective inclusive practice.

1.5 What supports inclusive practice?

To create and support inclusive models of practice we have to accept that these won't just develop organically but will require support and an investment of time and effort by all involved. For a school to become genuinely inclusive the staff usually have to engage in a creative and challenging set of processes. These processes are facilitated when teachers and support staff

- Work predominantly from the basis of student strengths and not their disabilities. This starting point allows teachers to remain focused on genuine learning support needs rather than on label-determined deficits.

What teachers say

"If something doesn't work, try another method – and ask the students."

"Kids with disabilities who act out elsewhere, often excel in drama. The best student actors sometimes can barely read or write. Skills needed in this subject are different to others."

"We made my class only 19 in the morning to accommodate an extra 5 students with disabilities in the afternoon. This was done as an incentive for parents to want their child in a smaller group – and it's appealing for teachers too!"

- Operate in ways which are genuinely more flexible and responsive to group members. Such flexibility allows teachers to think more creatively about how they approach classroom work and to create more exciting work and interesting learning challenges for all students.

- Modify the pace of work, building activities gradually and in clear stages. Complexity and depth need to be built up gradually and this will suit the way all

students learn and how many students with disabilities need to learn.

- Adopt a team approach. Working together in permanent partnership (co-teaching) or in flexible partnerships (team-teaching) and teaching in complementary ways allow for more models of support to be offered to students.

What teachers do

Establish a supportive classroom climate.

Provide buddy and peer support.

Give lots of feedback – predominantly positive.

- Use and exploit well-honed techniques that are effective for all students, adapting ideas and methodologies if needed, rather than believing that there is a set of specialist approaches only appropriate for use with students with disabilities.

- Mix inputs. Use a variety of teaching techniques, e.g. problem-solving, investigative learning, direct instruction, hands-on learning and teaching, multimedia and technology. These approaches may allow students with a disability to demonstrate their strengths and further promote their acceptance.

Working in ways that support inclusion, however, requires more than a rethinking of working practices. Being genuinely inclusive of, and accessible to, young people with disabilities also requires teachers to

- Actively challenge the low aspirations of others. Some people believe that work with students with disabilities will always be of lower quality and they don't recognise the opportunities that inclusion affords for teachers to teach in innovative ways that challenge all members of the class.

- Insist that students (and their efforts) not be devalued or marginalised by allowing them to be pigeon-holed, e.g. by a 'medical diagnosis' (She has Down syndrome and all students with Down syndrome can't do x or they act like y). Such generalizations are inaccurate.

- Focus on the "social" and "typical" (He is 14 years old and most 14 year olds enjoy x).

Individual teachers and group of teachers can bring about significant changes in their schools and they need not wait until conditions are ideal to do so. However, change in inclusion culture, policy and practice will be smoother if led by the executive and supported by the whole staff.

What research shows

Research shows that how teachers teach is a key determinant of student outcomes, second only to the contribution that students make to their own learning (Hattie, 2005).

Although we focus on teachers in this discussion, it should be emphasised that many individuals must be part of this reform and part of the model of support – students, parents, teaching assistants, consultants, allied health professionals and members of the local community.

Individual teachers can make a difference!

1.6 The research on which this resource is based

Between 2004 and 2006 the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) funded a project to

- Do a critical review of the literature on inclusive practices.

- Undertake research on inclusive classroom practices.

- Identify innovative ways to support the literacy and numeracy development of students with disabilities.

- Investigate transition issues for students with disabilities.

- Describe ways of supporting professional development about inclusive practice.

- Develop summary information for teachers (such as this booklet).

- Conduct small-scale trials of innovative dissemination strategies.

Section Two: Strategies for Teachers
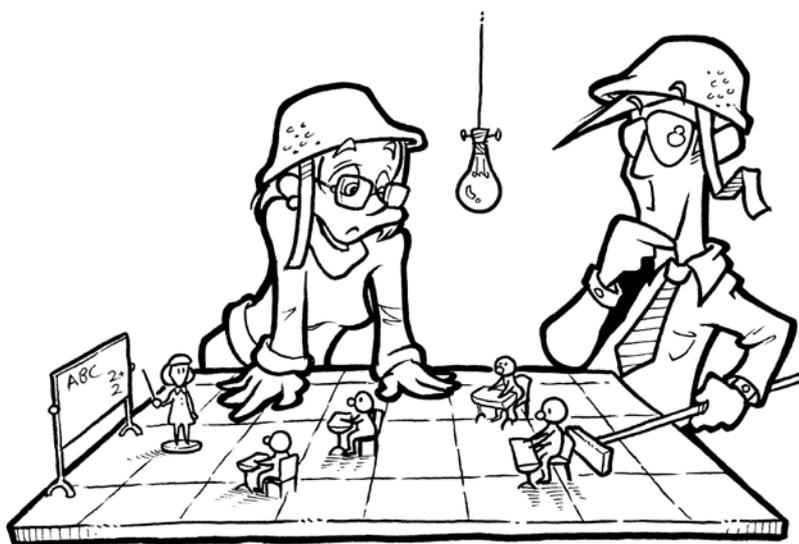
In this section you can read about …

- ✓ Starting up and getting ready (2.1)
- ✓ "Differentiation" aka "differentiated instruction" (2.2)
- ✓ Differentiation content (2.3)
- ✓ Plans for individual students (2.4)
- ✓ Adapting process and product (2.5)
    - • Whole class approaches (2.5.1)
    - • Teaching learning skills (2.5.2)
    - • General differentiation strategies (2.5.3)
    - • Specific differentiation strategies (2.5.4)
- ✓ Assisting with friendship and networks – social inclusion (2.6)
- ✓ Strategies for high school teachers (2.7)
- ✓ Working with teaching assistants (2.8)
- ✓ Finding time for planning and collaboration (2.9)
- ✓ Contributing to whole school culture change (2.10)
- ✓ Where to from here? (2.11)
- ✓ Experimenting, reflecting on, and enjoying teaching (2.12)

2.1 Starting up and getting ready

"If students become engaged in the" right stuff" they are likely to learn what we want them to learn" (Schlechty, P.C. Working on the Work, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2002).

Getting ready for having a student with a disability in your class is all about the "right stuff". It is almost like learning a new language but one that fits right into any modern discourse about effective teaching and learning.

When you are told that there will be a student with a disability in your class, or any other student whose needs may be somewhat more complex, assume nothing, and learn as much as you can as quickly as you can from

- • Previous teachers and counsellors
- • The student and the parents
- • Your own observations of the student
- • General print and web-based information if applicable.

All this will help you develop a "learner's profile".

Once a learner's profile has been developed it can help you present work that is relevant, interesting and challenging for students. When students work at a level of difficulty that is both challenging and attainable, learning takes place. The learner's profile may help you decide whether you need to *differentiate* – meaning that you put in place a number of supportive strategies to meet the individual needs of the range of learners in your class.

