

# **Creating Schools That Work**

*Promoting Excellence and Equity  
for a Democratic Society*



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## *The Six Principles of Whole Schooling*

**WE NEED NEW VISIONS OF SCHOOLING** to promote effective learning and a just society. The Whole Schooling Consortium links individuals and schools in work to build schools and classrooms based on **SIX PRINCIPLES** of Whole Schooling.:

- ❑ **Empowering citizens in a democracy.** The purpose of schooling should not be a test score but to help children become active, effective citizens for democracy. This means that sharing of power and decision-making is an integral part of the culture of a school at all levels – among staff, partnerships with parents and the community, and within classrooms.
- ❑ **Including all.** For a democracy to function, by definition, all children must be there. For students to learn well, to be prepared to function in a diverse society, they must be exposed to people with diverse characteristics. Thus, we seek schools in which All children learn together across culture, ethnicity, language, ability, gender, & age, where separate pull-out programs and ability grouping in the classroom are used seldom if at all.
- ❑ **Authentic, multi-level teaching.** For such schooling to work instruction cannot be monolithic and traditional one size fits all. Rather, we expect students to function at a range of ability levels, each being supported and encouraged to move to their next level of competence, yet without ability grouping or segregation. In such schools teachers design instruction for diverse learners that engages them in active learning in meaningful, real-world activities at multiple levels of ability, providing scaffolds and adaptations as needed.
- ❑ **Building community.** Effective schools that serve truly diverse students in authentic and democratic learning must work together to build a community and provide mutual support within the classroom and school. When students engage in behaviors that are challenging, staff understand that these are expressions of underlying needs of students and seek to help students find positive ways to meet their needs. Staff make commitments to caring for and supporting such students in their school.
- ❑ **Supporting learning.** Support in learning is needed by teachers and children alike. Schools use specialized school and community resources (special education, title I, gifted education) to strengthen the general education classroom. Support personnel collaborate with the general education instructor to include children with special needs in classroom activities and to design effective instruction for all students. They avoid ability grouping or teaching children at the back or side of the room. All struggle to provide proactive supports to meet needs of students with behavioral challenges.
- ❑ **Partnering.** Finally, educators cannot and should not seek to build such a school alone. In a Whole School, educators build genuine collaboration within the school and with families and the community; engage the school in strengthening the community; and provide guidance to engage students, parents, teachers, and others in decision-making and direction of learning & school activities.

For more information go to: <http://www.wholeschooling.net>

# **Creating Schools That Work**

## ***Promoting Excellence and Equity for a Democratic Society Through Whole Schooling***

In recent years, many people have called for an improvement in our nation's public schools, decrying the poor achievement of many students, particularly those from low-income communities, students with disabilities, and others who are at risk. Beginning with the trend-setting report, *A Nation at Risk* that set the stage for the Governor's Education conference called by George Bush senior, continuing the Goals 2000 legislation during the Clinton administration, and culminating most recently in the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) under George W. Bush, national policy and legislation has created goals to address this problematic situation.

Do America's schools need improvement? Virtually all analysts agree that they do. However, some challenge the proposal that America's schools have become suddenly worse or that, in fact, the United States is at a competitive disadvantage. But virtually all agree that students who are poor, have disabilities, are at risk, or highly able and gifted, simply don't receive education that meets their needs.

The passage of No Child Left Behind has particularly focused the national consciousness on this longstanding concern that too much of American education has been geared almost exclusively to the needs of a largely mythical average student who resides in a homogeneous, European-American, and relatively small middle-class community. While there has always been a wide spectrum of abilities in almost every classroom, the assumed "typical" student has become increasingly rare in recent years. Parents of students who are clearly not average have long pressed for greater attention to children across the spectrum of abilities ranging from gifted to cognitively disabled. NCLB acknowledges the existence of a greater range of diverse needs by placing explicit emphasis on students in demographic subgroups who tend to have relatively poor academic and life outcomes: members of some racial and ethnic groups, students with limited English language proficiency, students with disabilities, and students deemed "at-risk".

Over the years, many bills have been passed to address the needs of special groups. In 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children developed a revolutionary policy – that all students should be educated by public schools no matter the severity of their disability and that such education should be provided in the "least restrictive environment", the regular class being the preferred placement with supplementary services. Recent amendments of this Act, now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, have strengthened and clarified this legislation.

