APPENDIX B - Running Head: INCLUSIVE BEST PRACTICES


Heather Stuart and Gabrielle Young
Literature Review: Inclusive Best Practices in High School Education

Introduction

The following literature review attempts to contextualize and provide a sense of the well-established body of literature devoted to the practice of inclusive schooling for all students—including students with mild, moderate, and significant disabilities. The studies presented focus primarily upon examinations of educational experiences and inclusive practices in high school settings; however, to a lesser extent, also included are data collected from elementary and middle schools. As the literature demonstrates, studies focusing upon inclusion for students with disabilities have been conducted with large, urban, diverse school districts, as well as smaller groups of school sites. What emerges from this literature is a varied landscape whereby best practices for the education of all students are inextricably linked to inclusive education for students with disabilities. What are also presented are the opinions and suggestions of various stakeholders in education—students, teachers, parents, administrators, and paraprofessionals. The literature does not attempt to oversimplify the issues involved in the always-complex task of educating unique, diverse groups of students, nor does it ignore the anxieties and perceived barriers some practitioners and administrators associate with a paradigm shift toward full inclusion of students with significant disabilities. Instead, the literature highlights the action-oriented, positive, proactive strategies schools and administrators have developed for embracing sustained change as inclusive schools.

The following literature review can and should be read alongside the indicators for Essential Best Practices in Inclusive High Schools developed by Cheryl M. Jorgensen, Michael McSheehan, and Rae M. Sonnemeier from the Institute on Disability/UCE, University of New Hampshire. The indicators, included in Appendix A, provide a framework for conceptualizing
inclusive, effective education for all students who access the general education curriculum. The literature serves to annotate and extend the discussion raised by these indicators. Following the discussion of each article, I have referenced specific indicators directly. Articles are currently in no specific order. However, the following thematic table of contents will allow the reader to view articles based on their discussion of specific indicators:

**High Expectations and Least Dangerous Assumption**

**General Education Class Membership and Full Participation**
Copeland, S. R., Hughes, C., Carter, E. W., Guth, C., Presley, J. A., Williams, C. R., & Fowler,


**Quality Augmentative and Alternative Communication**


**Curriculum, Instruction, and Supports**


**Ongoing Authentic Assessment**


Family-School Partnerships


Ryndak, Downing, Jacqueline, and Morrison. Parents’ Perceptions After Inclusion of Their Children With Moderate or Severe Disabilities.

Team Collaboration


**Social Relationships and Natural Supports**


**Futures Planning**


**Self-Determination**


**Professional Development**


**Literature Review: Inclusive Best Practices in High School Education**


In an article titled, “Measuring and Reporting Student Progress,” from *Curriculum Considerations in Inclusive Classrooms: Facilitating Learning for All Students*, Brian Cullen and Theresa Pratt (1992) call for the need to ensure that both curriculum and means of assessment are tailored to the needs of individual students. They draw attention to the fact that, “Large scale, norm-referenced testing and grading programs are seen by teachers to be ineffective and of little use in determining the learning patterns and applicable skill development of students” (p.195). Cullen and Pratt also stress the importance of partnerships between teachers, students, and parents in order to develop both curriculum modification and strategies to assess student progress in multiple domains. In addition to this, teachers should not have to rely upon a standardized report card as the primary means of assessing student skills. As the researchers explain, “Open, two-way communication based on the needs of the child is fundamental to an effective reporting system. Any form of student evaluation that is to be developed by the partners in education must be meaningful for parents, teachers, and students. The data must be relevant to all concerned and must also be clearly classified so that modifications to the program can occur as appropriate” (p.195). Ongoing assessment is seen as a fluid process whereby neither student nor teacher is constrained by the need to ‘make evaluations fit’ into a standardized form.

Cullen and Pratts’ recommendations are consistent with both the idea that each student develops differently and has different educational needs, and the idea that teachers need to be
given the opportunity to be flexible in their responses to each student. A teacher who has been
trained to develop sound pedagogy as well as the confidence to provide useful, constructive,
formative feedback will welcome the chance to respond to students in a nonstandardized fashion.
In closing, as Cullen and Pratt explain, teachers need to have the training in order to be able to
assess students in more than one, standardized way: “The teacher must be provided with the
skills to assess and report student progress; therefore, a continuum of preservice and inservice
training opportunities are suggested” (p.195). The most effective means of education and
evaluation rely upon increased training and collaborative support for both students and teachers.

See Appendix A: Ongoing Authentic Assessment; Family-School Partnerships;
Professional Development; Team Collaboration

Curriculum. In R. A. Villa & J. S. Thousand (Eds.) Restructuring for Caring and
Effective Education (pp. 208-241). Baltimore: Paul Brookes.

