

**Fifth Avenue Group  
Inclusive Schooling Recommendations Report**

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*At the heart of discourtesy is the lack of respect for persons; it has less to do with breaking rules of etiquette than with breaking the ties that bind us together.*

Dr. Donald McCulloch

The school districts involved in this report vary in location, socio-economic background, student base and cultural background. The schools all educate various ages of children ranging from early childhood through high school. Despite the vast range of differences the commonality they all possess is that they all have one purpose: to educate children.

The persons conducting the observations are of varying backgrounds. All are special education majors at different places within their programs. They vary in experience, whether or not they are parents, culture, gender and race. Again, despite the differences, the common factor that drew these people together, like the schools, is their interest in educating children.

In order to coordinate this project, each member of the group visited various schools. Urban and suburban schools were observed. Each member examined a minimum of one inclusive classroom and then interviewed personnel from the school. The members wrote individual group reports, which were submitted to the instructor. From these reports each individual submitted, to Laurie League, a summary of positive and negative findings along with suggested modifications of their observed program. Laurie then compiled the findings into this report. A rough draft was submitted to each member of the group and suggested changes were discussed and the paper was edited where necessary.

This group, within these schools, found very common factors that were elements they had not been previously discussed as a group, yet each member found to be important when making note of their observations. These factors are listed below.

- 1) All students were treated the same.
- 2) Students were allowed to work cooperatively.
- 3) Teachers were knowledgeable of subject matter.
- 4) Teachers created and maintained
  - a) Respect for
    - 1) Students
    - 2) Staff
  - b) Environment conducive to learning
  - c) Pride in work.
  - d) Good classroom management
  - e) Positive attitude
  - f) Community
- 5) Varied materials suited for all children to work with.
- 6) Accommodations within the work environment.
- 7) Support Staff was available to students as well as teachers.
- 8) Teachers worked with all students.

Together, these elements created a learning environment that was active and fun for all involved, including those who were observing! The classrooms were far from quiet yet productive in the student's enthusiasm to learn. The children discussed, compared,

interacted, questioned, explained, demonstrated, consulted and actively sought out the knowledge. The teacher or teachers were involved in observing, demonstrating, questioning, moving, and interacting with the students to promote clarity of subject matter. . Students worked with other students, both in learning material for the first time, and also in peer tutoring. What better way to solidify knowledge than by having to teach it through demonstration and verbalization? In this type of environment, learning was fun, behavior was exemplary yet realistic and the sense of a respectful community was apparent.

Conversely, the negatives within the classrooms were, in general, opposites of the positive factors listed above.

- 1) Students are not treated the same.
- 2) Students are not allowed to work cooperatively.
- 3) Teachers are not knowledgeable of subject matter and/or do not care to be.
- 4) Teachers do not create and maintain:
  - a. Respect for
    - 1) Students
    - 2) Staff
  - b. Environment conducive to learning
  - c. Pride in work.
  - d. Good classroom management
  - e. Community
  - f. Positive attitude.
- 5) Varied materials are not available for all children to work with.
- 6) Accommodations are not made to allow for disabilities within the classroom environment.
- 9) Teachers work with specific children only creating segregation within the classroom.

Our group only had one room in which we would say the observed inclusion was not successful. In contrast to our other observations and it became very apparent that when an inclusive environment is bad, it is very, very bad. It was certainly not due to the type of students in the classroom, as none of them were even remotely close to being severely

impaired. Instead, we observed children that were Learning Disabled or Emotionally Impaired.

The major factor that destroyed this community was that of poor leadership resulting from negative attitude. The teachers were, maybe not what we would label as resentful, but definitely not supportive of their mission. They were inflexible in their teaching approach and very much lacking in positive attitude. These were teachers who were not teaching because they loved to teach, they were instead teaching because it was their job. There were no observed accommodations made even for varying learning styles. This certainly is not a methodology belonging to the world of special education, but instead to good education in general. There was no forethought in teaching to varying levels of ability within the class. This class, interestingly, did not even appear to have extreme variation within the ability levels of students. One student was overheard to disgustedly say, as he left the room, "This class sucks!" Our group would have to agree!

Currently, the answer to support for the children is that of resource rooms. Interestingly enough, this is side of support has a flip side to the coin. Instead of excluding the special education students, it is here that general education students are excluded. Special education students are allowed extra help, but general education students are not. Most often, the public school system general ed students' teachers are too busy to assist their students before or after school. They are unable to provide extra help so the problem is compounded when educators exclude them from the rooms that are provided for extra help. Extra help is available, only, for children with labels. We are not opposed to extra help. Sometimes it is necessary to spend some extra time on a particular

area that any student cannot grasp. If a specific room is to be made available to any students for such assistance, then it should be available to all students.

In general, despite the best scenario of observations mentioned, the students that are involved within these classrooms are of specific disabilities. They are the higher functioning students. Severe students are still segregated and contained within classrooms, which, in general, provide a more functional curriculum. This is an area that we would all like to see changed. Despite the arguments that these children do not belong due to the fact that they might not acquire the content as the general education students do, it is our feeling that all students should be included. Often, within a general education classroom, not all students acquire the knowledge at the same rate. It is still our belief that with the ability to teach to varying levels of ability within a classroom, then it is possible for all students to thrive in any classroom.

Multi level teaching could very easily be used in any classroom situation. For those students who are at the concrete stage, their lessons would be based on obtaining the concrete material. An example would be for this student, when doing research, to find main ideas or simple details. The student who was at a more abstract stage could seek material such as cause and effect that would allow the student to feel successful, but still work on the development of skills. This would continue until the students who were at the most advanced levels were working on gaining information at the highest level of thinking skills, such as inferences. All students would work at his or her own level and then when reviewing a section; each child would be responsible for reporting their material to the class at their own level. This way, the higher thinking students would gain from the review of the lower level students, while the higher performing students would

model their material for the other students. No one would regress or be overwhelmed. All would benefit.

Supporting staff would work within the classroom setting to assist with their area of specialty within a true academic setting that is nurturing and comfortable. The students would benefit because their application of the knowledge would be true hands on experience and not a fabricated situation. Also, the additional staff would observe, assist and model social interactions in the environment where the students would benefit the most.

It is with this idea that the old adage holds true, "If there's a will, there's a way." Attitude of staff determines the outcome in any classroom. When a teacher believes that inclusion will not work, then it is destined to fail from the very beginning. We, as teachers, must serve as the role models for attitude, motivation and work ethic. Flexibility and determination are the keys to success within any classroom. Good management along with in class support of other staff will demonstrate good community, positive attitude and acceptance of everyone.

There are other benefits that this group of learners will reap from a non-segregated, diverse learning opportunity. Socialization, respect, acceptance, compassion and a true sense of community are some of the greatest benefits of a productive, educational environment. If we, as adults, continue to accept segregation, classification and separation, what messages are we instilling in our youth? Is it not possible that this mask of malevolent humanity we are hiding behind is truly a pandering to prejudice? What if, instead we took a look at ourselves through the eyes of our students? Is this the

way we would want to be treated? Our feeling is that we would rather be included.

Loved, respected, included and valued as any human being should be.

#### Bibliography

McCullough, Donald. *Say Please, Say Thank You. The Respect We Owe One Another.*  
New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1998.