2.2 Plans for individual students

Some students, particularly those who have developmental disabilities or complex learning needs, may have some form of individual plan. These plans have different names in different states, e.g. "Learning Support Plans" (New South Wales), "Negotiated Education Plans" (South Australia) and "Individual Education Plans" (Tasmania). In Western Australia, the term "Documented Plan" is used as an umbrella term for a whole range of plans for learning, transition, behaviour and so on. Sometimes teams of individuals including therapists, educational consultants, parents, advocates and the students themselves draw up these plans together with the teacher. This approach is called "transdiciplinary" and it involves individuals from different disciplines. The advantage is that many

points of view are incorporated. However as you may be the person who has daily contact with the student, you could end up with most of the work. This may not bother you but at least be alert at the individual planning meeting to ensure that specialists and consultants don't expect you to implement elaborate interventions without providing practical support.

Individual plans are useful but if they are not school-based the objectives they contain may not relate closely to the curriculum. Apart from the burden this places on teachers (in trying to deliver an individual curriculum in a group situation), having a student on an alternate curriculum may put a negative focus on the student, disrupt the learning of other students, basically "velcro" the student to the teaching assistant and unnecessarily complicate life for the teacher.

Although states and territories have their own curriculum policies and guidelines, many are moving towards a common curriculum for all students - one that is sufficiently differentiated so that there is something relevant and appropriate for every student. This approach is based on the principle of "universal design" which means that the design of the curriculum itself, and the instructional materials and activities, provide alternatives for students with differing abilities. The idea is that if students do need an adapted curriculum, it is best for everyone if it is derived from the same general curriculum.

Introducing Michael …

Michael is in year 8 in a comprehensive high school. He has multiple disabilities from birth including substantial intellectual disability. All his life he has needed specialist assistance from doctors, therapists and educators. He has many absences from school because of his epilepsy, plus he has to visit his city specialists for medical checkups, adjustments and repairs to wheelchairs, new glasses and so on.

Michael's academic performance is patchy. On his good days he reads at about a grade three level, can do basic Arithmetic, but struggles with year 8 Maths. He participates in the rest of the curriculum including PE. Michael is fiercely independent, tries hard to be "cool" and he hates to be singled out, withdrawn from class or seen as unintelligent. He gets into fights with other students, often because he goes about establishing friendships the wrong way. Predictably, he goes into rages when called "dummy" or similar names. Michael's independent living skills are not advanced and his individual learning plan emphasised his need for better social skills.

Curriculum planning for Michael could involve:

- The identification of priority learning goals based upon his currents skills and strengths, family priorities and input from other teachers and therapists.

- Each subject teacher identifying appropriate outcomes and content, based on their knowledge of Michael and the content to be covered in each of the subjects.

- Different outcomes from those of the other students – but the topic and content could remain the same.

Michael's example illustrates *multilevel curriculum* – the same content as the other students but at a different level. This approach can be used to reduce the difficulty and complexity of the content or to increase difficulty and complexity. Multilevel curriculum is appropriate for all students, included those who are gifted.

Consider a different scenario – with the same student. Let's assume that when staff met to plan Michael's program with Michael and his parents, they agreed that his academic performance was being held back by his behaviour and social skills, i.e. it may be more important at the moment to focus on these areas. In this case, curriculum planning for Michael would probably involve

- The identification of priority learning goals based upon his currents skills and strengths, family priorities and input from other teachers and therapists. (Same as above)

- Each subject teacher identifying appropriate outcomes and content, based on their knowledge of Michael and the content to be covered in each of the subjects. (Same as above)

- Different outcomes from those of the other students – with somewhat different topic and content.

"I think it is important for a student with a disability to feel they are learning the same things as the rest of the class."

"I try and make the students feel some success and start to take risks in their learning."

"I try to understand what is an acceptable level of achievement for a student with a disability."

What teachers do

They collaborate with other teachers so that a particular skill is reinforced in many contexts.

They organise class groupings so that students can sometimes be the major contributor to the group's performance and that can have a big impact on a student's self esteem and acceptance.

They sometimes pair students so that their skills are complementary, e.g. if a student has difficulty with reading, pair him or her with a capable reader and get them to discuss answers.

This approach is called *curriculum overlap* and it involves teachers embedding additional curriculum content in a lesson or unit of work. In Michael's case, if the other students are learning how to conduct an experiment in small groups, the focus for them is the experiment - the science. However, the focus for Michael is on learning the skills that allow him to participate successfully in groups like the science class. The challenge is to ensure that curriculum overlapping involves students in gaining the skills and understandings

that are most relevant for them and it's not simply a way of their appearing to participate in the class activities.

2.3 "Differentiation *aka* Differentiated Instruction"

Differentiation allows you to plan and carry out varied approaches to *content* (what a student learns); *process* (how the student learns and how you teach); and *product* (how the student demonstrates what they've learned) in anticipation of and in response to student differences in *readiness* (prior mastery of knowledge, understandings, and skills); *interest* (the student's curiosity and passion); and *learning profile* (how the student learns best).

When planning a unit of work, some teachers find it helpful to ask:

• Do I need to make any adjustments at all?

• Would technology help some/all students?

• Do some students need material presented differently?

• Should some students present their work differently?

• Will all students be assessed in the same way?

• Will some students need additional or different goals?

2.4 Differentiating content

Although teachers tend to respond to the needs of their students by adapting *what* they teach and *how* they teach, seamlessly, unconsciously and simultaneously, it is hard to write about it that way. We will first deal with ways of adapting *what* you teach – the content - and then with other aspects of *how* you teach.

Suzie provides another example of teachers embedding additional goals ...

Suzie is a student in year 3 and she has cerebral palsy. She uses a wheel chair and she communicates in class and at home using a communication board. The class is working on a Science unit on Natural and Built Environments. One of the learning activities is to conduct a survey on the types of transport most commonly used by teachers and students in the school. The teacher embedded the individual goal for Suzie to learn to use a speech output device – a VOCA (voice output communication aid) – into the curriculum goal for the whole class. Using a VOCA to ask other members of the class the question "How did you travel to school today?" Suzie was able to independently conduct her own investigation. She used symbols from her communication board to create a retrieval chart to record the results of her survey.
Source: Sarah Mottarelly, Speech Pathologist, NSW DET 2003

Some students with a disability will not need any adaptations *because of their disability*. However, like other students they may require adaptations for other reasons … they haven't caught on to decimals or trigonometry; they have missed some important lessons; they have no friends; or they are finding the unit of work does not extend them and so on.

When you differentiate the curriculum be careful that you do not unnecessarily simplify it. You could be depriving students of the opportunity to achieve the same learning outcomes as their peers. Remember, the "Golden Rule" of adaptation is "Adapt curriculum – but only if necessary".