In an article titled, “Standards, Assessments, and IEP’s: Planning for Success in the
General Curriculum,” from the book Restructuring for Caring and Effective Education, Michael
L. Hock (2000) uses the 1997 Amendments to the 1990 Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)
to frame his argument that the education of children with disabilities can be strengthened by
having high expectations for students with disabilities and ensuring their full participation in the
general curriculum.

Hock also states the need for IEPs (Individualized Education Plans) to promote high
expectations for students. He feels that IEP goals should be directly related to the standards of
the general education curriculum to avoid the simple “watering down” of curriculum for students with disabilities. As he makes abundantly clear, students with disabilities are not to be assigned arbitrary goals and objectives apart from those of the rest of their class. He writes, “A standards framework provides a map for developing IEPs that links IEP goals and objectives to classroom goals and objectives, which are the goals and objectives that are considered important for all students” (p. 211). He also sees a clear role for states (or provinces) and districts in relation to these standards: “State and district accountability for special education also can and should be referenced to standards. Providing a role for standards and assessments in special education, and specifically in IEP development, is a sure way to ensure compliance with the 1997 IDEA Amendments” (p. 211). Thus responsible and accountable planning for student goals and expectations is made a priority for all students, and is a mandate maintained by various overseeing bodies. The goal here is not to standardize the education and performance of the students themselves, but to ensure that discrimination and decreased expectations for particular students are not institutionalized.

See Appendix A: Special and General Education Reform; Curriculum, Instruction, and Supports; Ongoing Authentic Assessment; General Education Class Membership and Full Class Participation

In a research article titled “Participation of Students with Moderate to Severe Disabilities in the General Curriculum: The Effects of the Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction,” by Agran, Cavin, Wehmeyer, and Palmer (2006), attention was paid to the lack of studies indicating the effectiveness of school-wide interventions to promote access to the general curriculum for students with significant disabilities. In the preamble to their own research study, Agran et al. state that while the 1997 Amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) called for districts to provide information on the educational programs and supports needed to ensure that both students with and without disabilities be involved in and participate in the general curriculum, the level of access attained by students with intellectual and developmental disabilities has not been “systematically investigated” (p. 231). As part of the initial body of research supporting their study, Agran et al. also point to findings that revealed that students with intellectual and developmental disabilities had a 90 percent chance of working on tasks related to a district standard while in general education classrooms. This was in distinct contrast to situations where students were working in self-contained settings. Their research revealed that in these segregated settings, students were much less likely to be working on standards-related curriculum.

The primary focus of Agran et al. was upon a project in which three students with significant disabilities were encouraged and supported in their efforts to self-determine their learning process as a means of augmenting the standards-based curriculum. As the article points out, “such strategies allow students to manage, direct, and regulate their own learning and permit students to plan, execute, and evaluate decision making” (Agran, King-Sears, Wehmeyer, & Copeland, 2003). The researchers referred to this design as “Self Determined Learning Model of Instruction” or “SDLMI” (p. 231). The focus of the majority research on the effects of SDLMI
has largely been upon employment and community-living skills as opposed to academic performance skills. Thus, as part of the project involving Mary, Lee, and Dan, three students with moderate to significant disabilities, each student was able to select her/his own goal from the different academic areas. Their choices were based upon the general education curriculum standards and benchmarks for each school district, as well as input from the teachers.

The results of the project indicated that “dramatic” and “immediate” changes were reported across all students, with all students achieving the mastery criterion level of 80% across three consecutive sessions in each of their chosen subject matters—science, geography, and life science (p. 236). The more general findings of the project were that students can and do acquire varying academic skills aligned with local and state standards when employing a SDLMI, but also that many students with disabilities continue to be educated outside of the general curriculum with IEP goals that are not aligned with general standards (Wehmeyer & Agran, 2006). When given the opportunity to use a SDLMI approach to their education, students with disabilities are “learning to learn” in the ways that students without disabilities are taught to access new content.

The authors acknowledged what would have helped the study in terms of more information. The article states that input from the students themselves on the benefits and difficulties of using the learning strategies would have been helpful. They also concluded that, “additional information from the cooperating teachers would have been of great value. In particular, how did the students’ use of strategies impact the learning environment, both that of the teachers and other students? Also, input from typical peers would have been worthwhile to obtain” (p. 239). This comprehensive approach would have contributed to this much-needed area of study. However, Agran et al. close their article on a very definitive note in their
highlighting of previous research: “Grigal, Neubert, Moon and Graham (2003) suggested that the success of educational services is the degree to which students with disabilities become a guiding force in their own lives and learning” (p. 240).

