

**I am an Educator,
I can teach All.
An Inclusive Teaching Guide**

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Preface

This guide's purpose is to break down the barriers that prevents teachers, parents and students from working together (in collaboration with the support teams that surround them) in the process of turning our classrooms into truly special places where everyone is welcomed, respected and able to learn to the best of their ability. While this guide is centered around a social studies classroom in the secondary levels of teaching, it's principles and it's ideals could be applied to any classroom and at any level. My personal hope in creating this guide was to not only demonstrate what I've learned and taken with me from this course, but to solidify my commitment to educate all and to be aware of all who enter my classroom. While my dreams are not yet backed by the reality of experience and practice, I go into my profession with a commitment to do my very best to make sure all students – no matter where they fall on the various spectrums life and genetics has put them on – are welcomed, cared for, and given the chance to become the best they really are. Only when my students are becoming the best they can be will I feel that I am doing my best as an educator.

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Part I: Envisioning the Inclusive Classroom

Introduction

For many students, parents and educators the first step towards building a classroom that is inclusive – that is a classroom that is open and designed for all students, from the highly gifted to the cognitively impaired – is breaking down the stigma that we cannot create these classrooms because we have not seen many of these types of classroom before. This problem of envisioning a classroom where students from all walks of life and from all diverse strengths and weaknesses come together as a true community to learn can be solved by first designing our classrooms with everyone in mind – not just the “typical” student. For most of America’s educational history, teachers and schools have tried to separate those with special needs from the majority of students who do not have those needs. We have seen the use of institutions in the early 20th century give way to a new type of institution: the segregated special education wing or resource room. Students with special needs were not often allowed to become part of the school community, and could not interact with other students who perhaps did not have needs like their own.

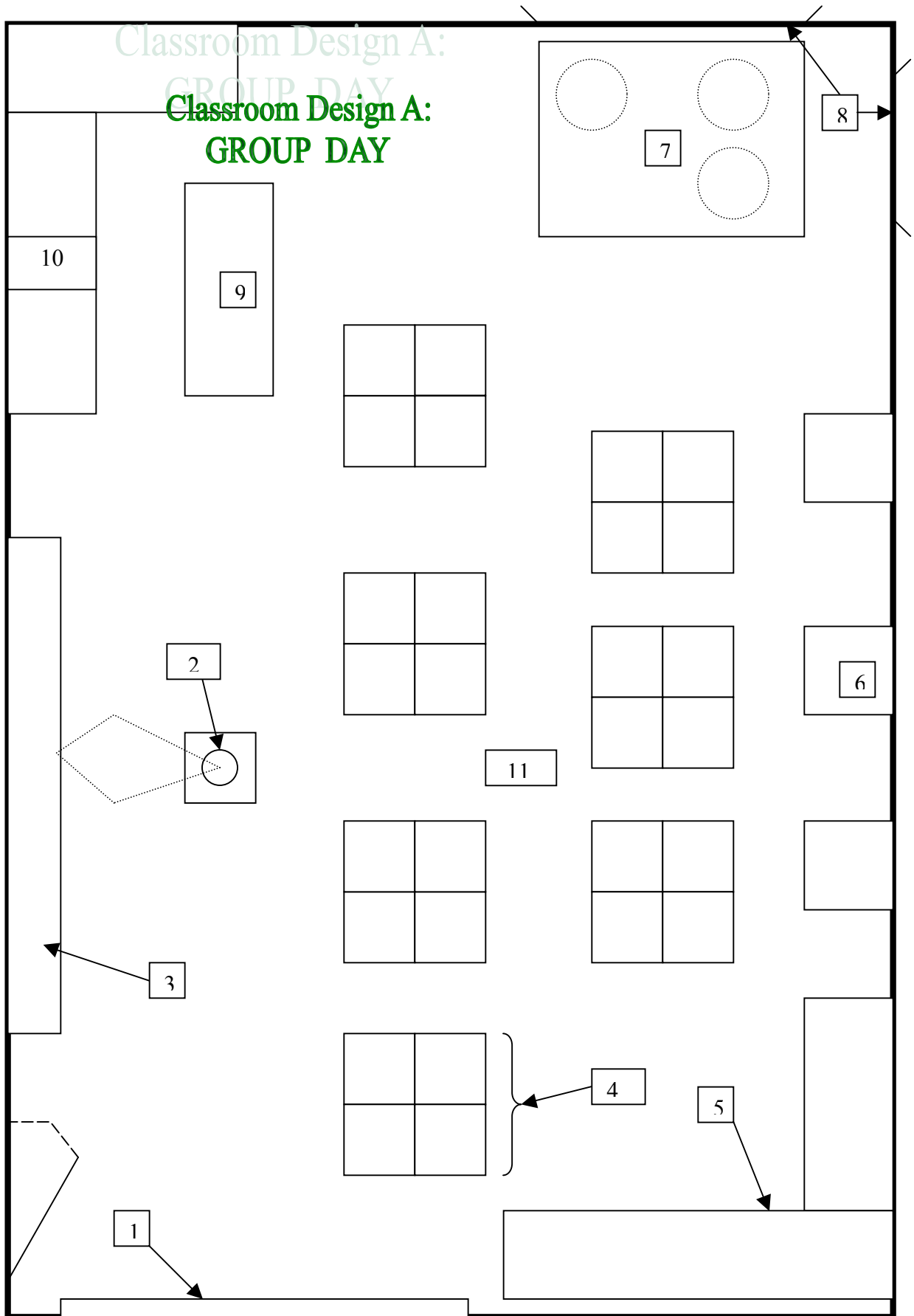
Today’s colleges and universities are beginning to train a new breed of teachers with the intention that they can become bridge builders to truly build more inclusive classrooms that welcome students with special needs into our rooms and allow them to become – just as we do with all other students – members of our classroom and school community. To allow students to become part of our school community we must design our classrooms for all students. Inclusive classrooms are designed in many cases to be open to the idea that we all learn in different ways and each student should be allowed to develop a learning identity that they can learn with in comfort. For example, an inclusive

