

Whole Schooling Consortium

# International Journal of Whole Schooling



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## The six principles of Whole Schooling are...

- (1) empowering citizens for democracy;
- (2) including all;
- (3) providing authentic, multi-level instruction;
- (4) building community;
- (5) supporting learning; and
- (6) partnering with parents and the community.

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The International Journal of Whole Schooling is a fully refereed on-line journal published twice a year and governed by the management team and an independent Editorial Review Board. The International Journal of Whole Schooling is a non-profit venture run by volunteer staff. Subscription is free.

The Journal seeks to discuss issues relevant to Whole Schooling, with contributions from a variety of stakeholders including students, parents, academics, educators, and administrators.

Contributions and feedback are welcome. Please contact Tim Loreman at [tim.loreman@concordia.ab.ca](mailto:tim.loreman@concordia.ab.ca) or Billie Jo Clausen at [bclausen@mesd.k12.or.us](mailto:bclausen@mesd.k12.or.us)

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## Research and Analysis

# Collaboration, co-teaching, and differentiated instruction: A process-oriented approach to whole schooling.

Lorri Santamaria and Jacque Thousand

Today a central concern of U.S. educational stakeholders is to ensure equitable access to the core curriculum for all children, including students eligible for special education, students for whom English is not a first language, and students with diverse cultural backgrounds. This concern is captured and communicated in legislation ranging from the equity in education foundation of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 (Public Law 107-110) to the 1997 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which articulates the school's responsibility to ensure students with disabilities access the core curriculum of general education, and placement of first choice in the general education classroom with appropriate supports and services. These federal legislative changes are inclusive of all children regardless of ability or perceived disability. As a result school administrators and district personnel are scrambling to meet the needs of all of their students, while attempting to ensure that all teachers are highly qualified.

This article describes one school's year-long effort to provide equitable access to the core curriculum to a very culturally, linguistically, and academically diverse student body while increasing teachers' needs for responsive professional development by piloting a dramatic change in the special education service delivery system with the support of professors from a local university. The successes and challenges chronicled in this article serve as examples for other schools to study and personalize to active collaboration, co-teaching, and differentiated instruction as means to improve student and teacher performance. First, we briefly examine the literature on collaboration, co-teaching, and differentiated instruction. Next we describe what happened at Bienvenidos Elementary School with regard to collaboration, co-teaching, and differentiated instruction. We do this by organizing the outcomes according to the Six Principles of Whole Schooling that are the philosophical underpinnings of this journal; namely: 1) empowering citizens for democracy; 2) including all; 3) providing authentic, multi-level instruction; 4) building community; 5) supporting learning; and 6) partnering with parents and community. We close with a preview of the school team's goals and vision for the second year of its journey toward whole schooling.

### **An Examination of the Research-Base for Collaboration, Co-Teaching, and Differentiated Instruction**

#### *Collaboration: Definitions and Outcomes*

What is collaboration? According to an Intelligence Community Collaboration (1999) study, collaboration can broadly be defined as the interaction among two or more individuals encompassing a variety of behaviors, including communication, information sharing, coordination, cooperation, problem solving, and negotiation.

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*“...school administrators and district personnel are scrambling to meet the needs of all of their students, while attempting to ensure that all teachers are highly qualified”*

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Friend and Cook (1992) offer a definition, specific to the needs of educators, of school-based collaboration as joint planning, decision making, and problem solving that may occur in a variety of formal or informal group configurations for the purpose of accomplishing a common goal (Cook & Friend, 1991; Laycock, Gable, & Korinek, 1991). More definitively, Friend and Cook (1992) list defining characteristics of successful collaboration as: 1) being voluntary; 2) requiring parity among participants; 3) based on mutual goals; 4) depending on shared responsibility for participation and decision making; 5) consisting of individuals who share their resources; and 6) consisting of individuals who share accountability for outcomes. Professional collaboration then includes empowering citizens for democracy by building community through partnerships. Such partnership includes parents and community and can take the form of a) consultation (Gerber, 2000; Howland, 2003; Stanovich, 1996), b) coaching (Lam, Yin, & Lam, 2002; Little, 1982; Joyce & Showers, 1982; Sparks, 1986; Singh & Shifflette, 1996), c) teaming (Correa, Mor-sink, & Thomas, 2000; Santamaría, 2003), or d) a combination of all three.