See Appendix A: Special and General Education Reform; Self-Determination; General Education Class Membership and Full Class Participation; Curriculum, Instruction, and Supports; Ongoing Authentic Assessment; High Expectations and Least Dangerous Assumption


In an article titled, “What We Know and Need to Know about Accessing the General Curriculum for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities, “Spooner, Dymond, Smith, and Kennedy (2006) discuss the barriers concerning access to the general education curriculum. The first barrier named in their study is that of a lack of appropriate, significant professional development. They claim that, “Institutions of higher education (IHE’s) are not adequately preparing or graduating school personnel (e.g., teachers, school administrators, school psychologists, social workers, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, guidance counselors) to work in today’s schools. In addition, recruitment and retention of qualified personnel is a major concern and attrition is a big drain on resources” (p. 277). Clearly, the researchers view the role of helping all students access curriculum as one
which necessitates the involvement and commitment of a range of school personnel, not just the classroom teacher or special education teacher.

The second barrier cited by Spooner et al. involves the lack of alignment between curriculum and instruction to the K-12 learning standards. They point out that many teacher-training programs do not provide teachers with broad enough backgrounds to become proficient in educating all students in content areas. In addition to this, there is a lack of family and community involvement in the development of curriculum (p. 278).

The third barrier named in the study is that of “physical presence” issues. By this, the authors mean that having students educated at separate segregated school sites proves to negate their access to the general education curriculum. Segregated schools do not provide for participation in statewide assessments and therefore leave students with disabilities out of “public accountability systems” (Spooner, et al., 2006).

To help remedy the problem of a lack of general education access, Spooner et al. provide a number of solutions. To echo the research of Agran et al. (2006) one of the solutions provided was that of self-determination for students with disabilities to direct their own learning. Another solution was family, community, and school partnerships. This approach emphasizes the interconnectedness of each group and the need for schools not to have to work in isolation to support students. The researchers also make reference to peer supports, ongoing professional development for teachers and school personnel, universal design for learning (UDL), and a curriculum which is aligned with state initiatives and allows for accountability so that the quality of education for students with disabilities can be evaluated as is education for non-disabled students. To remind readers of the benefits of committing to such solutions, Spooner et al. call upon the previous research of Browder & Spooner, 2003; Cushing, Clark, Carter & Kennedy,
In “Defining Access to the General Curriculum for High School Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities,” Stacy Dymond, Adelle Renzaglia, Christie Gilson, and Michael Slagor (2007) explore the phrase “access to the general curriculum” (p. 1). They immediately point out that while the term is widely used, especially in the field of special education, little is known about how teachers and other professionals are conceptualizing access for students with significant cognitive disabilities. Dymond et al. call upon the work of Hitchcock, Meyer, Rose & Jackson (2002) to provide their own working definition of access to frame their study: “Rose and Meyer (2001) note that ‘access to information’ is not the same as ‘access to learning.’” In
order to have access to learning, the goals for learning must be carefully defined so the student
receives supports that are consistent with the task to be learned. Emphasis needs to be directed
toward choosing materials, instructional methods, and assessment strategies that are flexible and
customized to allow each student to learn in accordance with the goals of instruction” (p.1).

To further explore definitions of ‘access’ within the field of secondary education,
Dymond et al. conducted a study whereby they interviewed both general and special educators at
one high school in a small city in a Midwestern state. This particular school was selected
because several teachers and administrators were interested in pursuing methods for facilitating
meaningful involvement of students with significant disabilities in the general curriculum in an
inclusive setting. The high school served approximately 1,500 students.

The results of the interviews were such that general educators most often defined access
as all students receiving the same materials and curriculum—the only difference between
disabled and non-disabled students being that students with disabilities would be supported by a
paraprofessional or special educator. This was dissimilar to the way that many special educators
defined access. They defined access as access to an adapted curriculum which is tailored to the
student’s individual needs and life situation. Dymond et al. conclude that general and special
educators need to work together to effectively provide access for students with significant
cognitive disabilities. This partnership would also include paraprofessionals, peers, parents, and
any other classroom or administrative personnel who engage with students. As a final
suggestion, the researchers call for their study to be reproduced on a larger scale and for it to
include other relevant stakeholders in the issue of inclusive access. In closing, they summarize
the imperatives of future research: “Future research must focus on further defining access,
identifying methods and instructional contexts for providing access, and determining student outcomes attributed to access” (p. 14).

See Appendix A: Team Collaboration; Special and General Education Reform; Family-School Partnerships; General Education Class Membership and Full Class Participation


In a research paper entitled, “The Effect of an Augmentative Communication Intervention on the Communication, Behavior, and Academic Program of an Adolescent with Autism,” Joanne Cafiero discusses the benefits of augmented communication. Augmentative communication uses visual-graphic symbols which can be pictorial, text-based or a combination of the two. In this study, augmentative communication was used by a nonverbal and behaviorally and cognitively challenged adolescent referred to as Timothy. Classrooms staff generated vocabulary for Timothy’s language board by observing normally achieving students and noting the vocabulary that would be needed for Timothy to participate in activities found in his everyday environment. Upon deciding on the vocabulary, communication partners touched key symbols found on the communication board to respond, ask questions and make comments, as well as to model, shape and expand Timothy’s communicative abilities.