classroom could have grouping of tables instead of rows of desk to promote social interaction. A carpeted area with a couch, or bean bag chairs, allows students room to become comfortable in perhaps an individual activity. The ability to place objects needed for a lesson around the room in work stations allows students chances to be mobile and active, as well as growing more socially aware of their peers and surroundings. The chalkboard could be used less for lecturing and more for brainstorming and displaying of student ideas and work.

In my person opinion, flexibility in design sets apart good classrooms from great. Great classroom are enabled by flexibility to take on different roles for different purposes. For example, group days could call for the students to assemble the room in groups of tables, while a test or individual reading day could call for more rows. A discussion day tells the students to put the desks in a “U” shape so they can all see one another. The following pages show several classroom designs for many different purposes that I could use in a Secondary Social Studies classroom. Notice the numbered areas of the designs, which are explained in the key below each design. These numbered areas are little ways a teacher – despite the room pattern they choose – can keep in mind principles of inclusion for all students.

Classroom Design A:

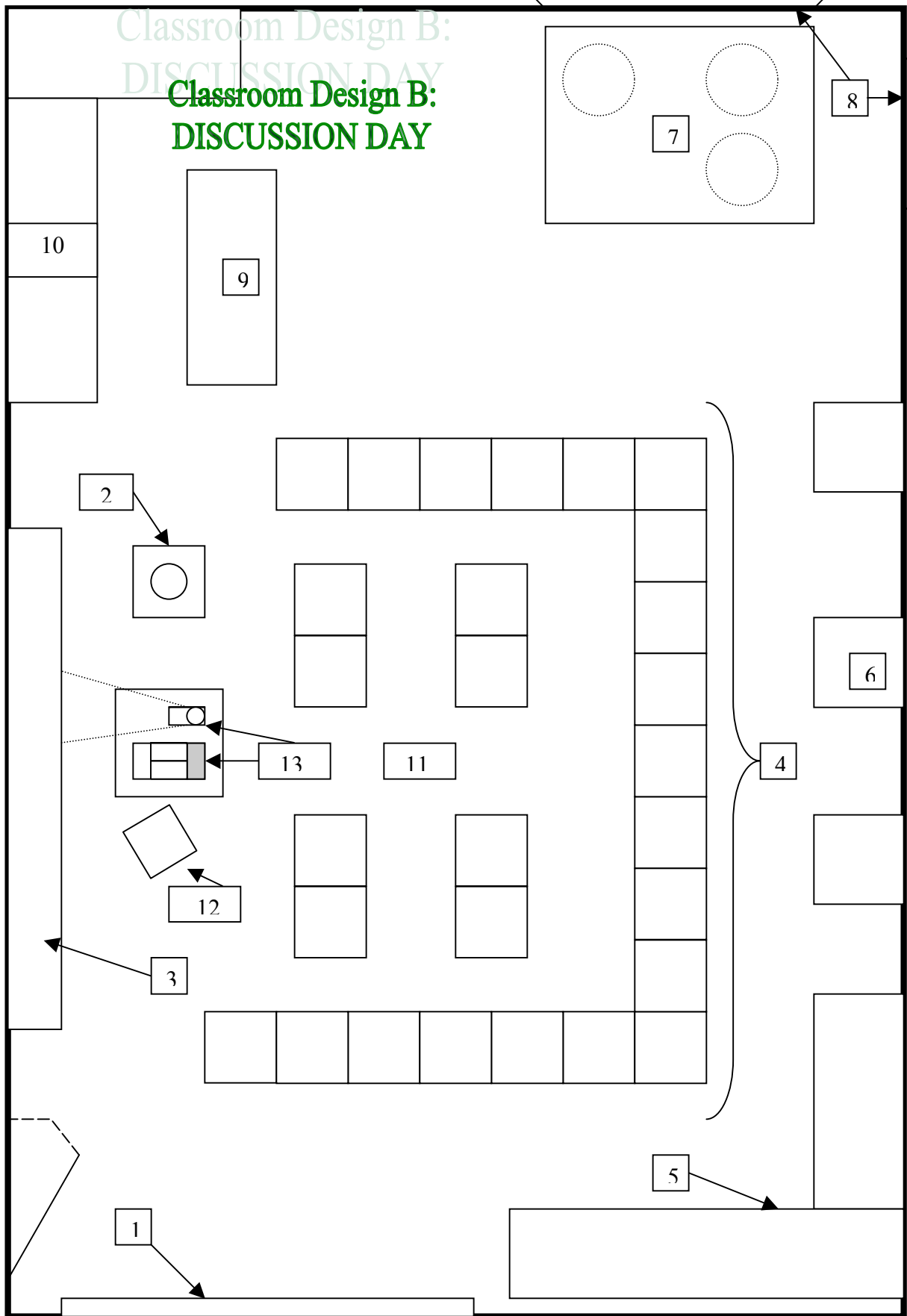
GROUP DAY
Classroom Design A:
GROUP DAY



Components of Classroom Style A on Group-Work Day for a Social Studies Project:

#	Item	Description/Rationale for use in an Inclusive Classroom
1	Bulletin Board	Displays creative work from all students, and provides students with a sense of ownership and pride in the classroom
2	Overhead Projector	Used for visually based students, provides students with an enlarged list for tasks or agendas to keep groups on task
3	Whiteboard	Displays announcements or quick reminders about the overall assignment for groups and allows them a reference point to turn back to if the instructor needed to get every groups attention
4	Group of 4 Desks	Groups of desks allow for more collaboration and learning between others than rows of desks.
5	Cabinets	Cabinets are low and accessible for all students
6	Computers along the back row	Assistive technology for students who need computers to aid their writing or research for the project at hand
7	Beanbags and Carpet	Area for group collaboration in a more relaxing, open environment
8	Windows	Beanbags placed near natural light
9	Teachers Desk	Desk is not a focal point of the room, but an area for conference and open discussion
10	File Cabinets	Student personal records and future examinations and assignments are kept uncluttered and again not brought as a focal point to the overall classroom
11	Space between groups	Wide enough for all students – including special needs students in wheelchairs.

Classroom Design B:
DISCUSSION DAY
**Classroom Design B:
DISCUSSION DAY**



Components of Classroom Style B on Discussion Day for a Social Studies Concept:

#	Item	Description/Rationale for use in an Inclusive Classroom
1	Bulletin Board	Displays creative work from all students, and provides students with a sense of ownership and pride in the classroom
2	Overhead Projector	Used for visually based students, provides students with an enlarged list for tasks or agendas to keep groups on task
3	Whiteboard	Displays announcements or quick reminders about the overall assignment for groups and allows them a reference point to turn back to if the instructor needed to get every groups attention
4	“U” shape of desks	“U” shape allows all students to see one another and respectfully discuss the concepts while remaining face to face with their peers.
5	Cabinets	Cabinets are low and accessible for all students
6	Computers along the back row	Assistive technology for students who need computers to aid their writing or research for the project at hand
7	Beanbags and Carpet	Area for group collaboration in a more relaxing, open environment
8	Windows	Beanbags placed near natural light
9	Teachers Desk	Desk is not a focal point of the room, but an area for conference and open discussion
10	File Cabinets	Student personal records and future examinations and assignments are kept uncluttered and again not brought as a focal point to the overall classroom
11	Space between groups	Wide enough for all students – including special needs students in wheelchairs.
12	Lectern	Positioned to allow students to give presentations to the classroom, should be designed to be lowered for students who may need it.
13	Laptop Computer with Projector	Allows students to present lessons and projects designed on the computer to the class. Helps keep visually-based intelligences alert (seeing the presentation), while allowing interaction with auditory (hearing the presentation) and kinesthetic learners as well (typing, presenting the information, etc)

The above classrooms use assistive technology to help strengthen the design aspects for students with all types of learning abilities. What is assistive technology, however, and how does it work?

The Use of Assistive Technology in the Classroom

Assistive technology is essential when building a classroom conducive for all students to learn. Assistive technology should not be looked at as only for special needs students but for all students in order to help them accomplish more and expand their limitations. For example, a student with no learning or physical disability is still using assistive technology when they use a computer to write a short story or do internet research on a frog they dissected and examined using a microscope. Technology shapes society for all human beings, not just those with special needs.

There are two basic types of assistive technologies that we can use in our classrooms with our students: low-tech solutions and high-tech solutions. A list of several general items that fall into either category are below, along with the definition between the two:

Assistive Technology in the Classroom	
Low-Tech	High-Tech
<i>Definition:</i> Simple Manual adaptations that require little cost or sophistication – though they often reflect great creativity	<i>Definition:</i> Devices that involve more sophistication and engineering (and often cost) than low-tech devices.
Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rubber Pad to help materials adhere• Large pencils• Communication boards with simple pictures or words	Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Computers• Scanners• Talking Software• Electronic alternative communication devices (student uses eye gaze or head bands to say words aloud in digital speech)• Electronic wheelchairs

Special education funds can be used to help bring these items to our classrooms to allow students with special needs to become a more active part of the LEARNING community. In addition, we as teachers should learn how to use these items whether or not we have children with special needs who need them in our classroom. This allows our appreciation to skyrocket and our potential timid feelings towards these items to diminish. We will truly begin to embrace these items as part of our classrooms – and that will help us value our children with special needs as part of our classrooms even more.

Sometimes modifications for students with special needs do not stop at the level of classroom technology. There are times when we must modify the entire school – physically – to ensure that all students have equal access to the building, the corridors and the facilities throughout. Furthermore we must develop and access these types of technologies on basis that will allow for inclusion for a diverse array of special needs, from Braille machines for blind students to talking computers for students with cognitive disabilities. Secondary Social Studies classrooms could use all of these pieces of technology – and more – in order to provide all students with a chance to engage the concepts of the course.