Overall, studies on professional collaboration paint a promising picture of success resulting in student needs being met by the most highly qualified people working together toward a common goal (Howland, 2003; Lam, et. al., 2002; Singh & Shifflette, 1996; Villa, Thousand, & Nevin, 2004). In a study of 57 university-school collaboration projects measuring variables including program quality, outcomes, and success, Kirschenbaum & Reagan (2001) found collaborative endeavors to be typically long standing, varied in type, serving large numbers of school students, satisfying to university partners, and perceived as generally achieving their goals. Programs with high levels of collaboration were judged to be more successful than those with limited levels of collaboration.

Collaboration as an ideal intervention is plagued by dynamic complexities inherent to most educational environments, often making it difficult for educators to reach and maintain the optimal conditions needed for successful collaborative endeavors (DeLima, 2003; Gottesman & Jennings, 1994; Miller & Shontz, 1993; Stanovich, 1996; Williams, 1996). Still, in light of current and future legislative demands for meeting the needs for the largest number of students, collaboration remains at the forefront of educational stakeholders' thinking as a viable solution when it comes to teaching in inclusive educational settings (Villa, Thousand, & Nevin, 2004; Villa & Thousand, in press).

#### *Co-Teaching: It's Power and Promise*

Co-teaching in American schools can be traced back to the 1960s when it was popularized as an example of progressive education. In the 1970s, co-teaching was advanced by legislated school reforms and teachers' increasing need to diversify instruction for a more diverse student population. Co-teaching offers a means for educators to move from feelings of isolation and alienation to feelings of community and collaboration, as teaching in isolation is replaced with teaching in partnerships. Furthermore, based on interviews of co-teachers conducted over the past two decades, co-teaching helps educators meet their basic psychological needs of belonging, fun, choice, power and survival (Villa et. al., 2004).

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Co-teaching has been found to be effective for students with a variety of diverse instructional needs, including English language learners (Mahoney, 1997); students with hearing impairments (Luckner, 1999; Compton, Stratton, Maier, Meyers, Scott, & Tomlinson, 1998); students with learning disabilities (Rice & Zigmond, 1999; Trent, 1998; Welch, 2000); high-risk students in a social studies class (Dieker, 1998) and students in a language remediation class (Miller, Valasky, & Molloy, 1998). To illustrate, Welch (2000) showed that the students with disabilities and their classmates all made academic gains in reading and spelling on curriculum-based assessments in the co-taught classrooms. Mahoney (1997) found that in addition to meeting educational needs “for special education students, being part of the large class meant making new friends” (p.59). There is, then, an emerging database for preschool through high school levels (Villa, Thousand, Nevin, & Malgeri, 1996) supporting the conclusions that: a) at all grade levels students with disabilities can be educated effectively in general education environments when teachers, support personnel, and families collaborate; and b) student performance improvements occur in both academic and social, relationship arenas.

At least five factors appear to account for the success of co-teaching arrangements. First, students become more capable collaborative learners as they emulate the cooperative and collaborative skills their teachers model when they co-teach (Olsen, 1968). Secondly, co-teaching provides co-teachers with greater opportunity to capitalize upon the unique, diverse and specialized knowledge, skills, and instructional approaches of other educators (Bauwens, Hourcade, & Friend, 1989; Hourcade & Bauwens, 2002). Third, teachers who co-teach often find they can structure their classes to more effectively use the research-proven strategies required of the No Child Left Behind Act (Miller et al., 1998). A fourth success factor is that co-teachers tend to be inventive and come up with solutions that traditional school structures often fail to examine (Nevin, Thousand, Paolucci-Whitcomb, & Villa, 1990; Skrtic, 1987). Finally, there is evidence that co-teachers feel empowered by having the opportunity to collaboratively make decisions (Duke, Showers & Imber, 1980) while simultaneously increasing their skills (Thousand, Villa, Nevin, & Paolucci-Whitcomb, 1995).

### *Differentiated Instruction*

Although widely celebrated in testimonials and classroom examples available in periodicals, books, and on the internet, differentiated instruction is just emerging as an empirically-based educational approach. Differentiated instruction can be thought of a compilation of good educational practices with roots in theoretical research and the successful outcomes programs such as gifted education. Differentiation practices have been described for the full range of learners (Gregory, 2003); English language learners (Heydon, 2003); particular content areas (Chapman & King, 2003); and conceptual frameworks such as Bloom’s Taxonomy and Multiple Intelligences (Rule & Lord, 2003). Tomlinson (1999, 2001) reports individual cases of success in which differentiation appears to be promising. With colleagues Brimijoin and Marquissee, she also has devised a student self-assessment tool that yields results enabling teachers to better differentiate instruction for students (Brimijoin, Marquissee, & Tomlinson, 2003).