Different policy initiatives have taken somewhat different approaches to improving education. NCLB extended the standards movement begun under the Goals 2000 legislation, to focus on several interactive policy measures: (1) set 'standards' for each grade level -- in practice, lists of facts, information, and skills that children are expected to know or develop at various stages of their educational career, (2) establish standardized 'tests' of such standards from grades 3-8, (3) and providing repercussions for schools where students do not meet the required expectations as measured by the test that begin with letting parents know that their school is defined as a 'failing' school to dissolution and reconstitution of the school staff.

IDEA, on the other hand, centers its policies around the development of Individualized Educational Programs (IEP) for students with disabilities based on their needs, the expectation that additional services will be provided albeit in the 'least restrictive environment', the

assurance that parents have a right to due process when disagreements occur, and, most fundamental, that all students have the right to a ‘free and appropriate public education’.

For all the fanfare about identifying outcomes of learning (standards) and the accountability of schools to produce such outcomes, there has been relatively little discussion in policy about what effective schooling and teaching practices actually look like in a school and classroom. The closest to such a dialogue has occurred related to the development of early literacy, particularly reading, where direct instruction via phonemic awareness and phonics has won the short-term political war against those promoting more student-centered approaches for the development of critical literacy skills.

What is clear at this point is that if we want to create schools in which all children succeed to their highest abilities, then we must be about understanding what practices support such outcomes and what practices are detrimental. That has been the role of the work in what we have called “Whole Schooling” that began formally in 1997. This short paper seeks to describe how two types of schools look – one virtually designed to insure that many students fail, the other designed to build success for all, to create a culture that models how a community can work to support all its members. We start with the stories of six children, historical fiction stories drawn from real, concrete examples. .

### **Stories Of Six Kids**

Bill, Jill, and Phil went to the same school district, but were never in a single class together. Bill entered a school for children considered gifted in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and a tracked ‘high achievers’ program in middle and high school. Originally supportive, Bill’s parents became increasingly concerned about his problems in interacting with others and his disdain of those not as ‘smart’ as he was. Bill graduated from high school, went to Harvard and was shocked that he was not still ahead of most students. He fell into deep depression and shortly withdrew from school.

Jill was in separate special education classes for cognitively impaired students at the end of the hall her entire school career working year after year on her alphabet. She went into a sheltered workshop and group home when she graduated. Jill always wanted to be with other kids and her mother had finally convinced the school to try this in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. However, it didn’t work. “I couldn’t keep up,” explained Jill, “and the teacher didn’t want me there”.

Phil had a tough life. His dad was murdered when he was three and his mother couldn’t cope. They moved a lot from house to house. At grade 3 Phil was put in a program for students with emotional disturbance. He started skipping school a lot in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade and was in a self-contained program in middle school where his class was locked in one room the whole day, not permitted to interact with other students at all. The kids in the school called it the jail. At age 14 Phil dropped out of school, went from minimum wage job to job. At age 19 he was arrested for a burglary in which a shopkeeper was injured. By age 21 Phil was in prison with a 15-year sentence.

Our other three students had an amazingly different experience. Mary, Gary, and Larry went to school together their entire school career. They had good times and tough times but were close friends when they graduated from high school.

Mary was considered by the teachers in her elementary school to be one of the most able children they had ever known. In Mary’s schools teachers learned to teach at multiple levels and build a community of learners, involving students in studying complex problems of their community and country. Students in Mary’s classes often delighted in finding work that was

challenging for her or getting her to help explain complex information in ways they could understand. Later, when she was pursuing her MBA at Harvard or when she was working to start her own computer services marketing business, she thought back how much about management, sales, and communication she had learned with her peers. She was grateful.

Gary had a moderate cognitive impairment. He became particularly good friends with both Mary and Larry. He had difficulty speaking verbally though he communicated in many ways. He had a circle of friends who acted as something of a social club. They also helped the teacher figure out fun and practical ways for Gary to be learning in all the class activities. His circle that started in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade continued, with no staff support, throughout high school. By high school he had become very interested in politics and had a dream of working as an aide or welcomer to a legislator in Congress. He audited several courses on politics at a local university. As it turned out, one of Mary's friends dad was a representative from their small state. She met Gary when at Mary's house on Spring break. Her dad agreed for Gary to move to Washington and work in his office. Mary provided them advice on how to structure support for Gary at work. They accessed funding along with that provided by the legislator to provide additional needed assistance. Gary has become active in national advocacy groups for people with disabilities. He is having a ball and setting a model for people with cognitive disabilities.

Larry's life was hard. His parents worked long and hard hours. He saw them little. When he was in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade his parents were divorced in a bitter fight. Larry withdrew, became depressed, and lashed out violently at school. He moved in with his aunt who lived in a small manufactured home at the edge of town. Things didn't get much better at home though. His aunt had problems with drugs and alcohol and was frequently out of work.