Through the course of the intervention, Timothy’s receptive and expressive vocabulary increased. Timothy’s functional vocabulary increased from 4 to 27 words and the language board vocabulary used by Timothy’s communication partners increased from 16 to 67 words. In
addition, his positive behaviors increased. Prior to the intervention, Timothy’s school program was non-academic and was based solely on functional life skills, as teaching staff believed that Timothy’s potential was limited to learning functional fine and gross motor tasks and activities surrounding daily living. However, Timothy’s increases in communication and positive behaviors altered classroom staff’s perception of him, and as a result, his curriculum and Individual Education Plan goals were made more complex and academic.

The results of this study demonstrate the effectiveness of natural aided communication. The results of the intervention also indicate that behavioral difficulties may be related to lack of stimulation. Cafiero (2001) states that communication systems must be put in place for individuals with disabilities as it is a “basic human right” (p. 187). In using augmentative communication, students will be more likely to demonstrate gains in receptive and expressive vocabulary, they may increase their positive behavior, and this may encourage educators to set higher goals for these students.

**See Appendix A: Quality Augmentative and Alternative Communication**


In an article titled, “Teaching Augmentative and Alternative Communication to Students with Severe Disabilities: A Review of Intervention Research 1997-2003,” Martha Snell, Lih-Yuan Chen and Kathryn Hoover provide results of a descriptive analysis of peer-reviewed, single subject design, intervention research on augmentative and alternative communication. In total, 40
articles were located that focused on individuals with severe disabilities who were under 21 years of age. In reviewing the literature, these authors conclude that individuals with severe disabilities can learn to request and reject items, inform others of their needs and desires, as well as to greet and socially interact with others through traditional word forms as well as augmentative and alternative communication. Regardless of the nature or cause of their underlying impairments, individuals with severe disabilities can learn to communicate effectively (Snell, Chen, & Hoover, 2006).

In their analysis, Snell, Chen and Hoover (2006) conclude that a variety of interventions were effective in improving communication. In more than half of the selected articles communication was conducted using routinely scheduled activities, but communication was less frequently conducted in integrated settings and with nondisabled peers. In 17 of the 20 studies where problem behavior was also measured, increases in communication were supported by data which indicated a reduction in problem behavior. Snell, Chen and Hover indicate that treatment integrity was reported in less than half of the articles, but when measured, generalization and maintenance of treatment effects were good.

In discussing their findings, the authors describe the research contexts as being unnatural as teachers, peers, parents and siblings were infrequently involved in the intervention. The unnatural settings, which included isolated or special classrooms, were used far more often than general education classrooms, homes, or community settings. Rafferty, Piscitelli and Boettcher’s (2003) study found that children with severe disabilities who were educated in inclusive settings made greater language and social skills gains than did similar peers in segregated settings. Based on this finding, Snell, Chen and Hover (2006) call for future research to be conducted in the general education class with typically developing peers acting as communication partners.
In an article titled, “Across-Program Collaboration to Support Students With and Without Disabilities in a General Education Classroom,” Pam Hunt, Kathy Doering, Ann Hirsoe-Hatae, Julie Maier, and Lori Goetz (2001) conducted a program of evaluation of a multi-component intervention using a collaborative team of special and general educators as well as bilingual educators and parents. This team developed Unified Plans of Support (UPS) for three students who needed support for their academic and social skills. Evaluation of the progress of the students was obtained via team interviews, behavioural observations, and analysis of student work samples. The team support-approach proved to be successful as Hunt et al. reported: “Evaluation outcomes suggested that consistent implementation of the plans of academic and social support by members of the UPS Team was associated with increases in academic skills, self-confidence and assertiveness, social interactions with classmates, and demonstrations of pride in academic accomplishments” (p. 78). The study makes clear the need for inter-program and inter-school collaboration in order to meet the needs of all students in general education classrooms regardless of whether or not the student has a disability. They emphasize the importance of collaborative teaming as a means of unifying the traditionally separate spheres of general and special education: “Collaborative teaming provides a vehicle for unifying the
historically dual systems of general and special education” (p. 78). However, they specify that these teams are not limited to school personnel only. Citing Villa and Thousand (2000), “The collaborative teaming process offers ongoing opportunities for general and special educators and parents to share knowledge and skills to generate new and novel methods for individualizing learning, without the need for dual systems of general and special education” (p. 78). Through previous research, Hunt et al. also make clear that simply working together does not make for effective teaming. There are guiding principles for effectively supporting students: “Effective collaborative teaming requires participants to: (a) share a common vision (Salisbury, Evans, & Palombaro, 1997; Snell & Janney, 2000; Villa & Thousand, 2000); (b) value the varied expertise of all members of the team (Doyle, York-Barr, & Kronberg, 1996, Rainforth & York-Barr, 1997; Vandercook & York, 190; Villa & Thousand, 2000); (c) share responsibility for implementing all plans of action (Giangreco, 2000; Merritt & Culatta, 1998; Rainforth & York-Barr, 1997; Salisbury et al., 1997 and (d) monitor individual and group accountability (Giangreco, 2000; Merritt & Culatta, 1998; Salisbury et al., 1997)” (p.79).

