

Project CHOICES

Children Have Opportunities in Inclusive Community Environments and Schools

An LRE Initiative of the Illinois State Board of Education

Learning from Inclusion: A Teacher's Perspective

I began teaching the 6th grade at Mt. Olive Elementary almost 10 years ago. I felt that the issues that the teachers then faced in large districts, such as class size, inclusion, scheduling, and discipline, were obstacles that I thought I'd like to avoid. Mt. Olive seemed perfect for my plans. I was naive and didn't realize just exactly how a small district could also be faced with many of the same challenges.

One of these "challenges" surfaced almost three years ago when Brett, a student with Down Syndrome, was first introduced into the fourth grade at Mt. Olive Elementary. The rumors of mounting modifications, our lack of support systems, and lack of adequate planning time, spread throughout our small school. Each future teacher began to wonder just what would they do if Brett was their student. How could they possibly get through this new wave in education?

As Brett approached the end of the fifth grade year, I knew that whether or not I would be the classroom teacher, I would see Brett on a daily basis as his sixth grade science teacher. So, I felt that I needed to prepare. At a science conference that year, I attended a workshop called "Inclusion in the Science Classroom." Then, at a regional conference, I attended a workshop entitled "The Laws of Inclusion."

Finally, it was decided that I would be Brett's sixth grade classroom teacher. I knew that I could teach Brett, but I still wasn't sure that I could do it "right." I sat in on Brett's IEP meeting at the end of the fifth grade year, and attended a Project CHOICES meeting with other district members and Brett's family. During that summer, I also attended Project CHOICES Summer Institute. The presentation that I participated in left me thinking a bit differently. Instead of it all being "for Brett," I realized that I had many students who would benefit from the same methods and techniques. There were articles and websites on inclusion which I studied, and I ended the summer knowing that Brett could learn in my classroom, not just "keep busy."

Some things quickly became routine. Some things we tried worked, and many modifications and adjustments just completely missed the target. Daily warm-up sentences were highlighted, and my aide created monthly calendars and visual aids for Brett's schedules, locker, and desk. "Word banks" and "choices" became common. We provided books on tape and repetitive readings with my aide in the mornings. Through trial and error it began to work. From then on, most of the modifications became easier.

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■ "Learning from Inclusion"

written by Juliann Caveny



Brett and Ms. Caveny

July — 2004

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Adam Swanson... Success in Naperville District #203

Adam Swanson, marching Redhawk and junior at Naperville Central High School, may well be striking the triangle chime you hear next time the band takes the field. When Adam attended the high school orientation, he was pleased that band director D.J. Alstadt assured him and his family that “there is a place for everybody in my band.” His favorite song is the Redhawk Fight Song.

Adam is not only proud to play the triangle, he’s also an assistant manager for the freshman Redhawk hockey team, a team his younger brother, Kendall, plays for. He also keeps busy participating in activities with the Council for Exceptional Children in which kids with special needs and general education students interact socially. Once a week, he enjoys attending “community lunch” where they enjoy the fare at different restaurants while honing life skills.



Adam said that Mrs. Darlene Kwarta is special to his education. Kwarta is Adam’s case manager and he sees her during first and last periods.

“She helps me send emails,” Adam explained. He sends the emails to his mother during last period to keep her informed about his homework.

Adam’s studies are adapted to meet his needs. But having specialized learning materials hasn’t created social barriers. He had a lot of fun dancing at

Homecoming with his friends, and he looks forward to the yearbook coming out.

Adam is not sure what he’d like to do when he grows up, but working at a bowling alley or hockey rink sounds good.

Adam’s mother, Cindy Swanson, is grateful that Adam, one of District #203’s first included students, attends school in the District, where the staff is always asking how they can do things better. “From a dignity standpoint, this has allowed him to be an integral part of the classroom community. Our goals for Adam include enabling him to have a rich quality of life working, volunteering, and being a lifelong learner like other people in District #203.” □

A Group of Friends

Five years ago at Naperville Central, a handful of students and two teacher advisors founded a social club. The club’s initial goal was for special education students (then called honorary members) and regular education students (general members) to get together on a regular basis to hang out together.