Differentiated instruction involves instructional practices and teaching strategies that are inclusive in nature, practices that enable all children including those with disabilities to access and succeed in the general education classroom and curriculum. Tomlinson (1999) describes differentiated instruction as a set of behaviors enabling a teacher to: (a) take students from where they are, (b) engage students in instruction through different learning modalities, (c) prompt students to compete more with their own past performances than with others, (d) provide specific ways for each student to learn, (e) use classroom time flexibly, and (f) act as a diagnostician, prescribing the best possible instruction for each student.

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*“Differentiated instruction can be thought of a compilation of good educational practices with roots in theoretical research and the successful outcomes programs such as gifted education.”*

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### Progress at Bienvenidos Toward the Six Principles of Whole Schooling Through Collaboration, Co-Teaching and Differentiated Instruction

The school that is the focus of this article will be referred to as Bienvenidos Elementary School. Figure 1 briefly summarizes some of the ways in which the faculty and staff at Bienvenidos School addressed the six Principles of Whole Schooling this past year as well as the ways in which it plans to do so next year. The figure illustrates the progressive and dynamic aspects of becoming a Whole School through the implementation of collaborative, co-teaching, and differentiated instruction (CCDI).

*Figure 1.* Collaboration, co-teaching, differentiated instruction actions and plans for the six principles of whole schooling.

6 Principles	This School Year's Actions	Next School Year's Plans
1. Empowering citizens for democracy	<p>Including learners with special needs as full citizens of general education classrooms with access to core curriculum.</p> <p>Bringing ancillary services in the classroom rather than the students to the service (i.e., pull-out).</p> <p><b>Collaboration</b> among teachers and university partners for professional support and development.</p>	<p>Continue including K-1 learners with special needs in general education classrooms for academic subjects; with general and special educators co-teaching with support of 4 paraprofessionals.</p> <p>Adding a parent component.</p> <p>Continual <b>collaboration</b> with teachers, university partners, shifting from a <i>consultation</i> to a <i>coaching</i> role.</p>
2. Including all	<p>Special education personnel <b>collaborating</b> to deliver support services in a team approach in general education.</p>	<p>Continuation of special education personnel <b>collaborating</b> to deliver support services in a team approach in general education environments limited to focus on K-1 classroom.</p>
3. Providing authentic, multi-level instruction	<p>Effective planned and on-the-spot <b>differentiated instruction</b> and <b>co-teaching</b>.</p>	<p>Deliberate professional development on <b>differentiated instruction</b> and <b>co-teaching models</b> provided by university collaborators.</p>
4. Building community	<p>Former Special Day Class teacher, paraprofessionals, student helpers, general education teachers, university collaborators work with <u>all</u> students.</p> <p><b>Collaboration</b> team viewed all learners as members of one collective classroom.</p>	<p>Building community activity will be extended to parents which may include a parental core council, parent advocacy tips, opportunities for parents to inform larger groups (e.g., PTA), etc.</p>
5. Supporting learning	<p>Paraprofessionals support all children in need of support regardless of "label" by providing <b>differentiated instruction</b>.</p>	<p>Paraprofessionals will receive professional development on deliberate <b>differentiated instruction</b> to further enhance inclusive support practices.</p>
6. Partnering with parents and community	<p>Current and planned presentations on participant successes and challenges and plans to continue for the next school year.</p> <p>Parent involvement and school-wide understanding and support are continuing challenges and goals.</p>	<p>Development and implementation of parent component as described above in building community.</p> <p>Sharing of the process and progress toward Whole Schooling in order to inspire other schools to also work toward Whole Schooling.</p>



*Principle #1: Empowering Citizens for Democracy at Bienvenidos*

Who are the citizens of Bienvenidos Elementary School? Bienvenidos is a K-6 campus of 422 students of whom just over 25% are English language learners of Mexican descent. About 30% of the student body qualifies for free and reduced lunch. There are several special education service delivery models at the school including three special classes (i.e., K-1, 2-3, 4-6), in-class and out-of-class resource specialist support, speech and language services, and occupational and physical therapy ancillary services. Despite the challenges these types of student diversity typically pose for school administrators and reported academic success; Bienvenidos Elementary boasts the following statistics: The school has a ranking of 8 out of 10 on the California Department of Education's Academic Performance Index; students have achieved an overall 42-point improvement over last year's performance, surpassing the state's target score for all schools of 800 (CDE, 2003). The faculty at Bienvenidos is seasoned, averaging 12 years of teaching experience. All but 5% of the teachers have the appropriate credentials to teach the grade levels and subjects assigned to them. Overall, this school fares better than similar schools in most every category considered.