2.5 Setting up the inclusive classroom

Classroom climate

An important part of providing an inclusive classroom is to set positive standards for behaviour and ensure the tone of the class is supportive and affirming for all students.

- Set **firm but fair behavioural standards** at the start of the school year. You should send a very clear message that you expect the classroom to be a place of respect, civility, and learning.

- If you teach in a team, make sure that all members of the instructional team use **consistent discipline practices**. Students become angry and frustrated when they are given different behavioural expectations and consequences in the same setting.

- Consider introducing class self-management tools e.g. teach students to hold class meetings and make decisions collaboratively on a range of items and events each week.

- Classroom rules: Keep them short and sweet. Classroom rules tend to be most effective when they are few in number (i.e. 3-5) and stated in positive terms whenever possible (e.g., "Work quietly at your desk" rather than "Don't disturb other students!").

- Students are more respectful of rules when they have had a voice in formulating them. Post rules prominently and review them occasionally to remind students that you value appropriate behaviours.

- Get to know your students from the beginning. Students are less likely to misbehave or act disrespectfully toward the teacher if they have a positive relationship with him or her. Get to know your class as individuals by making up a simple survey of student interests and reward preferences to complete at the start of the school year.

- Every move you make … they are watching you! Teachers should never forget that they are powerful role models for their students. Because they shape student behaviours by their own example, teachers should hold themselves to the same standards of civility and respect that they expect of their students.

- Draw up a classroom crisis plan with the students – one that will be your response to any likely crisis. If you have a plan, your responses to possible crisis situations (such as an asthma attack, an accident or intruders etc) will be quicker and more appropriate.

- Let students know how passionate you are about learning and teaching. Students respond well to enthusiastic, respectful, teachers who love to learn themselves.

Teaching learning skills

When we think about successful learners we realise that they

- Relate their class work to clearly defined long-range goals.

- Have taken control of their educational experiences.

- Have learned to be aware of their own learning and thinking processes.

- Recognise that understanding takes place over time; it is seldom immediate.

- Use more than one sensory channel to improve their learning.

- Look for underlying structure in what they are learning.
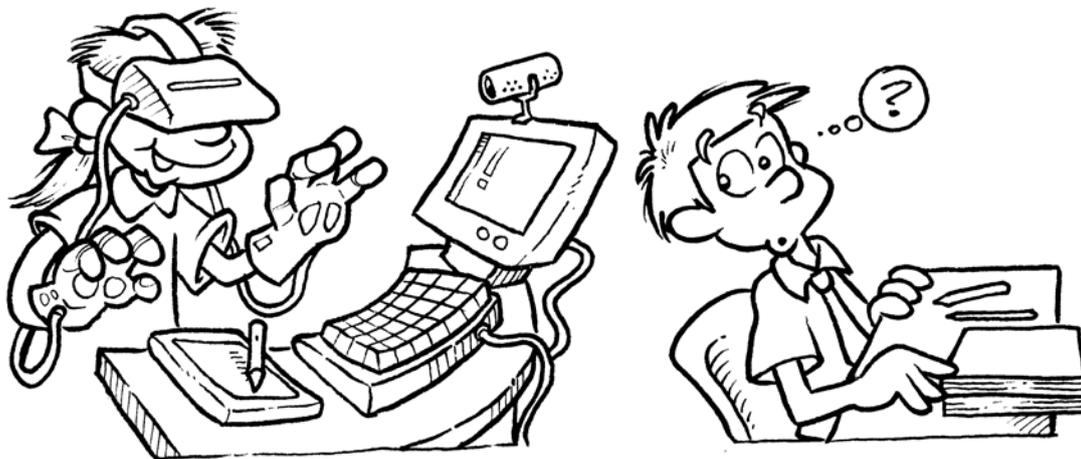
As a teacher you need to develop your students' learning skills and strategies. Most students at all levels, in one way or another, eventually need the following:

- Time and materials management.

- Accessing information from textbooks.

- Taking notes and gathering information.

- Listening, remembering and understanding.

- Proofreading.

- Presenting ideas in various formats.

For some students (and possibly some who have disabilities) all of these areas may prove difficult and they may need help in acquiring these learning skills. Some students may need specific differentiation strategies.

What teachers say

"Keep them involved in their own learning. Students can be talked with about their learning and given the opportunity to help with decision-making about their learning."

"To encourage students to be more independent learners we have given them a number of "visual desk cues" to help them get organised and commence work."

"We have taught the boys strategies to work independently – getting started, where to put finished work, what to do when they are finished, how to ask for help, who to ask."

What teachers do

Some teachers help students to self-manage their behaviour, e.g. if it calms a student down and the work gets done, let the student work in the corridor or at a desk in a quiet place.

Some teachers put brief instructions on "what, where, how + who" to ask for help on the white board or on unobtrusive cards on a student's desk so they can check what they have to do next.

General differentiation strategies

The availability of "respectful tasks" and "scaffolding" in a classroom may make only limited adaptations necessary. Quality teaching and supported learning occur in the presence of

1. **Respectful Tasks:** These are tasks that are interesting and engaging for every learner, provide access to essential knowledge, understandings and skills, and refer to tasks that are neither boring nor frustrating.

2. **Scaffolding:** This refers to any kind of differentiating that provides the support needed for a student to succeed in challenging work. Scaffolding also means that you are planning student work and presenting materials from simple to complex in such a layered way as to build student mastery and, thus, confidence.

If your tasks are respectful and scaffolding is provided in a non-labelling way, students respond positively, engaging in learning in increasingly independent ways.

Some differentiation strategies which teachers find helpful in keeping work challenging and success attainable are

- **Finding Entry Points:** This strategy allows a student to explore a given topic through as many as five avenues or entry points such as narrational (presenting a story or narrative about the topic or concept in question), logical-quantitative (using numbers or deductive/scientific approaches to the topic or question), foundational (examining the philosophy and vocabulary that under gird the topic or concept), aesthetic (focusing on the sensory features of the topic or concept), experiential (using a hands-on approach where the student deals directly with materials that represent the topic or concept). You can make each entry point a valid one for learning and exploring and ask students to share acquired insights to the same topic.

- **Complex Instruction Tasks:** A strategy for differentiating instruction in heterogeneous classrooms. Complex instruction tasks (a) require students to work together in small groups; (b) are designed to draw upon the intellectual strengths of each student in the group; (c) are open-ended; (d) are intrinsically interesting to students; (e) are uncertain; (f) involve real objects; (g) provide materials and instructions in modified English if needed; (h) integrate reading and writing in ways that make them an important means to accomplishing a desirable goal; (i) draw upon multiple intelligences in a real-world way; (j) use multimedia; (k) require many different talents in order to be completed adequately. An effective complex instruction task does not have a single right answer, does not reflect low-level thinking, and does not involve simple memorisation of routine learning.