It was amazing, however, what happened with Larry at school. Despite the problems he caused them, the adults at Larry's school created something of a blanket of protection around him and were afraid he would be taken to another school where he would be dealt with differently. They helped form a circle of friends for Larry as well, helped him think about his life, formed teacher to teacher partnerships to provide support in working with Larry. Larry responded bit by bit, pulling himself together. In high school he was on the honor roll and in an assembly received a standing ovation when given an award for a service project with older people in the community. After high school, Larry still struggled but kept in contact with Mary, Gary, and others in their circle. He went to a community college for a technical degree in computer repair. When Mary returned to town, he went to work for her. Both discovered that Larry had a talent for working with customers who were themselves undergoing stress.

Mary, Gary, and Larry, along with 3 other members of their circle, get together once a year for a reunion.

### **The Principles Of Schools *Designed To Leave Many Children Behind***

What do we make of these stories and the hundreds and thousands of additional stories modeled after them? Most centrally, schools and teachers *do make a difference*. However, because schools and teachers make a difference, we must pay very close attention to *what helps, and what hurts*.

Many schools, too many, use practices that assure that many children fail and are left behind. It is as if such schools systemically and explicitly developed a school deform plan, to use the language of James Kauffman, for that purpose. What are the principles that guide practices of

such schools? It's helpful to say them. They include:

1. *Demanding* compliance and obedience of staff and students.
2. *Segregating*, tracking, and ability grouping.
3. *Teaching to the middle* using one size fits all instruction.
4. Creating a culture of *pressure, tension, and competition*.
5. *Isolating* adults from one another and assuring *professional turf*.
6. Parents and educators *blaming* each other.

## **1. Cultures of tension and repression.**

It is well documented that in too many schools that serve low-income children, a culture of staff anger towards both children and parents is too often pervasive. Low expectations, difficulties with behavior management, problems with parental connections all contribute to problems in learning and effective relationships between parents, children, and school staff. In such cultures, the tendency is to use approaches that attempt to highly regulate and control the behavior of students in the school (Koshewa, 1999). Examples: in such schools students are expected to sit quietly at their desks and work, raise their hands to make simple movements in the class, in elementary school, students are marched in regulated lines from class to class; in high schools, security guards check students coming into school and periodically make sweeps and searches of lockers looking for prohibited items. The result is that in these schools democratic processes where students and staff alike have a sense of input, control, choice in their daily routines is limited or virtually non-existent (Anyon, 1997; Martella, Nelson & Marchand-Martella, 2003). A cycle of control and challenge is born that reduces dramatically learning about responsibility and citizenship, increases anger and the need of students to challenge what they see as repressive authority, and sets in place emotions and tensions that reduce learning (Apple, 1995; Caine & Caine, 1991). Such schools tend to have higher referral rates for special education, as segregation and exclusion are added as a tool of control (Fierros & Conroy, 2002). In schools across socio-economic spectrums, however, the norm of segregated special education classes is to limit also opportunities for choice, control, and power in the classroom with similar outcomes as in low-income schools. While the tone is one of beneficence and care, rather than repression, student initiative is often similarly impaired.

## **2. Segregation, exclusion, and isolation.**

Segregation and isolation create many problems for many students in schools. Low income minority students in urban areas are at higher risk for referral for special education and alternative schools are used for an increasing number of students who are considered have behavioral problems and are socially maladjusted. The President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education (2002) found substantive problems with the segregation of students with disabilities. One key finding was stated as follows (p. 42):

...This Commission . . . is deeply concerned that many children with severe disabilities, including those children with autism or emotional disturbance, are relegated to segregated educational settings simply because of their disability. Despite decades of successful inclusion of children with disabilities in regular schools . . . there are children with disabilities who are

still segregated simply because their disability creates difficulties in providing integrated educational experiences...

The Commission further directly stressed educating all students within general education settings, including those with severe disabilities.

*Major Recommendation 3: Consider children with disabilities as general education children first:* Special education and general education are treated as separate systems, but in fact share responsibility for the child with disabilities. In instruction, the systems must work together to provide effective teaching and ensure that those with additional needs benefit from strong teaching and instructional methods that should be offered to a child through general education. (p. 8)

Overrepresentation of students of color in special education has been relatedly recognized as a critical issue, a factor crucial in urban areas. Losen and Orfield's recent edited book (2002) clearly describes these patterns. As indicated in the figure, Black students are three times as likely to be labeled as having mental retardation and twice as likely to be labeled emotional disturbed than white students while far fewer such students are identified as gifted and talented than expected. Data shows that being served in special education does not lead to improved outcomes and that minority students are more likely than white students to be served in segregated educational settings (Fierros and Conroy, 2002).