Today CEC is much more than a social club with a group of students that meet once a month. It is a group of friends. The club still plans events such as informal and formal dances, movie nights, seasonal parties and barbecues. But it has also grown to much more than that. Students now get together regularly to attend school events or just

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■ **“Adam Swanson”**
Written by Denise Raleigh,
from “District 203
Shareholders’
Report, 2003”
(Reprinted by
permission)

Photo by Jimi Allen

■ **“A Group of Friends”**
Written by Todd Bates

A Group of Friends (continued from page 2)

“Hang Out.” The ability for the club to work the way it does depends on the people who join it. Experience has shown that the club doesn't run on people who want to pack a resume or get an edge on college admissions.

Just as in real life, CEC's success comes through person-to-person relationships. The ability for one student to call another just to talk, or to run out and grab something to eat without an hesitation, is what the club is really about. The club really triumphs when people who join care enough about one another to take the time to really get to know each other.

It has been a long road for CEC, with its ups and downs, and it has come a long way. After it has all be said and done, everyone has realized that it was worth every second. □

■ “A Friendship that Will Never Halt”

written by Chris Gasperik

A Friendship that Will Never Halt

I first met Adam Swanson in my fourth grade class and have been going to school with him every year since that.

At that time his social skills were lacking. I first became involved with Adam, other than talking with him in class, in sixth grade. His Mom called me and asked if I would be willing to walk to school with him in the mornings. I thought that it sounded like a good idea. I kept thinking of how I was doing a good deed by helping somebody out who was less fortunate than I was. But I was clueless of what that deed would become.

One day while walking to school I noticed that Adam was always the first, and sometimes the only, person to ask me how I was doing, how my day went, etc. That is when I realized that Adam had become so much more to me. He wasn't simply the boy I helped walk to school but he was my friend.

He cares about me and he always listens to everything I have to say. He

would never shut me down or ridicule me for the things I say. That is what makes our friendship so special and meaningful. We have remained tight ever since then.

Adam and I decided to become locker partners and have been since we were freshmen.

Now we are seniors and our friendship still continues to grow. We play hockey together and both are in the same club at school (Council for Exceptional Children) which strives to bridge the gap that keeps regular

education kids from understanding special education kids. We both joined marching band last year. I play the electric guitar and Adam plays auxiliary percussion such as the triangle, etc.

The friendship that exists between Adam and me is a friendship that will never halt. I trust Adam and I know that I could tell him anything. He is an amazing person and everybody should have a chance to have a friend like him. □



Chris plays the guitar while Adam plays the triangle in the marching band

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East St. Louis Senior High School: A High School on the Move

Project CHOICES Team IV has been extremely busy in its collaborative efforts with East St. Louis Senior High School. We have signed a collaborative agreement with the Senior High School and have committed to provide training opportunities for their staff and parents. To date, trainings have occurred in the areas of Inclusive Practices and the Law, Collaboration and Teaming, Positive Approaches to Behavior, Co-Teaching, and Building Positive Relationships Between School and Families. East St. Louis Senior High School is off to a good start. Plans are in place to continue implementing the collaborative agreement this next school year.

A special thanks to Lee Ola Johnson, Special Education Supervisor, for all her efforts in coordinating site visits and training. It's been a pleasure getting to know Lee Ola and other staff members. We look forward to the 2004-2005 school year. □

■ "East St. Louis High School"
written by Team IV
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Mark Your Calendar!



TASH Annual Conference: *Blazing the Trail*
November 17-20, 2004; Reno Hilton
For more info: 410-828-8274 or <<www.tash.org>>



Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional
Children: *Lessons Learned: Weaving our Future from the
Threads of the Past*
December 5-8, 2004; Sheraton Chicago Hilton & Towers
For more info: (406) 243-5898 or <<www.dec-sped.org>>



Project CHOICES/Chicago Public Schools LRE Conference:
The Art of Inclusion; **January 28, 2005**; Holiday Inn Tinley
Park. For more info: (630) 778-4508 or <<www.projectchoices.org>>

Learning from Inclusion (continued from page 1)

Small teaching miracles began to brighten the days. For instance, Brett easily handled one digit multiplication but needed assistance with multiplication of multiple digit factors. That is, he **did**. Some of my lessons are sprinkled with little "lost" math tricks. One specific trick is multiplying using the "Lattice" method. In the past, most of my gifted students, and a few of those strategic thinkers were able to pick this up. Brett understood this method instantly!