> For more information on this strategy try this website: http://cgi.stanford.edu/group/pci/cgi-bin/site.cgi

(Cohen, E.G. (1994). Designing Groupwork: Strategies for the Heterogeneous Classroom, 2nd Ed. New York: Teachers' College Press).

What teachers say

"I found small group rotational work worked best so children could work at their own level, and to some degree, pace."

"For her to be successfully working in our school she needs continual support whether through learning support from the teaching assistant or peer support."

"I have a portable board that, with binoculars, the student can read for short periods of time if it is situated directly in front of him."

What teachers do

Before deciding to give alternative work, try some simple adjustments, e.g. simplifying text, making task demands more explicit, enlarging the text.

Support learning by using generic or specialised software.

Sometimes provide a peer scribe for students who won't write because they can't spell.

- **Compacting:** This is a strategy for differentiating instruction, derived originally from the field of gifted education. It involves a three-step process which (a) assesses what a student knows about the topic and what the student still needs to master (b) plans for learning what is not known and excuses student from what is known, and (c) plans for freed-up time to be spent in enriched, catch-up or accelerated study. This works well for students with disabilities who are often kept from learning more deeply about topics because of the lack of basic/access skills (reading, writing etc).

- **Cubing:** This is a versatile strategy which allows you to plan different activities for different students or groups of students based on student readiness, learning style, and/or interests. You can create a cube for different groups of students. On each of its six faces, you describe a different task related to the subject and/or the concept being learned. Each six-sided cube could carry instructions like

  - Describe: What is it?
  - Compare: What is similar to and different from?
  - Associate: What does it make you think of?
  - Analyse: How did it come about?
  - Apply it: How is it used?
  - Argue: For or against?

The above instructions can be varied so that students can participate in the learning activity at different levels if necessary.

> For an example of a lesson using cubing go to http://www.narragansett.k12.ri.us/Curriculum/Narragansett%20Ideas.htm

- **Flexible Grouping:** This is a strategy for differentiating instruction that provides for students to be a part of many different groups based on the match of the task to student readiness, interest, or learning profile. You must ensure that all students have opportunities to work with students who are like themselves and dissimilar from themselves. All students should have rules for working cooperatively and independently, and groups can be selected by the teacher, or at times, by the students.

- **Group Investigation:** This is a strategy for differentiating instruction that puts students in the active role of solving problems. Present students with a complex problem for which they must seek additional information, define the problem, locate and appropriately use valid resources, make decisions about solutions, pose a solution, communicate that solution to others, and assess the solution's effectiveness. This strategy offers an opportunity to address readiness, interest, and learning profile.

- **High-Level Questioning:** This is a strategy for differentiating instruction that provides for presentation of questions that draw on advanced levels of information, requires leaps of understanding, and challenges the thinking of all students. Intellectual deepening of our questioning requires all learners to think at high levels and to defend answers.

- **Learning Centres/Stations:** This is a strategy for differentiating instruction that provides for "centres" or "stations" or collections of materials that learners use to explore topics or practise skills

(tasks can be adjusted to readiness, interest, or learning profile).

- **Learning Contracts:** This is a strategy for differentiating instruction that provides for an agreement about work between student and teacher and which can take many forms i.e., what will be learned, how it will be learned, amount of time for learning, and how the work will be evaluated. Such contracts should be in writing. Students must be helped to set realistic deadlines. They also have the right to have the role and function of contracts explained and to renegotiate the contract when it isn't working. Teachers should involve students gradually in contract development and start small, i.e. 1 or 2-day contracts. As a first time user of contracts, do not

  - expect all students to be able to use contracts;
  - expect all students to like contracts;
  - assume contracts can take the place of regular instruction;
  - use contracts without a sound classroom management system.

- **Data-Driven Decision Making:** This is a strategy in which you record and use your student data to make judgments and plan instruction. Use qualitative and quantitative measures to provide a more "objective" basis for instructional decisions.

What teachers do

Provide scaffolds for lengthy or complex assignments, e.g. separate the components, rephrase the instructions, and give a checklist for ticking off tasks as they are completed.

Never do for a student anything you can teach the student to do independently.

Include all students in initial class discussion and information-gathering on topics. When students do individual work, modify tasks and assessments if necessary.

Differentiation is a philosophy and mindset that has a teacher acting responsively to a learner's needs and applies to all students in the class. It is one of the most useful places to start when you are new to teaching or new to teaching students with individual needs (Adapted from Tomlinson, 2001).

Specific differentiation strategies

Some students may need specific adaptations such as

- The amount of work or size of projects may need to be altered.

- Encouragement to complete work in small, manageable chunks. Students beginning a big project may need help organising an individual plan for completing it.

- Smaller projects with a gradual work up toward larger ones (for students who tire easily).

- More time to complete in-class tasks.

- Support for dealing with their perfectionist behaviour, e.g. being too fussy and never completing tasks on time.

- Flexible time schedules. Make assignments due over the course of several days or even weeks. Provide a range of time during which an assignment may be submitted.

- Encouragement of specific work habits. Students may keep a log of the work they accomplished or the teacher may consult with students each day to make sure they are on task.

Ahmed is in Year 5 and he enjoys drawing and practical activities such as science experiments, hands-on maths activities, art and building models. Ahmed has been diagnosed as having a mild intellectual disability and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). He has difficulty with expressive and receptive language and he rarely talks with peers or teachers. Ahmed does not complete much work and he moves around the room when agitated. His handwriting is slow and limited to simple sentences, with frequent misspelling and his reading is several grades below expectation.

For *writing* Ahmed was provided with:

- A computer with software that could support his writing by providing a spell checking facility and reduced keystroke support.

- Alternative ways to participate in writing tasks such as drawing responses, cartooning, power-point presentations with visuals and abbreviated text.

- The opportunity to tape responses instead of writing.

- Reduced text to write by using cloze texts or sentence starters.

- Writing scaffolds that outlined the features of the text such as headings or ideas for content.

- Opportunities for group work where he had a positive role in contributing to the final written product. Students in the class and Ahmed were taught how to work in groups cooperatively.

For *reading* Ahmed was provided with:

- Taped readers, e-books or stories on CDs that provide him with modelled reading opportunities and an opportunity to hear the content of a text or story that other students in the class are reading.

- Computer software that reads scanned text aloud for him to have access to similar content material as others in the class.

- Story maps or outlines that show the key points in a narrative or key concepts in a factual text.

For *study skills* the teacher

- Supported Ahmed to work to an individual contract involving a timetable and schedule to complete work.

- Adjusted the amount of work so he can complete it and achieve success while ensuring it is authentic and content-appropriate.

- Provided opportunities for Ahmed to negotiate how he could respond to an assignment using his skills with drawing and model-making.

What teachers say

"Her report card relates directly to her individual education program. Behaviour is the same as her peers but her goals and achievement are separate."