### **3. Un-engaging, rote instruction: *One size fits all, no place for individual differences.***

Much instruction in schools, particularly those that serve low income students is un-engaging, rote, unauthentic with little recognition of or place for differences in abilities and learning styles. Haberman (1998, p. 6-7) described what he called the "pedagogy of poverty" used in too many urban classrooms with low income children and contrasted this with "good teaching", strategies that included involvement "with issues they regard as vital concerns, . . . involved with explanations of human differences, . . . helped to see major concepts, big ideas, and general principles and are not merely engaged in the pursuit of isolated facts, . . . applying ideals such as fairness, equity, or justice to their world, . . . actively involved in heterogeneous groups, . . . involved in redoing, polishing, or perfecting their work, involved in reflecting on their own lives and how they have come to believe and feel as they do". These themes reflect the broader summary by Zemelman, Daniels & Hyde (1998) in their cross-discipline analysis of best practice standards for teaching and learning of the major national professional educational organizations. These recommendations called for less rote learning, memorization of skills, lecture, and more active involvement in authentic learning projects in heterogeneous groups in which democratic leadership was both promoted and explicitly taught. Relatedly, the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education found that "while recent research has begun to determine critical factors in instruction, more high-quality research is needed on instructional variables that improve achievement by students with disabilities" (2000, p. 54).

Further, in virtually every classroom, there is a broad range of abilities and learning styles among the students, ranging from a minimum of three grade levels to as many as seven to eight in school serving different socio-economic groups. Yet, instruction in the pedagogy of poverty so well described by Haberman typically insists that all students be at 'grade level', thus ignoring the needs of a substantial number of students functioning both below and above that level.

Instruction that is multi-level, allowing all students, from those with severe mental retardation to students who are highly gifted to be challenged at their own level of ability provided proper supports and scaffolds and attention to their individualized learning styles.

#### **4. Places of isolation, tension, and competition.**

In too many schools, in both low income urban areas and high income suburbs, schools become places of competition, social sorting and ranking. Some schools actually institutionalize such dynamics by listing test scores in rank order of all students in the school. The growth of “zero tolerance” policies, particularly in low income urban schools is contributing to this dynamic. In an effort to create safe schools, such policies are becoming methods of expressing intolerance to and lack of concern with students who demonstrate behavioral challenges. Such school cultures minimize attention to helping students learn skills to deal with internal feelings of anger and hurt and interpersonal conflict (Ayers, Dohrn & Ayers, 2001; Lantieri & Patti, 1996). Brain-based research makes it clear that such settings create conditions in which the brain “down-shifts” into fight or flight, making learning difficult if not impossible (Caine & Caine, 1991).

What is needed instead is a school-wide focus on building a sense of community and care, using multiple strategies to assist students in providing help to one another and using positive behavioral support strategies, based on an ongoing commitment to challenging students, when difficulties occur. In his testimony to Congress, Sugai (2002) listed a number of basic features of systematic support for ensuring appropriate behavior in schools. Two of these were integration of academic and behavioral support for all students:

*The application of evidence based behavioral practices and systems promotes academic engagement and achievement, and the use of empirically supported instructional practices and systems promotes displays of prosocial student behavior and creates safe classroom and school settings.*

*All students in a school should have access to positive, preventive, structured, and on-going opportunities to learn, practice, and be acknowledged for displays of prosocial school-wide and individual social skills (p. 7).*

If schools are to work for all, students must receive instruction and support in social, emotional, and behavioral learning to support academic growth. For such individual learning to occur, a community of learners in the truest sense is necessary to provide a context and environment in which such learning is part of the day-to-day, minute-to-minute experience.

#### **5. Lack of support for teachers and students.**

If schools are to be successful, a professional community of support among teachers is necessary as well. Typically, teaching is an isolated and isolating profession. This is particularly problematic when teachers are dealing with children with many life challenges. If teachers do not have support in the class, forums for dialogue, communication, sharing, and problem-solving, it is all too easy for frustrations to develop and students with high needs to become targets (Evans, Lunt, Wedell & Dyson, 1999; Idol, 1997; Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin and Willaims, 2000). In many urban schools, as is the case in most schools in the Detroit area, specialized

resources are used for special classes and schools or pull-out resources rooms, further isolating students and providing general education teachers little help and assistance, thus contributing to problematic dynamics discussed above (Detroit Public Schools, 2002).