The school principal has strong convictions about the purpose of schooling. He believes schooling should not be reduced to test scores but to assisting students to become active, effective citizens for democracy. Recognizing the school's accomplishments, yet striving for further improvement, the principal approached university education professors to assist school personnel to include students eligible for special education general education classrooms and provide support to teachers apprehensive of this process. He did this knowing very well the history of failed attempts at inclusive practice. Several years before an incident had led teachers to question the viability of more inclusive practices. Namely, when parents of a child with severe disabilities requested an inclusive placement for their child, the child was placed in a general education classroom, but without teachers being prepared with advance notice, training, or support beyond the provision of an untrained paraprofessional. The reported results were an unsuccessful student experience, confusion, and feelings of anger and hostility on the part of some teachers towards the future inclusion of students with more intensive in general education at the school.

Given the principal's convictions and knowledge of the faculty's negative past experience with an attempt at more inclusive practice, he initiated an active collaborative and democratic course of sharing power and decision-making with university collaborators, a core group of teachers, students, a few parents, and paraprofessionals. What this principal envisioned was the kind of collaborative model described by Friend & Cook (1992) as the voluntary participation from individuals who share resources and accountability for outcomes; equal status among participants; mutual goals; and a sense of shared responsibility for participation and decision making.

This collaborative effort was coordinated through the leadership of a Core Council comprised of representatives of the central office (e.g., the special education coordinator); the school's principal; the preschool special education program coordinator; classroom teacher representatives; special education representatives; and, a related services representative (i.e., speech and language therapist). A Steering Subcommittee comprised of two university professors (the authors of this contribution); the district special education coordinator; the principal; and three interested teachers became the primary project managers who communicated more frequently via face-to-face meetings and e-mail, as necessary. Students who would be served through this effort would be determined later, during the implementation of the project. The principal felt that building this type of democratic planning structure was critical to the ongoing reshaping the culture of the school at all levels - among staff, partnerships with parents and the community, and within classrooms. His thinking resonates with research findings that make similar conclusions as to the critical components of successful professional collaborative partnerships (Howland, 2003; Lam, et. al., 2002; Santamaría, 2003; Singh & Shifflette, 1996; Villa et al., 2004).

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At the initiation of this project, a number of the school's general educators entered into the 'democracy' with trepidation. They had become accustomed to including students with disabilities in their classrooms for no more than the "minimum time" necessary, only in non-academic times such as during art, music, and physical education. They did not particularly like the idea of including students with special needs into their academic teaching times. References to such issues appear in the literature and have been classified as non-commitment based upon fear of the unknown, tradition, comfort level, and resistance to the relinquishment of sole control when partnerships are established (DeLima, 2003; Gottesman & Jennings, 1994; Miller & Shontz, 1993; Stanovich, 1996; Williams, 1996). Despite the non-participatory dispositions of many teachers, the allure of the student teachers provided by the collaborating teachers (perceived as additional help) attracted some unlikely participants to the project.

*Principle #2: Including all at Bienvenidos*

The initial vision of this CCDI approach was for students with more significant disabilities to be included in classrooms across all grade levels, kindergarten through sixth grade. An incentive and support during the fall and spring semesters was the addition of six general and special education student teachers across the grades.

The student teachers and the on-site support of the university professors were provided from the start. Research and the professors' past experiences at systems change foreshadowed teachers' apprehension regarding collaboration and the inclusion of all students (DeLima, 2003). It soon became apparent that teachers' apprehension combined with the sheer enormity of initiating a school-wide systems change made the initial vision impractical. The project was scaled back to focus upon kindergarten and first grade the first year.

The community now became three teachers, five paraprofessionals, five student teachers, two university professors, 42 students, their parents, the principal, and older students who became peer helpers in the primary classrooms. With principal and district-level administrative support, one general education kindergarten and the teacher of kindergarten and first-grade aged students with moderate to severe disabilities became a co-teaching team. In addition, they had in-class support from the special education program's four paraprofessionals and two student teachers provided by the two university professor collaborators, who supervised these and four other student teachers at the school.

Teacher participants sought limited guidance from university professors, who acted as consultants during the initial stages of the project. This consulting role is supported by Howard (2003) and others who have found consultation effective in facilitating improvement in school and teaching. University professors were available regularly, agreed with, and supported teachers' ideals that all students learn together at all times as well as the inclusive way the participating teachers conducted their instruction. The two university professor collaborators also facilitated regular, ongoing planning and problem-solving meetings and provided in-class and out-of-class technical assistance.