I now feel that I have done well at my job. Looking from the beginning of the year to now, I can see that Brett has really learned a lot. Maybe not exactly what I initially set out to teach, but in that way, I have learned too. With support groups such as Project CHOICES, utilizing resources available through libraries and the Internet, having clear and honest communications with family members and co-workers (asking for help when you are stuck!) and a positive attitude, it is a wave we can all manage. In the end, we can all learn. Isn't that what education is all about? A quote that I like is from Richard Bach: *Learning is finding out what you already know.* □

Ruiz School Boasts Success Thanks to Principal!

Many principals have found ways to implement the Least Restrictive Environment principle. Not many principals have implemented inclusion as well as Mrs. Beverly Williamson-Ashford.

Mrs. Ashford is the Principal of Irma C. Ruiz Elementary School in Chicago, Illinois. Ruiz is 97.5% Hispanic with 93% of its students receiving free or reduced lunch. It is also a Fine and Performing Arts School. After teaching almost every grade (including middle school and special education), and being an assistant principal for a number of years, Mrs. Ashford began her contract at Ruiz in April of 1998. Mrs. Ashford has dedicated 33 years to the Chicago Public School system. She retired this June. In her six years at Ruiz, Mrs. Ashford turned self-contained special education classrooms and mainstreaming into full inclusion to benefit all of her 980 students.

At Ruiz Elementary, special education services are provided within a regular education classroom. This means that children enrolled in special education attend regular education classes along with their peers. The special education teachers, paraprofessionals, and regular education teachers work together to provide each child with his/her needed services in the regular education classroom. Mrs. Ashford believes that children benefit academically and socially by having the opportunity to build relationships with their peers. Her philosophy of Developmentally Appropriate Practice allows for the varied ability of all children during instructional activities. The use of role models allows all children to learn from each other every day. Children are empowered when they are able to demonstrate their skills for their peers.

She believes, and research has proven, that students with disabilities in inclusive settings have shown improvement in standardized tests, acquired social and communication skills previously undeveloped, shown increased interaction with peers, and achieved more and higher-quality IEP goals. Typical learners learn greater acceptance of their peers who are different from themselves. Low-achieving students benefit from review given to students with special needs as well. Mrs. Ashford knows that successful schools regard all students as rightful members of the school they would attend, and the classes in which they would participate if they did not have disabilities. Each student must be provided instructional curricula to meet his or her individual needs and learning styles.

The atmosphere at Ruiz School has changed drastically over the last six years. Parents can be seen taking ESL classes, working in classrooms tutoring, and volunteering throughout the building on a daily basis. Teachers have the freedom to implement best practices in their classrooms. As long as teachers are implementing research based and standards driven strategies, Mrs. Ashford gives them her full support. Teachers do not have to worry about teaching page-by-page from a teacher's guide. Classrooms are warm, inviting, and student-centered. Teachers and students come to school early and stay late, and the school has a very high attendance rate. It is obvious that dedication and creativity flourish at Ruiz!

When visiting Ruiz, guests are amazed. The entire building is warm and inviting, from the student-built dome and gardens outside, to the murals and mosaics on the walls inside. Mrs. Ashford created a community of learners where everyone feels welcome! □



■ "Ruiz School Boasts Success"

written by Maria Elitzer
Vice Principal
Ruiz School

All submissions to our newsletters are welcome!

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“Classroom Instruction”

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Classroom Instruction that Works

With the introduction of standards, educators no longer ask “what” to teach and when to teach it. The alignment of the curriculum and the Illinois Learning Standards answers those questions. Educators, however, may still struggle with the “how!” With the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requiring implementation of research-based instructional strategies in the classroom, where can we turn for direction?

As educators and parents we want to know what works and what does not work when we talk about classroom strategies. In addition, we want to know what and how we teach to increase learner outcomes. An excellent resource and guide is, *Classroom Instruction that Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement*. The authors, Marzano, Pickering and Pollock, list and describe nine “broad teaching strategies that have positive effects on student learning”:

- 1 Identifying similarities and differences
- 2 Summarizing and note taking
- 3 Reinforcing effort and providing recognition
- 4 Homework and practice
- 5 Nonlinguistic representations
- 6 Cooperative learning
- 7 Setting objective and providing feedback
- 8 Generating and testing hypotheses
- 9 Questions, cues, and advance organizers

For each of the nine strategies the authors have given many outstanding classroom examples that teachers can use **now**. None of these strategies are new, but we now have a resource that outlines what effective educators have believed: teaching can be a science and not simply an art! ☐

Bibliography:

Marzano, R., Pickering, D., & Pollack, J. (2001). *Classroom Instruction that Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD/McCREL

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