Yet, effective classrooms inclusive classrooms – from my future social studies one to any other subject or grade level - are not just designed physically; they also need the use of effective community building to spring into action.

Part II: Learning Communities for ALL

Introduction

Imagine what your local community looks like... different roles are being displayed by different people. Firemen put out fires, bakers bake pastries and bread. The grocer sells the food, the postman delivers the mail. In a working community, people have different roles, different strengths, different weaknesses and different backgrounds and lifestyles. They work in many different types of places, they live in perhaps many different types of homes. Their personal tastes, their choices, their everyday decisions may all be different from one another. What makes this community work though is the fact it is a place where these diverse people develop bonds and relationships that allow them to grow, learn and truly live by both celebrating their differences and working together to help others grow, learn and cope together as a human family.

The community we as teachers build in our classrooms should be no different than the guiding principles that bind the hypothetical community described above together. Yet the last century of human existence has shown that we as humans are not using community building, but community destruction to confront challenges and problems – both in the community in our classrooms and the communities at large all around the world. This weakening of the community has led to higher feelings of isolation for some members – which can lead to substance abuse, depression, loneliness, etc. Great communities can begin in our classrooms by building a sense of belonging for all students – regardless of ability, special needs, socioeconomic status, or race, creed and lifestyle.

These communities will build all of our student's self esteem and feelings of self-worth. Together students – when linked as a true community with many other students – will begin to learn how to become tolerant to differences, how to bridge diversity and hope to cope together in episodes of triumph and setbacks. This section of the guide will look at two basic functions of communities in the classroom: first a chart that talks about human needs and what the components of a good classroom community is, and secondly a few paragraphs concerning how teachers can respond effectively for behavioral challenges that appear in classrooms with so much diversity in their learning community. In my future Social Studies classroom in the secondary education realm both of these ideas are essential to help my students succeed on concepts and in life as members of an active community someday.

What Are Human Needs? How will a School Community Help Meet those Needs?

Human Needs: Glasser and Maslow

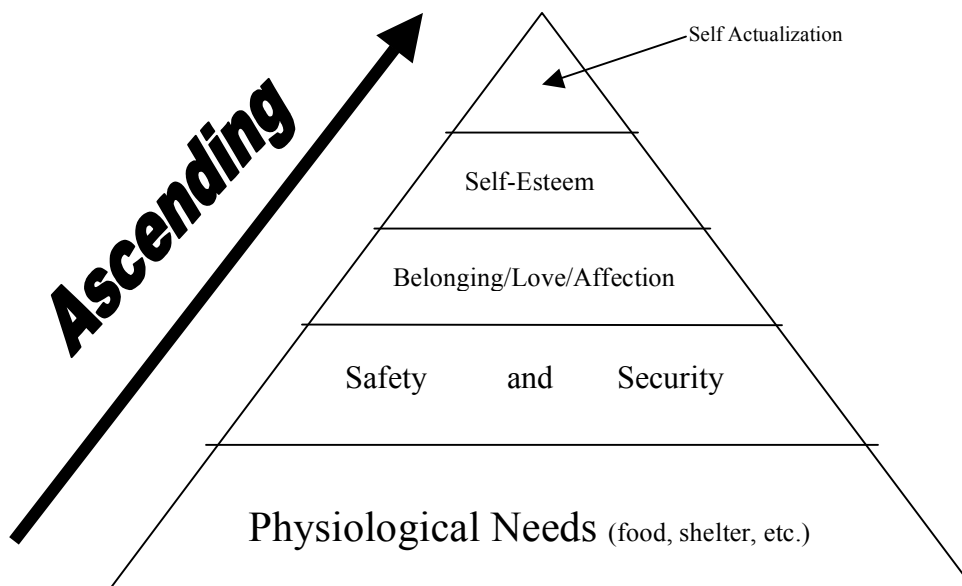
The following lists have been created by both contemporary researchers in order to describe what human needs are and how they must be fulfilled in order to create a true community of individuals – both in a school and in the world at large. I use these lists as a precursor to creating the big picture of a true community in my classroom because they make any reflective teacher realize that a community of many starts with individual community members having their needs met.