See Appendix A: Team Collaboration; Special and General Education Reform;

Curriculum, Instruction, and Supports


“Teacher, Student, and School Attributes As Predictors of Teachers’ Responses to Inclusion,” an article by Leslie Soodak, David Podell, and Laurie Lehman (1998), included an
interview of educators to determine their receptivity-level to having students with disabilities included in their classrooms. One of the most striking elements of their findings related to the feelings of teachers about their own abilities. Soodak et al. write, “Unlike teaching efficacy, personal efficacy was found to relate to anxiety as well as hostility toward inclusion, perhaps because personal efficacy reflects a more personal belief about oneself rather than a general belief about one’s profession. The findings indicate that when teachers have a greater sense of their personal efficacy, they are less anxious about inclusion. Interestingly, opportunity to collaborate with other teachers mediates the relation of teachers’ efficacy beliefs and their feelings of receptivity toward inclusion. Teachers who did not perceive themselves as having opportunities to collaborate had greater hostility toward inclusion associated with low personal efficacy” (p. 493). Clearly, collaborative approaches to teaching provide support for more than just students. In addition, this study demonstrates that there may be more deeply imbedded personal reservations affecting teachers’ anxieties about inclusion. These anxieties may have otherwise surfaced as anxieties about the students or the school had the researchers not asked study-participants a wide range of questions.

Lastly, the researchers make clear that the nature of their data on the relationship between attitudes toward inclusion and collaboration as a means to offset personal anxieties is groundbreaking: “Although the potential benefits of collaboration have been discussed by several researchers (e.g., Idol, Nevin, & Paolucci-Whitcomb, 1994; Johson & Pugach, 1996; Thousand, Villa, Paolucci-Whitcomb, & Nevin, 1996), this study is one of the few that provide empirical support for the importance of collaboration in establishing a supportive environment for inclusion” (p. 493).
In an article titled, “Including High School Students With Severe Disabilities in General Education Classes: Perspectives of General and Special Educators, Paraprofessionals, and Administrators,” Erik Carter and Carolyn Hughes (2006) examined the perceptions of general and special educators, as well as paraprofessionals and administrators, on including students with significant disabilities in general education high school classrooms. Specifically, the study looked at the perceived, “goals, barriers, benefits, outcomes, and supports associated with including adolescents with severe disabilities in general education classrooms” (p.174). Their study focused upon eleven high schools within an urban school district and involved thirty-six general education teachers, twenty-nine special education teachers, nineteen paraprofessionals (educational assistants), and sixteen administrators. All were given a questionnaire to fill out which examined their attitudes and concerns. Carter and Hughes claimed that in order for inclusion to truly work, the attitudes of all of the above agents needed to be sampled. Citing Praisner (2003) and Riehl (2000), Carter and Hughes point to the important role of the values and beliefs of administrators in influencing the delivery of educational services within schools.
The results of the study were such that school staff, as well as students, felt that inclusive classes would increase non-disabled students’ awareness and understanding of issues relating to disability, as well as nurturing a sense of maturity and personal growth within students. Among the barriers to inclusion cited in the study were a lack of resources and a lack of time to collaborate with other professionals. Interestingly, the study found that special educators may tend to overestimate barriers to inclusion as a result of feeling primarily responsible for the placement and support of students with disabilities within general education classrooms (Carter & Hughes, 2006). As the study points out, “The extent to which special educators are accurately evaluating or overestimating these barriers is not clear—in reality, barriers may not be nearly as formidable as perceived” (p. 182). Discussion among teachers, classroom aides, and administrators, as well as collaboration with these groups can help alleviate some of this anxiety because it ensures that placement and support decisions are not made in isolation by particular teachers.

Another notable dimension to the study results was the tendency for both general and special educators to place priority upon the development of social and functional skills such as following rules and procedures, learning responsibility, and interacting with classmates, over academic skills such as finishing course assignments, learning course content and assimilating new academic and vocational skills (Carter & Hughes, 2006). The privileging of one set of skills over the other raises the question of how well general education students are truly accessing the general curriculum. The authors conclude from this that teachers need to work together to clarify the goals for all students. Further, it is clear that educator-concern over the social interactions of students and their ability and willingness to follow classroom procedures is not limited to students with disabilities.
In closing, Carter and Hughes restated the general consensus of support among teachers and administrators for including students with severe disabilities in general education classes. They also summarized the study’s recommendations for helping school personnel develop positive strategies for inclusion. Since the study results demonstrated that teachers felt that they needed and desired more professional development training focusing upon inclusion, Carter and Hughes explained that this professional development “may include creative combinations of sequenced workshops, onsite consultations, strategic mentoring, summer institutes, and provision of follow-up support” (p. 183).