Initially, the co-teachers had 32 students, the 20 kindergarten students who otherwise would have been assigned solely to the general educator and the 12 students for whom the special educator was the service coordinator. Together, these students and teachers started the school year in one classroom. Four of the 12 students with special needs were first-grade aged, so they also spent part of their day (i.e., afternoons) in the third teacher's first grade classroom with adult support.

During the second week of school, due to unpredicted budget cuts, class sizes were increased and 10 more students were added unexpectedly to the general education classroom teacher's roster. This created a crisis in space, as now 42 children and 8 adults were crammed into one classroom. At this time, the teachers could have abandoned the project altogether and reverted back to teaching separately, as they had in previous years. The literature on collaboration recognizes the dynamic complexities inherent to most educational environments that make it difficult for educators to reach and maintain optimal conditions needed for successful collaboration (DeLima, 2003; Gottesman & Jennings, 1994; Miller & Shontz, 1993; Stanovich, 1996; Williams, 1996). This was one of those situations. However, they were steadfast in their commitment to the notion that "all means all." They persevered because both teachers truly believed that students should have common access to the general education curriculum in one learning community, that children should learn together across culture, ethnicity, language, ability, gender, and age, without separate pull-out programs and ability grouping.



*Principle #3: Providing Authentic, Multi-Level Instruction at Bienvenidos*

When the class size suddenly mushroomed (and after the teachers got over their initial shock), the project core team figured out how to turn this crisis into an opportunity (Howland, 2003). As the teachers, principal, and university professors put their heads together to ask, “In what ways might we rearrange adults, students, space, and time to make this more workable?,” the principal reorganized classes so that this co-teaching team could be relocated to two adjacent classrooms connected by a smaller workroom. With this move, they reorganized all three spaces, the supporting personnel, and learning materials to create flexible learning situations that could more readily accommodate multi-level or differentiated instruction as well as the management of material and human resources. Together, the teachers created academic lesson plans that were based upon California Language Arts, Reading, and Mathematics standards. “For the first time,” exclaimed the special education teacher, “my students have access to the core curriculum.”

As predicted by Walther-Thomas (1997), who examined collaborative teaching models in 23 schools across eight districts, these co-teaching partners also changed the ways in which they taught once they moved to their new, larger teaching space. When they had only 32 students, the two teachers primarily engaged in *team teaching*. They both taught all 32 students together in a whole group by taking turns teaching various aspects of the content, while the paraprofessionals engaged in *supportive co-teaching*, providing support to individual students as needed (Villa et al., 2004). With the addition of the 10 students, the co-teachers expanded their ways of co-teaching.

For example, they moved from relying solely on their former team teaching arrangement to using other co-teaching arrangements such as *complementary* or *parallel teaching* at stations. Here they created small heterogeneous groups of students that rotated among stations, each of which was supervised by a teacher, paraprofessional or student teacher. In this arrangement, all of the adults engaged simultaneously in instruction at stations for part of the day, doing different things in different locations, with students rotating among the stations. The teachers also sometimes split the class in half heterogeneously and conducted parallel instruction of groups in the same or different topics in different rooms. These expanded co-teaching configurations allowed for better student management, individualized attention, and the maintenance of high yet differentiated academic standards (Villa et al., 2004).

Most of the co-teaching described in the literature describes teacher partners planning with student characteristics primarily dictating instructional practices (Santamaría, Fletcher, & Bos, 2002). At Bienvenidos, part of the university collaboration involved university faculty coaching teachers on multi-level, differentiated instruction techniques and authentic assessment. This coaching may have accounted, in part, for co-teachers’ decisions on how to organize and evaluate instruction throughout the day. But, it is the authors’ contention that these two experienced professional educators also used their already-learned skill to spontaneously modify lessons on the spot. These observed phenomena of *spontaneous differentiation* have not been addressed in the literature on differentiated instruction thus far (Chapman & King, 2003; Gregory, 2003; Heydon, 2003; Rule & Lord, 2003; Tomlinson et al., 1999, 2001).

In summary, authentic, multi-level instruction and assessment became the norm in the classroom as teachers moved among a variety of co-teaching configurations to respond to the broad range of student needs (Villa et al., 2004). They planned centers, seat work, and free-play. They planned to free themselves up through the support of the other adults in the room to work with small groups and individual students on individualized goals. They put student teachers (who were learning parallel pedagogy in their pre-service teaching coursework), university collaborators and anyone who walked in the door to work so as to scaffold students at multiple levels of ability to actively engage in the complexities of the day (Santamaría et al., 2002).