Glasser (1992) Needs of Human Beings

1. *Survival* – Creating safe places in our classroom

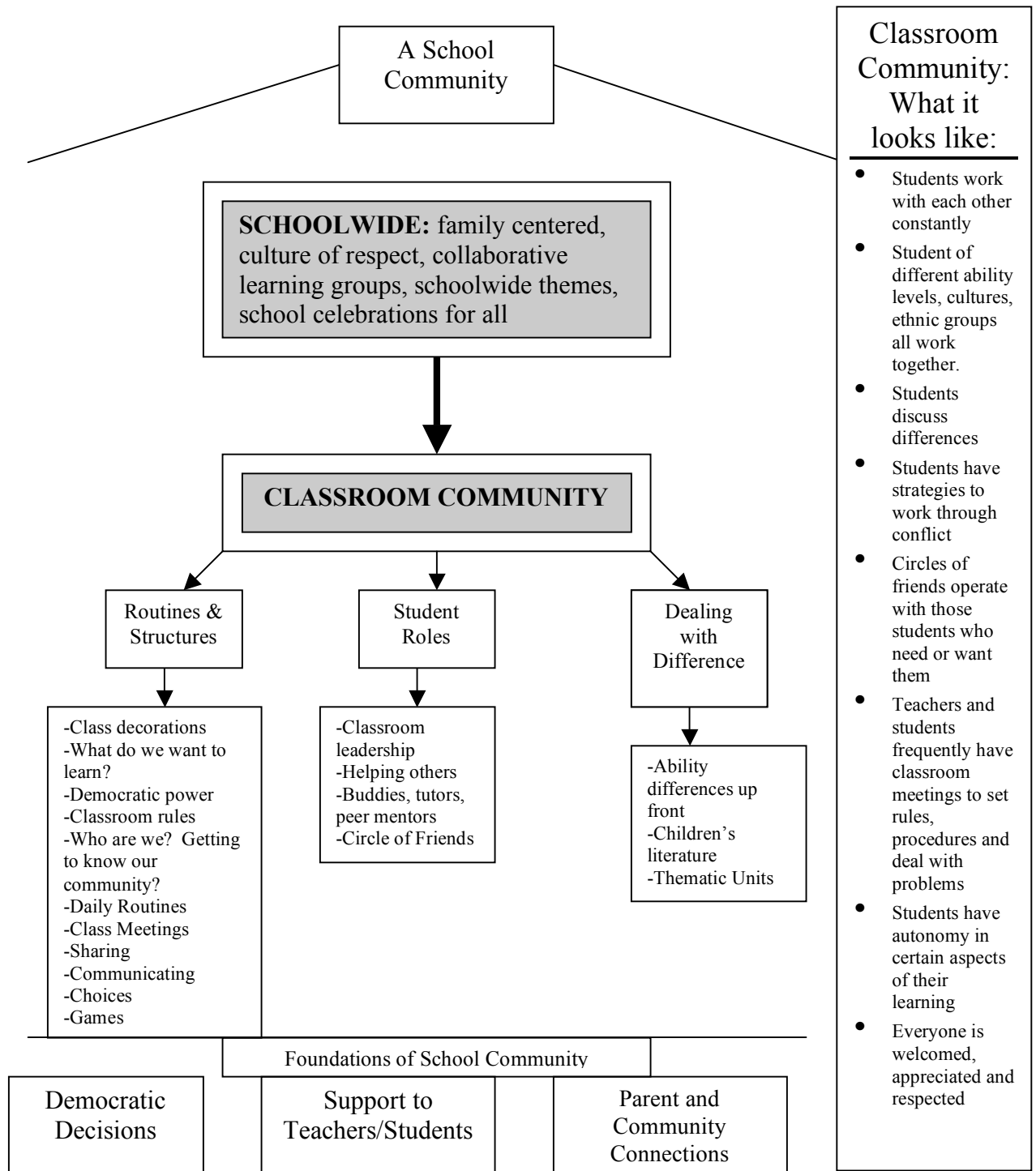
2. *Love and Belonging* – Many students feel rejected, but we as teachers can provide learners with respect, with collaboration, and with connectivity with other learners which can become the base of a sense of love and belonging.
3. *Power* – This challenging need is fulfilled by teachers who help build a sense of responsibility in our students, and real opportunities to make decisions and exercise choice.
4. *Fun* – Instruction should engage and not attempt to turn off students
5. *Freedom* – Students are given choice in their mobility, in their work habits (as long as they show productivity) and to learn in ways that are comfortable to them as much as possible.

Maslow's (1970) Hierarchy of Needs



Taken together these ideas about needs can be translated into a chart that helps qualify what my ideal true school and Secondary social studies classroom community should look like:

The Foundations of a Classroom Community
(Figure 11.3 from Inclusive Teaching (Peterson, et. al.), with modifications)



Yet even with this development of community comes the potential for behavioral problems that must be addressed – but addressed in ways that produce more positive results.

Behavior Challenges are an Opportunity for Teaching and Learning Community Growth

To adequately build a learning community in our classrooms, we as teachers must do our best to promote, expect and TEACH good behavior standards for our children to adhere to. These behavior standards allow teachers to treat all students with respect while modeling appropriate ways to grow socially and emotionally in a classroom besides solely cognitively.

Even in the best types of classrooms that utilize principles to help permeate and concretize the efforts of community building, there are times when behavioral problems will become apparent. These types of problems can be from an host of internal or external factors which lead a student (or students) to be:

- Restless – wont sit still
- Physically violent – hitting another student or teacher
- Acts belligerent
- Unprepared for class
- Talks during instruction
- Off task when asked to do an assignment
- Insults and/or disrespects other students

In these moments teachers have the opportunity to turn this destructive behavior into a learning moment of opportunity. For example, teachers can confront behavioral challenges by opening up the discussion on classroom rules and procedures with the students. When students take an active part in deciding the classroom rules they are likely to take a sense of ownership for how those rules are enforced and cherished. Teachers who promote learning in engaging and fun ways which keeps students involved and active also can confront behavioral challenges. Instead of yelling or berating a student (basically the two wrongs make a right theory), teachers should try to show comfort and care for the student and try to reason with the student to

understand why their behavior is disruptive and destructive to themselves and the learning community that surrounds them.