See Appendix A: Professional Development; Curriculum, Instruction, and Supports; Special and General Education Reform; Team Collaboration


In “Moving Toward Inclusive Practices,” Nancy Burstein, Sue Sears, Anne Wilcoxen, Beverly Cabello, and Michael Spagna (2004) provide a comprehensive exploration of the term ‘inclusion.’ Burstein et al. draw upon a definition from the National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (1995), in order to frame their discussion. Citing Ferguson (1996) they write, “The term inclusion specifically refers to the process and practice of educating students with disabilities in the general education classroom of their neighborhood school… with the supports and accommodations needed. The intention is to alter education for all students, benefiting not only students with disabilities but also those without disabilities” (p. 104). Burstein et al. (2004) invoke this definition to emphasize the importance of the community as a
part of school inclusion, as students with disabilities are not removed from their local communities to be educated. In addition, inclusion is presented as a set of best practices for all students, not just those with disabilities. To further extend and specify this definition, Burstein et al. call upon the well-established work of other researchers saying:

The literature suggests that successful inclusive schools provide a unified educational system in which general and special educators work collaboratively to provide comprehensive and integrated services and programming for all students. At these sites, inclusive practices have been carefully developed and implemented, with resources provided to support and maintain change (Burello, Lashley, Beatty, 2001; Larrivee, Semmel, & Gerber, 1997; McLeskey & Waldran, 2002; Vaughn & Schumm, 1995; Villa, Thousand, Meyers, & Nevin, 1996). As with any innovation or educational reform effort, the successful inclusion of students with disabilities requires fundamental change in the organizational structures of schools and in the roles and responsibilities of teachers (p. 105).

In addition to staff development which is “ongoing” and “participatory,” Burstein et al. cite Villa et al. (1996) to emphasize the crucial role of administrative support as a means of sustaining change within schools: “Administrative support, at both district and school levels, is critical, particularly in changing organizational structures of schools to promote inclusive practices” (p. 105). To highlight all of these concepts, the researchers provide the results from a three year project to facilitate inclusive education that was designed as a state-wide partnership involving the California Department of Education, institutions of higher education, and selected school districts (a university and two school districts were involved). The university had approximately 25,000 students. In one district, five elementary schools and one middle school
were involved, while in the other, two elementary schools and one middle school was involved. One district served 22,000 students, the other 18,000 students. Both districts served diverse groups of students including substantial Hispanic and English Second Language populations.

At the outset of the program, students with disabilities were taught by resource specialists in pull-out programs. Students with more significant needs were in segregated classes and were involved in inclusive settings for nonacademic activities such as lunch and recess. Students with the most significant disabilities were often placed at segregated sites for special education students or were in segregated wings of schools. Many other students did not have the option of attending their local school and were in programs clustered at specific school sites. Programs were separate, with little to no collaboration between special and general education practitioners.

The overall results of the study indicated that change occurred at these schools as a result of collaboration on various levels and among stakeholders aside from school personnel. Parents began to request that their children with moderate and severe disabilities be fully included in the general education classrooms. Some general and special education teachers were experimenting with collaboration, and district leadership encouraged change in service delivery models—in one of the two districts, “task forces” made up of parents and educators, both special and general, were formed to work on inclusion strategies (Burstein, et al., 2004). In the other district, several individuals in leadership roles were in favour of inclusion and had “actively pursued the project” (p. 106). The role of professional development and the provision for learning from other schools were implicit parts of the success of the moves toward inclusion outlined by the study. Teachers were given the chance to visit other schools to observe best practices in inclusive education—this allowed them to plan for change and become agents in their own commitment to inclusive practices. Plans also involved district leadership teams which attended state and district
professional development seminars. University faculty members served as liaisons to each
district and provided technical support and consultation on a continuing basis to help support and
implement project activities. Again, the alignment of various stakeholders within and outside of
the schools played an instrumental role in the positive outcomes of the study. The researchers
identified that, “each school district had key administrators at both the district and the school
levels who supported the reform efforts” (p. 108).

Given the relatively large size of the study and the complexity of serving the diverse
range of the students involved, the overall results of the study were extremely comprehensive.
They can be summarized as such: a) There was increased collaboration between general and
special educators—e.g. team teaching, grouping according to need rather than label, collectively
planning curriculum and groupings of students; b) There was total elimination of special
education classes in some schools. Special educators provided support to both students with
disabilities as well as those without disabilities; c) Both general and special educators at the
middle school level reported that behavior problems dropped. Burstein, et al. refer specifically
to fact that the study revealed that students with disabilities were no longer coming to the office
as much and that when there were problems teachers felt supported by a team of other teachers;
and d) Schools had parental support as students no longer felt like “oddballs” or “misfits” at
school (Burstein, et al., 2004). In order for inclusion to endure within schools, the researchers
call for continued commitment of resources for ongoing professional development for staff and
the time and space needed for school personnel to engage in collaborative planning.