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*Principle #4: Building Community at Bienvenidos*

Authentic community building involves common understandings and expectations among collaborating participants. This understanding is derived from joint planning, decision making, and problem solving directed toward a common goal in formal and informal configurations (Cook & Friend, 1991; Correa et al., 1991; Peters, 2002; Laycock et al., 1991; Santamaría, 2003; Villa et al., 2004). These configurations certainly include the dynamic co-teaching environment and structures created by the Bienvenidos teachers in this example. One outward sign of the transformation to a unified community of learners and teachers was a shift in the language used to describe the 42 students. Within weeks the adults and parents involved in this classroom no longer used language such as 'your students' versus 'my students,' but instead referred to 'our students' and 'our class'. Further, when cross-aged fifth-grade student helpers were involved later on in the years as supports, they were introduced to students as one family without differentiation of who was and was not eligible for special education. It was a cultural shift signaled by a shift in language. The cross-aged helpers were acculturated to believe all of the students belong to everyone, and the classroom (although there were two) was really one classroom with lots of students.

A second outward sign of the strength of the community and the commitment to caring for and supporting all students involved in the project was the way in which students were treated when engaging in challenging behaviors. Because of the dialogue that occurred among the adults in the community, there developed a common understanding of the communicative intent or function of the behaviors used by students. The adults therefore were able to hypothesize the underlying needs expressed in a student's behavior and seek to help the student find positive ways to meet these needs, rather than punishing or removing the child from the class. This fourth principle of community building manifested itself because of the common interest in all of the students' growth participants toward their previously identified common goals.

*Principle #5: Supporting Learning at Bienvenidos*

Paraprofessionals provide an invaluable support service to teachers and students in schools and were highly valued partners in this collaborative endeavor. In the past, the paraprofessionals involved in this collaborative, worked only in a segregated classroom with a very small number of students, all of whom were eligible for special education. They had little to no interaction with general education teachers or students during instructional time. When they did leave the self-contained room it was to journey with a few students to join as visitors in a general education art, music or physical education class.

The ways in which paraprofessionals learned to support students was very different from what they did in the past. Paraprofessionals learned to avoid ability grouping or teaching children at the back or side of the room. Similar to findings of the university-school partnerships studied by Gerber (2000) and Stanovich (1996), paraprofessionals followed their teacher models and provided proactive supports to *any* student who appeared to need help. There was an adjustment period in which they were confused as to their role in the combined class. However, this passed as the daily routines settled in and the two lead teachers continued their consistent modeling of support to any and all students.

As previously noted, cross-aged peer helpers were added to the support formula as the year went along. The student helpers offered natural peer supports to individual students. Support might have involved sitting close to a student who needs contact to stay in a group, being a playful partner while guiding student work or playing a game, or being an instructor of concepts such as shapes, colors, and letters. Peer helpers or tutors have the opportunity to demonstrate mastery, independence, and generosity while supporting their younger schoolmates to become independent, masterful. They also create a sense of belonging for the students and themselves in the classroom.

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*“The ways in which paraprofessionals learned to support students was very different from what they did in the past.”*

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Finally, student teachers from the neighboring university added another instructional dimension to the classroom. Their presence increased the teacher/student ratio, enabling more individualized attention to students, and enriching the instructional expertise in the classroom as they tried out the best educational practices (e.g., cooperative group learning, scaffolding techniques) they were learning in their university classes. Student teachers also brought visible enthusiasm and pride to the collaborative endeavor; they knew they were involved in something innovative and important and they were as determined as the classroom teachers to make this venture work.

*Principle #6: Partnering with Parents and Community*

From the start, a central goal of this collaborative effort was active parent and community involvement. The Core Council and especially the principal recognized that educators could not move toward a Whole Schooling approach without community understanding and buy-in. In this first year, the partnership with the university proved to be one of the strongest and most consistent components of the project. This is good, but it is not enough. The parents whose children are involved in the blended classroom are the central community partners whose genuine involvement and support must be attended to on an ongoing basis.

Because this is a very open and welcoming class of 42 students, parents easily access the teachers' ears when they drop off and pick up their children. This personal contact has been a powerful tool in building community support. For example, when student numbers were increased by 10, uninformed parents showed their dissatisfaction by becoming a looming presence in the classroom. The down side of this open door practice is the teachers, although welcoming of every parent's bid for conversation, usually also were involved in delivering instruction and managing the complex and fast-paced routines of the day. The divided attention of the teachers often led to "on the fly" conversations in the middle of a lesson or ad hoc shifting of teacher roles so one classroom teacher could be freed up to address a parent question or concern. In other words, although face-to-face time was readily given, no set time or method was established to maintain consistent face-to-face, phone-to-phone, e-mail, or home-to-school journal communication with all of the parents. One consistent communication was provided as the special educator did manage communication journals with all of her parents. As a result, the collaborating teachers are planning to add a significant parent communication and involvement component in their planning for next school year.