As painful as this sounds to some teachers, when a student acts out in an inappropriate behavior (repeatedly), it is also time for a teacher to reevaluate their delivery and method to how they teach their lesson. Teachers have a responsibility – when they are truly attempting to make a classroom a community – to not only teach their subject matter but to teach to different cultures, lifestyles, learning types and personalities. Sometimes changes in a lesson plan go a long way to head off behavior problems that occur when students feel the teacher is not making their own efforts to become a productive member of the learning community and whose role is to teach to ALL students.

We have now seen how inclusive learning needs to involve good classroom design that enlists technology and extends to create a community that responds to behavioral challenges. Next it is important to look closely at what strategies a teacher uses to teach in order to attempt to truly be an inclusive center for learning for all.

Part III: Strategies for Inclusive Instruction

This section will list five major strategies that can be used in my classroom to promote learning environments that are conducive for inclusive learning designed for every student. The following chart will list 1) those strategies, 2) a personal definition as

to what those strategies refer to and 3) a potential scenario/student when that strategy would be appropriate to use in my classroom.

Strategies for Inclusive Instruction		
STRATEGY	DEFINITION	SCENARIO
Modified Work Assignments	A work assignment is changed to fit better the goals of a student’s individualized learning plan while still pushing the student to attempt their best work and feel as though they are completing tasks similar to other students	A young child who is new to America and limited in English reading and writing completes extra multiple choice questions and less intensive essay writing portions on an exam in a history class.
Assistive Technology	The use of technological adaptations to help promote student participation and learning growth in the classroom.	A teacher records test questions for a visually impaired student on an audio tape in order for the student to respond to.
Democratic Class Decision Making and the use of Value-oriented Surveys	The instructor allows students to express their values about learning, set up the rules and procedures of the classroom and take more personal responsibility for their own actions and the overall progression of the classroom community.	Students – no matter who they are or what their strengths and weaknesses are – brainstorm a new classroom procedure and then vote on its adoption.
Individual Learning Goals	Students work with their instructor to build and maintain personal learning goals that are individualized for their needs.	A student with AD/HD works with an instructor to plan on both learning objectives for the course subject but also learning goals on how to effectively deal with their hyperactivity.
Multi-Level Teaching	Instructors reach beyond their comfort level and attempt to teach to a wide range of multiple personalities, intelligences and personas.	The classroom engages in a 15 minute auditory lecture before breaking up into small groups for a tactile activity.

Even with these strategies, a good support team can help teachers go even an extra mile

their ability to attest that their classroom is indeed an inclusive center for all to learn.

Part IV: The Scaffolding of a Schoolhouse: Intersections between Teachers and Special Needs Support Staffs

Introduction

This section will look at the various resources that surround classrooms with special needs students to help better ensure their successful transition to a true learning community where all learners are learning. Teachers are not alone when it comes to special needs students in their classroom. Whereas some teachers may feel that they are “dumped” special needs students and are not given adequate help and support to best help those students learn and grow, the truth is we as educators are becoming more and more aware of the essential roles that are fulfilled by support teams.

Much like scaffolding surrounding a building under construction, support teams provide the teacher and the special needs students with stability, strength and dedication that goes beyond aiming for success on the next exam or tutoring before a big presentation. This scaffolding becomes a foundation that a student with special needs can build the foundation of their feelings, values and levels of self-worth around. In this section we will define what a support team is and what types of people make up a support team for special needs students in our schools. Secondly, we will look at how to best collaborate the support team with the general education classroom that is filled with all types of students, including some with special needs. Finally, we will briefly discuss logistical issues that can hinder the progress of a school’s support team as well as some strategies to help teams circumvent these potential problems.

FAQ’s about Support Teams for Special Needs Students

What is a Support team for Special Needs Students?

Support teams are staff members that work with the general education teacher to help assist in the development, implementation and evaluation of inclusive education for special needs students that are in the classroom.

Who may a support team include?

Support teams can include special education teachers, Title I and bilingual teachers, counselors, social workers, psychologists and many others.

How can a support team work in my Secondary Social Studies classroom?

Support teams work by meeting regularly and having open, frank and meaningful discussion on the directions of students with special needs and developing – collectively with that student – an individualized education plan that will allow that student to concentrate on set goals and benchmarks designed for them. This multilateral approach allows specialists from many different fields and areas of expertise to confer regularly with the instructor on how best to attempt and evaluate if a student with special needs is meeting their benchmarks, displaying effort and growth, and, occasionally, be there to help support the teacher through their own personal doubts and inhibitions they may feel for with working with students with special needs.

Collaboration: Teachers and Specialists Unite!