See Appendix A: Professional Development; Curriculum, Instruction, and Supports;
Special and General Education Reform; Team Collaboration

In “Promoting Access to the General Curriculum Using Peer Support Strategies,” Erik Carter and Craig Kennedy (2006) focus upon the need for students with significant disabilities to be able to fully access the multiple learning and social opportunities available within general education. While students with significant disabilities may indeed participate in general education classes, the most common approach to inclusion is to assign these students paraprofessionals (e.g., classroom aides) to support students one-on-one. Citing the research of Gerber et al. (2001), Carter and Kennedy acknowledge that while these paraprofessionals are valuable supports to help students access the general curriculum, research suggests that exclusive reliance on adult-delivered one-on-one supports may inadvertently hinder students from participating in the entire academic, social, and other learning opportunities which comprise the general curriculum. In addition to this, they add that working exclusively with paraprofessionals may cause the student to disengage as she/he may be completing instructional activities completely separate from the activities of the rest of the class.

To offset the isolation of students working primarily with paraprofessionals, Carter and Kennedy detail the role of peer mediated strategies. Citing the research of Downing et al. (2005), Carter and Kennedy describe peer mediated learning strategies which involve other (non-disabled) students as the primary “instructional interventionist” and which are being recognized “as an especially promising vehicle for promoting full participation and success in school. Indeed, the involvement of peers without disabilities increasingly is a core element in many
intervention packages used to support students with severe disabilities within inclusive secondary classrooms” (p. 285). This is not to imply though that peer mediated intervention replaces the role of classroom teachers, nor that it is as successful in the absence of a strong core curriculum presented by skilled practitioners. Carter and Kennedy write: “Peer support arrangements offer an effective and feasible approach for promoting access to and progress within the general curriculum for students with severe disabilities. However, the potential impact of these interventions will always remain constrained unless these strategies are couched within educational programs guided by careful planning, collaborative teaming, relevant curriculum, and sound instruction” (p. 290).

As part of their discussion, the researchers also provide examples of the ways in which non-disabled students can be reinforced in their role supporting their peers. Intervention strategies can be modeled by a paraprofessional or special educator—peers are provided with a summary of their teacher’s expectations regarding their support role, information about how their classmates communicate, interact with their environment, and learn most effectively. Peers are then shown strategies for supporting their classmates with disabilities by adapting class activities to facilitate their participation, helping to attain IEP goals, modeling age-appropriate and contextually dependent communication skills, providing positive feedback, and helping to facilitate interactions with other students in the class. Information and support strategies are tailored to meet the individual needs of the student with disabilities. Carter and Kennedy thus make clear that there can be a certain structure to the support provided by non-disabled peers; however, they also stress a more organic opportunity for interactions between disabled and non-disabled students: “Peer support emphasizes a natural context for making new friends, acquiring new social skills, meeting classmates, etc. Peer support interventions improve both brief
interactions and more long-term social relationships” (p.287). They point out that peer support may initially be guided by encouragement from teachers, but can quickly develop into non-contrived friendships extending beyond the classroom.

See Appendix A: Curriculum, Instruction, and Supports; Special and General Education Reform; Team Collaboration; Social Relationships and Natural Supports; General Education Class Membership and Full Class Participation


An article titled, “Increasing Access to General Education: Perspectives of Participants in a High School Peer Support Program” by Susan Copeland, Carolyn Hughes, Erik Carter, Carol Guth, Judith Presley, Cherwanda Williams, and Stephanie Fowler, explores peer mediated relationships between disabled and non-disabled students via a specific program called the Peer Buddy Program. Such ‘buddy’ programs, popular at many institutions, can often have much more negative connotations than less formally structured partnering of students. The role of a peer buddy for a non-disabled student often leads to extrinsic rewards such as academic credit or recognition from an outside source for the student’s ‘charitable’ work as a ‘buddy’ to a student with a disability. For this reason, peer buddy programs encourage non-disabled students to view their relationship with their disabled peer as an act of public service or as a means of bolstering a resume rather than the forming of a legitimate friendship. Despite the fact that the focus of their research was one such peer buddy program, Copeland et al. uncovered some valuable
information through the course of their study. The study involved seven large, urban, metropolitan schools and six focus groups—aside from one school, each school participating in the program held a focus group to discuss non-disabled students’ opinions and suggestions about the peer buddy system in which they had been involved. Focus group audiotapes were transcribed verbatim.