**Next Steps at Bienvenidos:  
Smoothing Out the Rough Spots and Expanding What Works**

At the end of the first year, teachers, administrators, and university partners were involved in planning for the next school year. This planning included a candid look at the accomplishments and setbacks of the current school year; and there had been setbacks. Research findings predict that support for collaboration and change is forthcoming, until it was perceived as either too complex or too close to affecting a teacher's own individual classrooms (Peters, 2002). This was the case at Bienvenidos Elementary School. Namely, some teachers who were not directly affected watched the collaboration with skepticism, withdrawing their participation when they saw that the project was showing signs of success. The literature does not address this phenomenon per se, but does document isolation and resentment toward the idea of collaborative practices in some cases due to fear of change, complacency, and inertia (DeLima, 2003; Miller & Shontz, 1993; Williams, 1996). As plans for expanding the project to more grade levels were being made, support waned. Support increased when Core Council members agreed to continue to focus on the primary grades, thus minimizing the direct impact on the upper grade-level teachers. A cultural shift has yet to occur school wide, making the principal's mission for them to function as a Whole School challenging at this time. Thus, plans for the upcoming school year will include asking and crafting strategies to address the question, "In what ways might we address the concerns, create incentives, provide resources, enhance skills through in-service training, and otherwise influence the disposition of the teachers not directly involved in the project?"

Other areas to be addressed in the current planning phase are identified in the right-hand column of Figure 1. The project will continue to rely upon collaboration, co-teaching, and differentiated instruction practices (see the bolded and italicized words in Figure 1). The planning team will also continue to use the six Principles of Whole Schooling as a framework to plan and organize activities to promote Whole Schooling at Bienvenidos.

Among planned activities is sharing of the successes with the community at large. This activity already has been initiated. For instance, recently the two collaborating teachers, one of their student teachers, and the university professor collaborators presented their experiences to 150 general education teacher candidates at a student symposium. The hope is that such public celebrations of co-teaching and whole schooling practices will influence new teachers to give collaboration and co-teaching a try. Similar sharing is planned for other school district and local school venues (e.g., faculty meetings, school board meetings).

Collaboration activities likely will shift from consultative to coaching, as teacher participants engage in professional development with last years' experiences in mind. Professional development likely will include more deliberate attention to the different types of co-teaching employed for different purposes and different times as well as appropriate differentiated instructional practices. A major focus also will be on creating a strong parent component to complement the project, as participants found this aspect to be partially responsible for negative attitudes from teachers who withdrew support. Developing a parental component and improving inter-educator relations are cornerstone components of the six Principles of Whole Schooling and high priority agenda items in futures planning. The core team members are committed and ready for a new school year of new opportunities; and they are hopeful that their story provides the impetus for others to choose to work toward similar goals.

### **Summary and Discussion: Examples of Differentiation to Achieve Inclusive Practices**

Without these teachers' collaboration and interventions, the participating students with special needs would not have had access to the entire general curriculum; nor would they have participated in school-wide assessments. By their willingness to meet the needs of all of the learners in their classrooms, the special education and general education teacher collaborators at Bienvenidos School provided students with curriculum access, and simultaneously responded to current trends in general and special education reform. These trends include the movement toward inclusion, the use of a collaborative consultation and varied co-teaching approaches, pre-referral interventions, and the inclusion of students with disabilities in high-stakes assessment (Baca & Cervantes, 2004).

For these co-teachers to successfully educate all 42 of the students in the same classroom, differentiation on many levels had to take place throughout every school day. Although the co-teachers did not expressly intend to employ five guidelines identified by Tomlinson for making differentiation possible (1998; 2000; 2001; 2003), this, in fact, is what they did. What follows are examples of how these teachers applied the five guidelines. For the purpose of this article, ways in which the teachers implemented each guideline are described separately. In reality, however, guidelines often were simultaneously employed by the teachers.