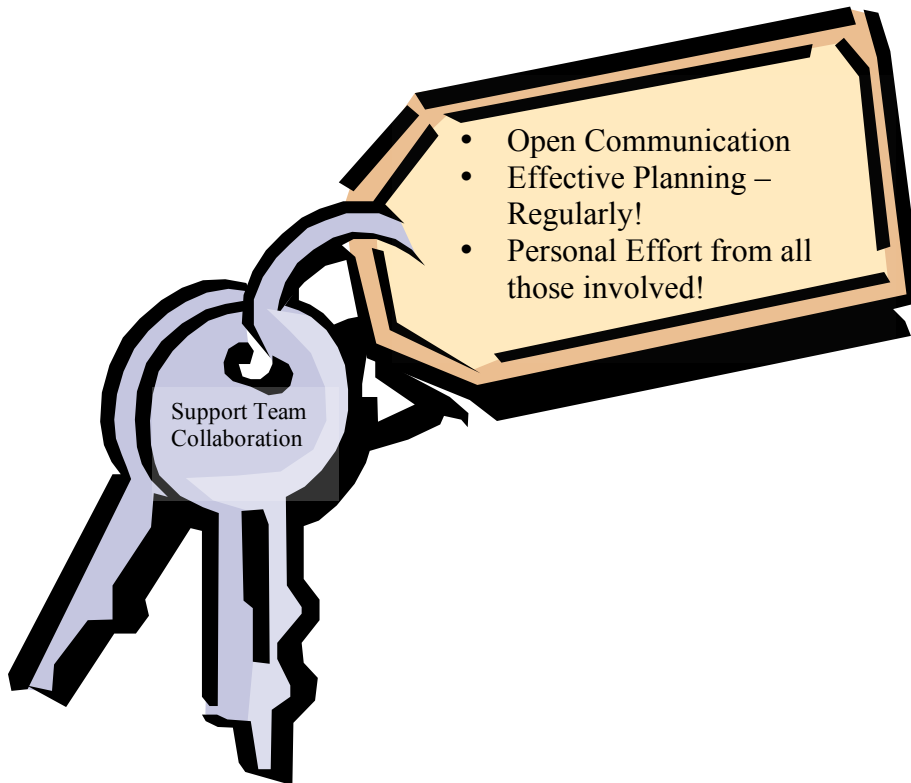
The effective use of a support team can result in collaboration that is both effective, but not invasive to the overall flow and pace of the classroom. Students with special needs would not need to be continuously aware that a certain specialist would be there strictly for them, as is the case when specialists come and single a child out and may remove them from the classroom to go work with them individually some where else in the building. Today these types of resource teachers and professionals could work with larger numbers of students as a group and, while truly there to observe and particularly work on a certain special needs student, continue to aid the student in need in a less invasive and embarrassing method. Paraprofessionals could work as secondary teachers who not only work with special needs students but also with groups of students where some of the members have a special need. Again this type of subtle collaboration between teacher, student and resource personnel allows a student to work in their own

classroom where they have hopefully grown respect, feelings of self-worth, and comfort in order to learn what they can and try their very best.

How to Not Let (Petty) Logistical Issues Hold Up Collaboration

There is an old saying in life that you will only get out of something what you put into it. In my secondary social studies classroom this is very much true. If I, as an instructor, cannot attempt to collaborate and grow with the resources that surround me and support my goals to help all students – including those with special needs – then I can expect little help in return. We as teachers must make the time to schedule meetings, ask questions and build trustful and open communication lines with those on our support teams.

These three keys - open communication, effective planning and personal effort to work together is what in my personal opinion will help drive success for all my students.



Now we are going to look at these four sections in action in our development of two Secondary Social Studies lesson plans and a hypothetical case study of the results.

Part V: Lesson Plans

10th Grade Social Studies: The Declaration of Independence

LEARNING GOALS	LEVELS
<p>In groups, students will receive each a role to play in a reenactment of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Evaluate the biography of a signer of the Declaration of Independence 2. Research the biography of your role to develop an idea of what type of person your role was, and what his/her ideals were/ 3. Display the role in a class –wide reenactment.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES	INCLUDING STUDENTS
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Write notes on your reading of the short biography of your role. 2. Use Media Center time to find books about your role. 3. Rehearse lines from the reenactment. 4. Perform the scene. 5. Discuss the scene, and the major democratic concepts the signing represented. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Students with gifted/natural leadership skills will be assigned more challenging roles. -Students with limited communication skills will take on roles with less speaking and will have shorter and easier to read biographies to take notes or attempt brainstorming on. -Students with cognitive disabilities will not need to do the Media Center research for their role, but will review in a small group information from the teacher regarding their role with either the teacher or a paraprofessional.

EVALUATION OF LEARNING
<p>This project will be assessed using a rubric the students develop that will allow the teacher to quantify if the student got to know their role, their role’s values and acutely displayed those views in the reenactment.</p> <p>Afterwards students will go home and write a short essay on whether they thought their role’s values are correct or wrong today and one way they would change the signing knowing what we know as Americans today.</p> <p>Impaired students could write to the best of their ability what they had learned and how it was important to understanding American history.</p>

10th Grade Social Studies: Building Map Reading Skills

LEARNING GOALS	LEVELS
<p>Students will pair up and circulate around the room to various learning stations where various types of maps will be, along with questions for the students to answer.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Comprehend the various map types that are in use in geography 2. Evaluate what types of maps are best for describing what types of situations 3. Understand how geographic perspectives have changed due to more accurate mapmaking.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES	INCLUDING STUDENTS
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Visit all seven map stations which will contain maps that are identifying different aspects of geography: topography, different projections, historical maps, etc. 2. Answer a packet of questions about the map stations you visit. 3. Use the buddy system to learn as a team. 4. Describe rationale why certain types of maps are used in certain scenarios more. 5. Write how mapmaking has changed over time. 	<p>*The teacher will note to the students that different packets contain different questions to expose each team to a more broad level of the topic. Students will not know that these questions are based around ability level and will be led to think their packets are randomly distributed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All students will be paired. -Gifted students questions will probe deeper into the topic and require more complex reasoning skills. -Special Needs students will have a more general packet, better suited but still challenging