Data from the student focus groups presented various barriers which isolated students with moderate to significant disabilities. Barriers included: a) the physical and social segregation of students with disabilities on school campuses; b) differential expectations and treatment of students with disabilities; c) a lack of knowledge about disability-related issues; d) negative attitudes held by students without disabilities; and e) insufficient or inappropriate support—students without disabilities can make the support environment difficult with their behavior—e.g., noise level etc. (Copeland, et al. 2004). As evidenced by their testimonies, the students were attuned to the ways in which the physical environment, the responses of teachers and school personnel, and non-disabled students made the academic and social environment difficult for students with disabilities.

The students also made suggestions for strengthening inclusion in their schools. They suggested: a) having students without disabilities take the initiative to form relationships with students with disabilities; b) advocating for students to prevent or intervene in situations where students are being teased; c) modeling acceptance for peers without disabilities—peer buddies as role models; and d) improving support skills—including using reflective journals to record and evaluate support activities they had participated in, adjusting support roles—they identified the need for equal participation of peers with disabilities when interacting with peers without disabilities (Copeland, et al. 2004). Lastly, the students identified the value of friendship roles in
this relationship. They spoke of the importance of being “sincere and building a bond of trust” (p. 347). What emerges from this study is the notion that despite some inarguably negative aspects of the formal ‘Peer Buddy’ program, any type of ongoing supportive interaction between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers can cause students to become more keenly aware of the ways in which students with disabilities can be disenfranchised and discriminated against within schools. In addition to this, interaction between students helped non-disabled students to think critically and proactively about ways to improve the physical and social environment for students with disabilities. This has positive ramifications for school climates in general and could lead to more productive, supportive learning environments for all students.

See Appendix A: Curriculum, Instruction, and Supports; Special and General Education Reform; Team Collaboration; Social Relationships and Natural Supports; General Education Class Membership and Full Class Participation


An article titled, “Parents’ Perceptions After Inclusion of Their Children With Moderate or Severe Disabilities” by Diane Ryndak, June Downing, Lilly Jacqueline, and Andrea Morrison (1995), details a study in which the parents of children with moderate to significant disabilities were surveyed to determine their perceptions of the impact of inclusive schooling upon their children. The purposes of the study were specifically to look at skills that the children acquired
in inclusive settings, the most significant benefit their child received, and their vision for their child’s future following inclusive education (Ryndak, et al., 1995).

To frame their study, the researchers provided their definition of inclusion. They state: “For the purpose of this study, inclusion was defined as the provision of appropriate special education and/or related services for a child with moderate to severe disabilities in the general educational settings she or he would attend if without disabilities” (Ryndak, et al. 1995). They also preface their own work by pointing to research by Giangreco, Edelman, Cloniger and Dennis (1993) which examined the perceptions of parents of students without disabilities who had a classmate with moderate to significant disabilities. This study indicated that, by and large, parents’ perceptions were that their kids were comfortable interacting with their classmate, had been positively affected by them, had positive feelings about them, and overall had not been negatively affected by their classmate (Giangreco, et al. 1993).

All of the parents interviewed in the study by Ryndak et al. were from New York State. Their children had been in inclusive educational settings for between one and five years. Four children had been in inclusive settings immediately upon reaching school age, while nine transferred from segregated classes to inclusive ones. All children attended their home school or school of choice. No child was removed from general education settings for more than 90 minutes per day.

The results of the study were wide-reaching. In terms of academic gains, parents found that their children were more motivated to learn, learned how to learn, realized they could learn, improved their communication skills and if they used assistive technology like signing or communication books, they noted an improvement in the way their children used these devices.
For example one woman’s daughter learned more signs, while another parent’s son used a communication book to express wants/needs when formerly he hadn’t (Ryndak, et al. 1995).

Socially, parents also reported differences in their children. Their children developed social skills, friendships with kids without disabilities, were invited to social activities with peers, and had increased opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities. They also did social things that their peers did (the study cites examples such as going to the mall, movies, and dances with friends). These were things they hadn’t done before receiving services in an inclusive setting (Ryndak, et al. 1995). Interestingly, the parents interviewed also noted physical changes in their children after being educated in inclusive settings. They noticed that their children made more eye contact, held their heads up instead of looking to the floor, and walked more confidently (Ryndak et al. 1995).

Finally, parents reported feeling that their children’s futures would be brighter—they could be supported in jobs with co-workers without disabilities instead of sheltered workshops, could live independently with a roommate of their choosing, and could be more active participants in their communities with “natural supports and greater acceptance by others” (p.259).

See Appendix A: Family-School Partnerships; Futures Planning,; Curriculum, Instruction, and Supports; Special and General Education Reform; Team Collaboration; General Education Class Membership and Full Class Participation; High Expectations and Least Dangerous Assumption