"Try to work on themes that really interest students. Allow them to follow their own interests within those themes and select texts that they are able to use."

"I use a bolster cushion for a student who requires extra height to work at the desk. I make these cushions available for all students. The student with a disability doesn't feel different because he has to use the cushions."

What teachers do

Ben* is in Yr 1 at his local primary school and insects are his consuming passion. He reads articles and draws pictures of insects at every opportunity. However, these interests sometimes interfere with his engagement with other tasks and his relationships with other students. What the teacher decided to do was create a learning centre about insects to which Ben had access with another interested peer as a reward for completing specific tasks.

* Ben is on the autism spectrum.

Methods you use to deliver information may need to be modified for one or more students.

- Use multimedia (PowerPoint, interactive video etc.) to improve student access.

- Support your verbal instructions with visual reminders.

- Use illustrations accompanied by written directions for students who have difficulty retaining information.

- Make assignments open-ended so that students have opportunities to use higher level thinking skills.

- Offer class-based options, allowing students to choose books to read or a topic for a project for the whole class etc.

- Offer assessment mode options, allowing students the option of doing class work orally, in writing, or by creating artwork, drawing cartoons etc.

- Focus on their positive experiences, reassure and provide firm, consistent guidelines and opportunities for interaction with other students.

- Explain tasks and instructions in several ways, e.g. oral instructions, written instructions, or demonstrations. It can help some students if they are asked to reiterate lesson expectations so the teacher is sure that communication was clear.

- Provide students with physical disabilities with materials that allow for maximum independence. The physical environment of the classroom or materials may need to be adapted for their individual needs. Teachers should help students verbalise difficulties they are encountering in order to help them solve classroom problems.

- Position students with hearing impairments in the classroom so they can get the teacher's attention, read classmates' facial expressions and see the teacher's face. Directions should be provided in writing and through demonstration. These students can be involved in group activities but may need good amplification systems or sign interpreters to be available.

- Help students with visual impairments to know the layout of the classroom, where materials are located and don't rearrange the furniture without telling them.

- Enlist the support of other students to provide this type of individual attention and support.

In conclusion, the goal of any adaptation should be student success without labelling. Focusing on students' abilities and reducing attention to their deficits enhances their learning as well as the learning tone of the entire classroom.

2.6 Assisting with friendships and networks – social inclusion

The social revolution that inclusion represents means that students with disabilities are included in regular education classrooms and in learning activities which promote both academic and social growth. It also has meant that students with disabilities have opportunities in school to participate in social and extracurricular activities in the company of peers with and without disabilities and with their siblings.

Social inclusion is an underlying aim of every learning and play situation in the school setting. One of your roles as the classroom teacher is to promote friendships among your students and to encourage peers to support one another as they work and play together. When social inclusion is not occurring you may have to analyse where the problem lies and to take steps to address it.

> Class membership means:
> - Having a place in the class
> - Feeling welcomed, wanted and respected by classmates and teachers
> - Being familiar with the routines and expectations
> - Being familiar with their classmates
> - Being involved in class activities.
>
> (Williams & Downing, 1998; Schnorr, 2000; and Tennant, 2000).

The world of social relationships becomes more complex as children develop with both verbal and non-verbal clues playing an enormous role in connecting or separating

people. Some children with disabilities have difficulties with the following social skills:

- Discerning nonverbal social cues.

- Organising social information into a meaningful whole.

- Understanding vocal tone and its effect on meaning.

- Understanding unspoken dress codes for social occasions, and

- Perceiving social groupings and their ever-changing patterns.

Developing social skills requires practice, patience and perseverance, not things students would want to invest in if their early attempts to socialise are unsuccessful. The student's sense of self and personal worth may be severely eroded and he/she may develop a certain vulnerability to being exploited by individuals or groups who offer false friendship to rejected peers. Greenspan (1996) hypothesised that such children may be able to discern the meaning of social communications but miss the emotional strength of these communications. They are "sensitive and over-reactive children as they lack self-organisation and the ability to self soothe". They are a "challenge for parents, teachers, and others who are often confused as to how to respond, resulting in the child feeling more alone and confused. Because of their reactivity, they are frequent targets of teasing by bullies".

The way we make social inclusion work in our schools is very much part of the whole-school vision and culture because it is built upon personal inclusivity and social skills on the part of teachers and students. The culture of the school is manifest in the language, actions and attitude of each and every staff member. If our school is friendly and adults within it are problem-solving and supportive then students learn quickly that school is a welcoming place and that their attempts to make and keep friends, to read complex social codes, to dress

appropriately for situations, to understand facial expression and body language have a good chance of being successful.

Being socially accepted and known for strengths rather than vulnerabilities is what every student wants. It is being known as "one of the most loyal supporters of the school's cricket team" rather than "the student with poor motor planning skills who could never make the cricket team!" Being socially skilled requires being taught how to understand and respond to a complex array of social communication events.

The comforting facts for you as a teacher are that

1. All students benefit from social skilling so social skill development is not a program you need to develop just for students with disabilities.

2. Most students enjoy social skill sessions as they are about the real world of complex social interactivity i.e. about them!!!

3. There are excellent commercially-available social skills programmes written by teachers both locally and overseas.

4. Speech pathologists, who often work with students with disabilities, can be very helpful in developing an age and content - appropriate program because of their knowledge of pragmatics (the use of language in different situations).

5. When you are teaching social skills you learn so much more about your students and come to understand the vulnerability that some students are forced to expose to others every day in the playground.

6. Social skill knowledge will make a big difference to the social inclusion quantum in your school.

Greenspan, S. I. (1996) *Developmentally Based Psychotherapy. Madison*, CT: International Universities Press.

Parents and teachers are also concerned about the social consequences for students with disabilities of attending a mainstream school. Liz Blakey talks about her son Daniel this way …

> Daniel has been in a mainstream 4/5 class for this year and has had a great teacher. Daniel sits with 3 other boys at his table and they all support him and model appropriate behaviour – reminding him when he needs to be at his desk, writing or anything else that is requested. They keep a watchful eye on him in the playground and assist where possible or seek the assistance of a teacher for him (all without being asked). When he leaves of an afternoon all the boys "High five" him and the whole class says "Goodbye Daniel".
>
> Last week the two boys met Daniel and I in the hallway when we arrived at school. I was trying to get Daniel to go to the canteen to drop off his lunch order as another parent needed to speak to me. I was distracted for a few minutes and turned around to see Daniel heading to his class. I said, "Wait you need to take your lunch order" and the two boys said, "He already did! We took him to the canteen."
>
> Earlier this year Daniel had the three boys over to play on the weekend. He is 11 years old and this was the first time that children from a mainstream class had ever visited Daniel. The best part was that the boys actually asked if they could come and Daniel actually wanted them to visit – this is a huge step for Daniel who due to his autism is really quite happy to be on his own.
>
> Everyday I arrive at school I get "reports" from students in Daniel's class – almost always positive – it is wonderful how the students have all taken it upon themselves to look after Daniel.