EVALUATION OF LEARNING
<p>Each team, which will truly be decided in a random fashion, will be judged first on their level of cooperation and their ability to stay on task.</p> <p>Each packet will be individually graded for completeness, accuracy and effort witnessed by the teacher and/or support team staff that is welcomed into the room for the activity.</p> <p>Each writing prompt will be graded individually based on completeness of thought and effort to create a readable, professional paper. The class will also discuss their ideas behind their writing prompt in a class-wide discussion.</p>

Part VI: Case Study of Part V. Lesson Plans

Joey's Story

Description of Student:

Joey is a well-liked 10th grader in my social studies class. Joey was born with a cognitive disability that has been diagnosed as mild Down Syndrome which is common cause of mental retardation though an abnormal chromosome development. Joey has only slight physical disabilities in terms of appearance and function. He rarely suffers from seizures but does have noted difficulties in walking and needs to move at a slower pace than other students. He uses a wheel chair when he wants to, and that wheelchair is kept in a closet in the classroom for his use only, except on occasions when Joey wants (and class time allows for) to show a student how the wheelchair operates. While Joey has a hard time reading and remembering information, he does produce awesome art work, has excellent computer skills and is an active speaker who tries very hard to express thoughtful ideas and perceptions. Joey has a limited vocabulary and has trouble writing his thoughts effectively.

Inclusion in Lesson Plan 1:

To include Joey in lesson plan 1, I as a teacher would first give Joey a role that required less memorization of lines for the biographical role he would take in our reenactment. To compensate for Joey's slightly modified work load, Joey would be able to work with other students on the internet looking up their roles and finding pertinent information. Joey, being very good with computer applications, would help them use

internet search engines and be able to sit and help other students retrieve their information.

Joey could also design set artwork with other students to help make the reenactment of the signing of the Declaration of Independence more accurate and feel more real. By working with other students Joey takes a sense of ownership in our project, even though he will have less to say when it comes to the actual reenactment.

Finally Joey will reenact his role with the class. Joey will be allowed the use of flash cards to remember his lines. When during the assessment phase Joey is asked to do a writing assignment, Joey will be given an easier to read prompt and be asked to outline or mind map his concept on paper and attempt to write a thesis statement about the prompt. If he finds this assignment too challenging, Joey is welcomed to see the teacher at a time that is private and of his choosing to discuss Joey's ideas verbally and have the teacher and him work on the mind-mapping and thesis statement together.

Inclusion in Lesson Plan 2:

Lesson plan 2 will allow Joey to be paired like any other student into a buddy system to complete the map-skills assignment. Joey's friend will be someone Joey has grown to trust and work well with, as well as someone who has enjoyed working with Joey in the past.

If Joey is in his wheelchair this day, Joeys partner will retrieve from the classroom cabinet a lower table that is used for Joey so their team can take the map off the workstation tables and bring it to a level that Joey can see it, feel it and comprehend it.

Joey will receive a modified session of worksheets that ask more basic concepts yet still challenge him to retain the information being presented. Being that each pair in the classroom will have members with different sets of questions individually to work on with their partners, Joey should not feel like his assignment was modified from the other groups.

Joey's partner will be allowed to write in Joey's packet if Joey asks him to because he is having a hard time writing correctly the words and phrases he is trying to say. Joey will be asked by his partner to talk about the ideas he sees in the map skills stations they visit and the teacher will ask Joey's partner to write down some of Joey's ideas neatly for him to keep so in later discussions Joey will have a memory cue card to base his words on.

Again with the writing prompt Joey will be asked to list the major types of maps he saw, classify them in terms of type and then describe what the map was showing in any way of his choosing. (list, chart, flowchart, etc.) This will allow Joey practice in writing words and linking concepts together without having grammar, usage and mechanics clog his process.

Conclusion

This guide will be something I can put on my bookshelf for years and years of my teaching career because the themes it tries to reinforce: unity, community, opportunity, inclusion, respect, team-building, needs-meeting, understanding, (I could go on and on and on...) are such an antithesis to what many people think the world is moving towards today. These concepts are so relevant to not only American ideals, but human ideals! We are created with diverse qualities, with diverse backgrounds and we grow into taking on diverse roles and lifestyles. We make diverse choices, we come packaged with diverse gifts and diverse needs. Yet as a human family – especially in a public classroom open to all – we come with similar goals. We come to find our place, our friends, and our identity. We come looking for respect, for comfort and for the simple phrase from a teacher we respect, “you can learn, you will learn, I’ll help you learn.” This guide is not a guide for students with just special needs – it’s a guide for all students and all youngsters who come to our room looking a little different, acting a little different, but looking for the safety of a place to be themselves and find respect for trying their best to be their best.

These ideals and these notions are not as corny or as pie-in-the-sky as some may think. And to be sure, there will be many who call for segregation of our students, of division, of removal of the ones who are guilty of nothing more than being just a little different. We must work past these challenges and challengers to prove that the best

classroom is the one whose door is shut to no one. The best classroom is the one whose door is open – and stays open – for all.

Sources

Peterson, M., Inclusive Teaching, (2003) Allyn and Bacon, Boston.