#### *Application of Differentiation Guideline #1: Clarification of Key Concepts*

One guideline recommended by Tomlinson (1998; 2000; 2001; 2003) is to clarify for students of key concepts and generalizations. This type of content-based clarification ensures all learners acquire deep foundational understandings of the academic material being presented. How did our co-teachers approach this guideline? The Language Arts and Mathematics content (based on the California State academic standards) first was presented to all students at the same time in general terms using literature, a song, or a skit acted out by the teachers. Then, in order to further clarify the concept, the teachers broke students into two mixed ability groups and engaged in *parallel co-teaching* – each teacher taking half of the group in one of the adjoined classrooms. The groups then were further broken up into heterogeneous subgroups and instructed by the teacher, an instructional assistant, or a parent volunteer usually using centers where students could receive personalized attention as they were guided through a center activity. Cross-aged, older student helpers also were available to further clarify tough ideas for students one-on-one, as needed. If time permitted, teachers then reconvened students in larger groups to further clarify information learned in order to make pertinent generalizations adding to students' cumulative knowledge base.

#### *Application of Differentiation Guideline #2: Promoting Student Choice*

Another Tomlinson (1998; 2000; 2001; 2003) guideline is to strike a balance between assessment-driven teacher-assigned tasks and student choice. Independent of students' assessed competencies, the teachers consistently provided all students with choices. Since they embedded these choices within academic tasks that reflected goals pursuant to California State standards, no matter what a student's choice, it always addressed a standards-based goal.

*Application of Differentiation Guideline #3: Process-Based Student Supports*

A third of guideline from Tomlinson (1998; 2000; 2001; 2003) is for teachers to use critical and creative thinking in global lesson design to craft process-based student supports as needed. At Beinvenidos, the teachers followed through on this guideline by using California State standards and the material adopted by their school district as foundational planning tools. At first, the teachers complained about having to adhere to standards and use the adopted materials. However, as they became more proficient in differentiating for particular student needs, they became more fluent in their ability to critically and creatively plan to make the standards accessible to each student on each student's terms using adopted as well as other materials. The research-grounded, process-based supports which the teachers used with students included scaffolding, pairing of students with more proficient peers, cross-aged tutors, and differentiated materials (Santamaría et al., 2003). Paraprofessionals also became proficient in providing process-based supports for students. These individuals were central to the teachers' success, since they provided fluid supports, moving among the instructional spaces and interacting with students, student helpers, parent volunteers, and other adults, as needed.

*Application of Differentiation Guideline #4: Engaging All Students Through Varied Learning Tasks*

A fourth of Tomlinson's (1998; 2000; 2001; 2003) guidelines for differentiation is to engage all learners by varying learning tasks. Engaging all learners sounds almost cliché, but when one considers how to engage English learners, children with disabilities, and all the other learners in the class, there are many factors to consider. The language of instruction in this classroom was primarily English. To accommodate students who were learning English as well as the content knowledge differences of students with and without disabilities, the teachers encouraged and accepted many modes of demonstrating learning - oral responses, body language, visual artistic expression, and small group responses. For example, learning centers included visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile activities as well as traditional pen and paper tasks. Virtually every activity was scaffolded to accommodate student characteristics.

*Application of Differentiation Guideline #5: Use of Assessment as a Teaching Tool*

The last of Tomlinson's (1998; 2000; 2001; 2003) differentiation guidelines is to use assessment more as an ongoing teaching tool that extends rather than merely measures instruction. The co-teachers at Bienvenidos used assessment in this way. For instance, in large groups, they routinely asked questions of students to illicit known information on a given content area in order to assess learning prior to more formalized instruction. Later, in smaller center groups, the teachers continued ongoing assessment using observational checklists, one-on-one content area reviews, and brief periodic checkpoint data collection of Individual Educational Program (IEP) objectives for students eligible for special education. Each child with special needs also carried a communication journal back and forth between home and school in order to solicit parents' observations and actively involve parents in the formative assessment process of student learning. In these ways, the teachers obtained the information they needed in order to draw summative conclusions for report cards and annual IEP reviews as well as to inform future instructional decisions.

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*“Engaging all learners sounds almost cliché, but when one considers how to engage English learners, children with disabilities, and all the other learners in the class, there are many factors to consider.”*

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### Conclusion: But Not the End

“Never doubt that a small group of committed people can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Meade

This often-quoted statement of anthropologist Margaret Meade nicely summarizes the Bienvenidos Elementary School experience in terms of the hoped-for outcomes of the participants in this project. Clearly, at the micro-level, the classroom co-taught by general and special educators, paraprofessionals, student teachers, and university collaborators is the world for 42 students and the adults with them. This experiment has changed their world and their families' world. Further, the stories that the adults and students tell about this experiment are the chronicles with the potential of inspiring others to change their educational worlds. And collectively, over time, these islands of hope, where change has been initiated, may connect and become mainlands of opportunity where the norm rather than the exception is for students to learn together as one community.

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