2.7 Strategies for secondary school teachers

Inclusive practice in secondary schools is subject to many pressures – set curricula, external exams, competition between schools, parental choice, school structure and organisation, and in many settings, the emphasis on subjects rather than on students. However, students who have been successfully included in primary school are likely to want to attend the same high schools as their peers and friends.

What research shows

We found that high school teachers, when compared with primary school teachers, reported:

- Fewer adaptations to curriculum content
- Fewer adaptations to teaching strategies
- More barriers to including students with a disability
- Less favourable attitudes to including students with disabilities.

(Shaddock, Neill, van Limbeek and Hoffman-Raap, 2007).

The primary and secondary teachers in our study were all trained in the same universities and colleges yet they reported teaching differently. Clearly, teaching large numbers of students each week makes flexibility and response to individual needs of students far more challenging.

For inclusion to be successful, secondary teachers need the same skills and knowledge as their primary colleagues. The secondary teachers in our research stressed that teachers need

- good teaching practices
- good content knowledge, and
- student knowledge.

It may take a little longer than in a primary situation, but teachers can get to know their students personally by observing and listening to them, talking to parents and past teachers. Learning profiles give teachers knowledge of students as learners, particularly their strengths. The collaborative process involved in developing individual education plans helps to give teachers the information and skills they need to support their students.

What teachers say

"Teaching is not just about a subject. Every teacher should be a teacher of wellbeing."

"Before their exams I gave them key vocabulary lists; I went through sample questions on the board; and I went through the textbook with them, highlighting key paragraphs as opposed to chapters."

"For the students with a disability in Science, some take longer to write so I get them started by drawing up their results table. That way they are quickly able to get started and get their results recorded."

While including students with disabilities is harder in secondary schools, many are doing it successfully. Most of the strategies and approaches we have outlined in this booklet are applicable in secondary schools – and they benefit all students. Here are some more:

- Use visual supports such a diagrams, pictures, photos, posters, visual timetables, desktop task cues and similar aids that have been found useful for students with autism or asperger's syndrome.

- Use a variety of teaching methods to cater for all learning styles. Many high school students, particularly boys, need to learn by doing rather than listening.

- Provide concrete materials if necessary.

- The curriculum can be adapted to some extent – but be careful. Check with students whether they want work adapted. Students usually prefer to complete the same work as their peers despite the difficulties in doing so.

- Use proformas and frames to support students' writing as they learn more formal processes. Remove the scaffolding as students demonstrate increased ability to work independently.

- Use assistive technology such as software that reads text aloud or text prediction programs for writing. These supports assist students to gain content knowledge and present assignments.

- Teach organisation skills to students in secondary schools specifically and relentlessly. The transition from primary to secondary can be quite difficult for many students and following timetables, transitioning to classes, and completing multiple assignments require competent organisational skills.

- Consider opportunities to "pre-teach" students before they are introduced to a new topic. Involving support teachers, teacher assistants or parents/volunteers in this manner can assist students to keep pace with others in the class.

- Teach literacy through your KLA. Spelling, word meanings, writing and reading in different genres can be taught in every subject.

- Introduce more variety into ways of assessing student performance. Alternative assessments make it easier for many students to demonstrate their learning.

2.8 Friendships

Friends are particularly important for high school students. Programs that attempt to create a sense of community among staff and secondary students assist all students to "belong".

- Social skills are important for adolescents and limited skills become increasingly obvious in secondary settings. A whole-school focus on social skills can benefit a range of students.

- Home rooms and social supports such as buddy systems can benefit any students who feel lost, overwhelmed or alienated. Computer games will attract peers to join them in the home room!

- Students can learn social skills and develop friendships when teachers provide opportunities for them to interact with each other in class through working in pairs or teams, group work, co-operative learning, playing games and/or rotating seating arrangements.

- Adolescents can be quite supportive of each other if they are well informed. Sometimes it is necessary to seek permission from the parents and student with a disability so that peers can be given information about the impact of the disability on the students and ways peers can support the student.

- Co-curricular activities in schools also provide a wealth of opportunities to promote friendships. Encourage students to join clubs, sporting groups or help them start an interest group of their own.

Mandy Plummer, the mother of James, explains how she set up a "Friendship-Building Group".

Once my son James reached grade 4, I had to assist in the areas of friendship and social skills as they weren't forming or progressing on their own.

So I set up what I called a "Friendship Building Group". I sent a letter home with every child explaining about Down syndrome and how it affects James. I explained his likes and his dislikes. I explained how you could communicate in the most effective way with him. I also explained our expectations and the way we managed his behaviour. In that letter I also invited children to participate. By doing this I was able to find the children who were willing to play with James.

Eventually I had 11 children and about 6 families who wanted to participate. I put those children on a weekly roster to play with James at each lunchtime. One lunchtime per week I met with these children for 15-20 minutes discussing any issues that they may have had concerns about. I taught them how to deal with those issues, how to support James and how to include him. Also once a month we all [families included] would meet at the park for a BBQ. It was at these get togethers that the parents would learn about James and feel more confident in inviting him over for a play.

This turned out to be very successful and so I continued the program each year until high school.

Now at high school I don't need to, as those friendships are already established and ongoing. I am now working on ways we can follow this through to the weekends and holidays. Throughout the school term James is extremely happy and very confident with these friendships.

2.9 Working with teaching assistants

Parents, teachers, teaching assistants and students are quite supportive of what has become the widespread deployment of teaching assistants to assist with the inclusion of students with disabilities. Many teachers regard having a teaching assistant as more valuable than just about any other resource and some parents in our research were very positive about teaching assistants.

What research shows

Despite the widespread involvement of teaching assistants, research has also identified a number of problems with the model. These include

• Expansion of the responsibilities of teaching assistants to include, in some cases, significant responsibility for students' educational programs.

• Students becoming dependent on support from the assistant.

• Students interacting less with their peers because of the close proximity of the assistant.

• Teaching assistants with little formal training being given considerable responsibility for students with complex needs.

• Teaching assistants receiving inadequate remuneration for the level of responsibility they are given or assume.

• Some teachers abrogating their responsibility for students with a disability in their class.

(For information about teaching assistants, check Michael Giangreco's website at http://www.uvm.edu/~mgiangre/)

Schools that successfully involve teaching assistants

• Treat assistants as an integral part of the team.

• Provide, through the teacher, clear guidance about roles and responsibilities, with the teacher directing the class program.

• Involve the assistant more in indirect support roles, e.g. routine monitoring of student achievement and recording of performance or in small group work, always under the supervision of the teacher.

• Often have principals who put great effort into relationship-building, particularly between teachers and assistants.

• Facilitate teachers and teaching assistants attending professional development activities together.

• Involve teachers in the selection of their teaching assistant.

• Arrange workloads so that teachers and teaching assistants have time to build their relationship, to plan and to reflect on their work.

2.10 Finding time for planning and collaboration

One of the major reasons for teachers not adapting the curriculum or the way they teach is because they do not have the time. If you do a web search on the general topic of "Time management for teachers" you will find literally hundreds of sites, some of which are useful, others not. In this brief subsection we will focus on the more specific issue of how you can find or make the time to support students with disabilities in the

mainstream. We will focus particularly on planning and collaboration because these are ways of working more efficiently and productively.

What teachers say

"I just can't say too many times just how important it is to be organised."

"In order for every child in my class to make progress, I must be aware of their different abilities, interests and personalities."

"I have 2 children requiring assistant time and they are in different maths groups (neither mine). It is necessary for me to just keep an eye on the other teachers – particularly the ones who don't get teaching assistant time – and make sure they are well prepared."

Negotiating more time

In our study of teachers who were successful in including students with disabilities we noted that several had bargained with their Principal or the Coordinator of Special Needs for extra preparation time and/or other support. We assume that these teachers undertook the negotiations with delicacy and style but the outcome was that they agreed to take particularly complex students **if** they were given additional time for planning, reporting, supervising and/or consulting or reduced class size. We are not necessarily encouraging you to do this; we just thought you might be interested!

Teaming up with others

By far the most commonly used strategies for finding more time involve teaming with others to support students. Teachers should not abrogate their primary responsibility for programming and teaching but there are ways of sharing that are efficient of time and energy.

Sharing with other teachers

Some teachers form teaching partnerships with compatible colleagues. For example, two primary teachers told us how they plan and teach in teams, with mathematics and literacy often programmed and taught separately, while the remainder of the curriculum is team-taught in the mainstream. One teacher scaffolds and pre-teaches clusters of students to ensure that they are able to participate in the class curriculum. They provided this example: "Before we discussed the life cycle of a butterfly in integrated studies, I taught this concept and vocab in a language session. We talked about this for a few days before it was taught in integrated studies. This pre-teaching of the concept of life cycles helped the students understand the way mini-beasts change."

Sharing with parents

Parents can also save you time in teaching. One teacher told us how she enlisted the parents to prepare the student for topics and activities that would be taught in class: "At times, up-coming tasks are sent home with the student so that the parents are aware of what is occurring in that subject area and also so that the student can come along with some prior knowledge on complex topics."

Sharing with specialists and consultants

Educational consultants and therapists can provide extra support for students in ways that can be very helpful in the classroom. For example, if you are able to involve a consultant who can give you advice about teaching a student with a vision impairment, you may find that a wide range of assistance that saves you time and that supports student learning is made available – enlarged print books, specialist software, adapted equipment and so on.

Reframe

Another distinguishing feature of successful teachers is that they tend to focus consistently on each student's strengths without being oblivious to their student's needs and/or any problems. This "reframe" of students in a positive light saves time indirectly because in focusing on what students *can* do and getting students engaged, students learn more efficiently and teachers do not find themselves preoccupied with what students *can't* do.

Plan, plan, and then plan!

We found that the successful teachers in our project made, and referred to, many plans – teaching plans, student plans, class timetables, teacher assistant rosters and so on. When time is scarce, it must be used well, and one way to do that is to be organised. Although the teachers were well organised and had plans, they also seemed very willing to abandon their plans if they were not working. As a principal said: "Flexibility is vital. It must come from a base of understanding the system's resourcing, belief in the positive aspects of inclusion for all children and clear purpose for the disabled children. Flexibility can easily be perceived as no plan, not caring or buck passing. So, refocusing back onto our purpose for inclusion is always a vital exercise. Being able to adapt to the changing needs of these children and the dynamics of groups is vital".

Sharing with assistants, students and others

Although it does take time to involve others – teaching assistants, volunteers, or other students as peer supports – such strategies share the teaching load. One teacher wrote: "I keep coming back to the fact that a team of people work together to support [the student's] learning. I am so grateful for the incredible support that is given to me to help [student]. For her to be successfully included in our school, she needs continual support – from learning support, to aide support, to peer support."

2.11 Contributing to change in whole school culture

Some schools are dynamic, flexible and responsive while others appear sluggish, inflexible and insensitive to the needs of their students and community. Schools that are successfully striving to achieve corporate change through reform planning and committed follow-through share several significant characteristics.

What teachers say:

"In my school it has been great to see how students have reacted to others with disabilities. They have supported and nurtured them on most occasions."

"Inclusion is all very well but you have to think of the other kids as well."

"On the excursion it was great to see [student] go up and ask children if he can sit with them – a very new improvement. It is the small pleasures that work well. A little step at a time!"

1. They aim to help all students reach high academic standards.

2. They are comprehensive in their approach; address all core academic subject areas, all types of school organisation, and all grade levels

3. They align all resources (human, financial, and technological).

4. They incorporate best-practice research.

5. They are the subjects of ongoing evaluation aimed at continuous improvement.

6. They provide faculty and community with a shared vision, focus, and organising framework that shapes and directs reform efforts.

7. They provide high-quality professional development for teachers and administrators.

8. They offer innovative and effective ways to involve parents and community in schooling.

(McChesney, J. (2002) Whole-school reform. ERIC Digest, Number 124. ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management Eugene

What teachers say

"My other duties around the school keep me involved with the parents, teachers and all classrooms and I really endeavour to become the voice of the child and promote 'inclusion for success' throughout."

"The new principal seems to be more in favour of separation than inclusion. She was hinting as to why I was not in an autistic unit. Ah well, let's keep plodding on!"

"We discussed (safety in PE class and the PE teacher putting all the students with a disability in the one group) at length as we had differing opinions. The following week I noticed no change but today the children were in different groups and there were no problems. Victory!"

In some schools, students' difficulties in learning may be blamed on students or parents; opinions rather than data drive the school's response; and policies and practices may reflect the views of a few powerful individuals. In other schools, teachers contribute to decision-making, their voices are heard in sectional or whole-school debates and they are encouraged to share insights into possible solutions for the challenges posed by some learners.

Whatever the type of school community you work in, you will probably want to have some influence on policy and practice. When you are not the principal or on the Executive, this type of activity is often referred to as "managing up".

> Coates (1994, p.2) states, "Managing upwards is not an appeal to anarchy. Rather it is an attempt to help the whole management process by tapping into all the experience and resources available to provide actionable solutions to problems, rather than complaining and waiting for someone else to do it for you."

All teachers are able to propose changes that make things more equitable for students with disabilities. Many teachers underestimate their capacity to influence school policy, assuming that without positional power no one will take any notice of them. Australian research has shown that two factors will get principals supporting inclusion - having a significant person in the school community who is a committed advocate and having a successful experience of including a student with a disability. (Bailey & du Plessis, 1998).

If you find you are the advocate for making your school more inclusive, your advocacy needs to be street-wise. In attempting to be an advocate for students with disability and to influence the school community and the executive, there are a few things you should and should not do.

Do Not …

- Attempt to brow beat.
- Use scare tactics, e.g. by citing legislation and court cases.
- Rely just on the strength of your case.
- Embarrass or surprise anyone – especially in public.
- Give up too soon.
- Be a cracked record.

BUT

Do …

- Look at the issue from the perspective of those whom you are trying to influence
- Explain how the initiative could work, e.g. including a student with multiple disabilities in an activity in which she has been, so far, just a spectator.
- Give examples of how the initiative has worked in other schools.
- Clearly explain the benefits to the school (including financial benefits) and positive publicity.
- Indicate what *you* will do to implement your proposals.

2.12 Where to from here?

You can get helpful information from a range of sources. In many Australian states there are associations devoted to different disability groups (e.g. Down Syndrome Association). Most have information about children and schools while some have members who are able to come to your school and discuss the inclusion process with your staff.

Many large city hospitals have community information units or Child Development Units whose staff are often able to address schools on issues pertinent to effective inclusive strategies for medically impacted students.

Your best sources of help however are usually the parents, past teachers and counsellors, old records and transitioned information at your school. Parents have been learning about their child's disability for many years. Many belong to support organisations and may have collected information they are willing to share with you. Remember they live with their child and their abilities and challenges 24–7 and have dreams and aspirations for them that should be respected

and supported. Teachers can use parents' acquired knowledge and insights into their children to improve the child's experiences and learning at school.

Teachers from previous years have often gained valuable insights into the student's abilities and may save you valuable time in setting up the classroom and your students for success. Don't wait until Easter to find out something about the student's learning or social profile which you could have been told over a coffee in the staffroom in Week 1!

Lastly there are good educational and technology suppliers in this country who supply excellent resources and give demonstrations of their products at school, district, state and national levels. Section three provides a more extensive list of references and resources.

2.13 Reflecting on and enjoying teaching

Including students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms is challenging but rewarding.

What teachers say

"Just tried one lesson … in language. It was fantastic. Students [with a disability] were pretty much independent. Needed very little support and were engaged! Students were excited, on task and worked very hard! A win for everyone!"

"I was surprised how something so basic had such an impact!"

"Initially the concept (senior students with disabilities) scared me. But after a while I have grown to love the challenge."

An interesting finding in our research was that teachers who were selected because they were successful at including students with disabilities in the mainstream were

not always sure, or even confident that what they were doing would work. These teachers "experimented" and tested hunches in their classrooms on a daily basis. Despite their acknowledged expertise they were surprisingly cautious and self-questioning. They paid close attention to what worked and what didn't; they reflected on their teaching; and they were prepared to adapt and change.

What research shows

Successful teachers wrote in their diaries

"I hope this is the right approach."

"I have doubts."

"I really hope this has a positive effect."

"I feel pressured sometimes knowing how to make the right decisions for how to cater for [student with a disability] as well as all the other individuals in year 1. I also need more advice from support people to know if I could be doing things better."

"I really want literacy time to be engaging and fun, so if this ends up not working, I'll arrange things differently".

(Shaddock, Hook, Hoffman-Raap, Spinks, Woolley, & Pearce, (2006).

These teachers' ambivalence is, in some ways, reassuring. It suggests that including students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms is a journey – not a destination. The fact that these successful teachers were prepared to "take a punt" based on their experience and knowledge indicates that no-one has all the answers and that strategies and solutions have to be developed for unique circumstances.

Inclusive practice involves collaborating with others, drawing on the pedagogical and content knowledge that you already have, being creative, resourceful and

confident, trialing new ways of teaching, reflecting on the outcomes and being prepared to do things differently tomorrow. It also involves a commitment to meeting the individual learning needs of all of your students - some of whom may have a disability.

Section Three: Resources & References

Print material from this research project

The following are available at http://www.dest.gov.au/schools/losd under 'Project to Improve the Learning Outcomes of Students with Disabilities in the Early, Middle and Post-Compulsory Years of Schooling'.

Shaddock, A.J., Hoffman-Raap, L., Smith, S., Giorcelli, L. & Waddy, N. (2007). *What are the professional development needs of mainstream teachers who have students with a disability in their classrooms?*

Shaddock, A.J., Hook, J., Hoffman-Raap, L., Spinks, A.T., Woolley, G. & Pearce, M. (2007). *How do successful classroom teachers provide a relevant curriculum for students with disabilities in their mainstream class?*

Shaddock, A.J., Hook, J., Giorcelli, L. Smith, S., Elliott, A., Hoffman-Raap. L., Kilham, C., Murik, J., Spinks, A. T., Thornton, S., Waddy, N. & Woolley, G. (2007). *Improving the learning outcomes of students with disabilities in mainstream classes: A review of the literature from a practice standpoint.*

Shaddock, A.J., Neill, J., van Limbeek, C. and Hoffman-Raap, L. (2007). *What adaptations do classroom teachers make for students with disabilities in their classrooms and why/why not?*

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Additional references

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Williams, L. J., & Downing, J.E. (1998). Membership and belonging in inclusive classrooms: What do middle school students have to say? *Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps*, 23, 98-110.

Web-based material from this research project

General resources

http://www.ldonline.org/
A website on Learning Disabilities for parents, teachers and other professionals.

http://education.qld.gov.au/curriculum/learning/students/disabilities/
This site provides information about inclusive education with particular reference to resources and support for student learning.

http://www.pbs.org/parents/inclusivecommunities/ This site suggests resources for parents and carers of children with or without disabilities.

http://www.chadd.org
This site is a resource about attention deficit disorder (ADD)

Specific sites about differentiation strategies

http://www.help4teachers.com

http://www.smcm.edu/edstudy/d7-Proj/Projects/ResearchSites/acbrowning/index.htm

http://members.shaw.ca/priscillatheroux/differentiating.html

http://members.shaw.ca/priscillatheroux/brain.html

http://www.austega.com/gifted/provisions/curdifferent.htm

http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/siegle/epsy373/Tomlinson.htm

http://www.southlakecarroll.edu/differentiation.htm

http://www.southlakecarroll.edu/differentiation.htm#Glossary%20of%20Continuous%20Improvement

http://www.southlakecarroll.edu/DI%20Brochure.pdf

http://www.tki.org.nz/r/gifted/pedagogy/plan_diff_e.php#top

http://www.aber.ac.uk/education-odl/diffsen.html

http://www.aber.ac.uk/education-odl/LessPlanPrep/lpp7.html

http://www.aber.ac.uk/education-odl/DiffSEN/diflearn3.html