## 6. Mutual blame: *Parents and educators.*

Finally, in too many schools serving low-income children, substantial tension and poor relationships too often exist between parents and the school. Educators blame parents for their lack of interest in their children. Parents blame teachers for not helping their children learn. Epstein (1994) and others have documented the critical importance of developing partnerships with parents. These same dynamics often play out with parents of students with disabilities across socio-economic groups (Fagano & Weerber, 1994; Hildebrand, Phenice, Gray & Hines, 2000; Taylor, 1997). The lack of instruction at multiple levels, commitment of educators to helping students with emotional and behavioral challenges, the tendency to be critical and refer students to segregated special education programs all contribute to conflict and alienation between educators and parents of students with disabilities. Again, the interests of both NCLB and IDEA have the potential to coincide.

### Schools for All *Thrusting All Children Ahead in a Culture of Care*

An approach to school renewal and teacher development is desperately needed that addresses these issues and incorporates knowledge concerning effective instruction and schooling in which children of substantial differences learn together well, instruction that



incorporates understanding of disability, ethnic and cultural diversity, and challenges of children who live in poverty, a process of school reform in which effective instruction, response to diversity, and inclusive education are central, rather than peripheral components (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1998; Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

To date, many approaches to school reform have been developed and utilized. However, none address all of these needs. While some approaches

are conducive to teaching with learning differences and abilities together, such as the Coalition for Essential Schools and Accelerated Schools, none explicitly address issues of segregation and the restructuring of support services needed in an effective inclusive school (Lipsky. & Gartner, 1997). Further, none systematically and explicitly address approaches to inclusive, multi-level instruction designed to help all children achieve at their highest levels.

Some approaches provide exemplary focus in some areas but are devoid in others. For example, the Comer School Development (Comer, 1997) approach addresses parent engagement and professional team assistance to children but does not approach the issues of

segregation or instruction. Most models focus on instructional approaches but avoid other critical elements. Recent trends in the standards movement, in fact, virtually ignore the nature and structure of instruction and classroom and school culture and climate in establishing conditions conducive for learning. On the other hand, the extensive work done in helping schools to move towards inclusive education have not provided a more comprehensive process to address improvement of schooling and teaching practices for all learners in the school. The result is too often that overall school improvement and inclusive education are seen as parallel processes (Lipsky. & Gartner, 1997).

These are serious deficits. If we are to create schools where the goals of both NCLB and IDEA are met, we need models that pull these critical elements together. To do so, however, we must develop schools and classroom practice that are designed for diversity from the beginning, what Das and Stein (2003) describe as “Universal Education”.

Based on our work to date, we are convinced that it is truly possible to develop school renewal and improvement processes that create effective schools for all and simultaneously meet the goals of NCLB and IDEA. Beginning in 1997, faculty, teachers, and parents joined together to create an approach designed to respond to the needs discussed above that has been called Whole Schooling. In the Whole Schooling Research Project (Peterson, Tamor, Feen, and Silagy, 2002) we observed inclusive classrooms and school practices in which students with disabilities, from low-income families, and at risk learned together with high levels of challenge, support, and achievement. It is these practices that we have worked to capture in the Whole Schooling approach to school renewal and teacher development. This project will further develop, implement, and evaluate Whole Schooling as an effective model for inclusive urban school renewal leading to effective practices for children targeted both by NCLB and IDEA.

**Six Principles: *A framework for self-assessment and change.***

After several years of work, *six principles* form the foundation of the Whole Schooling approach to effective schooling and teaching that represent a simple but comprehensive synthesis of a broad range of scientific research on practices regarding schooling and classroom practices designed to maximize learning at high levels. Each of these principles, we have found, is interactive and mutually reinforcing.

<b>Principles of Schools Designed to Leave Many Children Behind.</b>	<b>Whole Schooling Principles: Supporting All Children to meet the <i>goals</i> of NCLB &amp; IDEA,</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Demanding compliance &amp; obedience <i>of staff &amp; students.</i></li> <li>2. Segregating, tracking, and ability grouping.</li> <li>3. Teaching to the middle <i>using one size fits all instruction.</i></li> <li>4. Creating a culture of pressure, tension, and competition.</li> <li>5. Isolating adults and assuring professional turf.</li> <li>6. Blaming one another.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Empowering citizens in a democracy</li> <li>2. Including all in learning well together.</li> <li>3. Providing authentic multilevel instruction</li> <li>4. Building community.</li> <li>5. Supporting learning.</li> <li>6. Partnering with parents and the community.</li> </ol>

As illustrated above and discussed below, key concepts of Whole Schooling include the following:

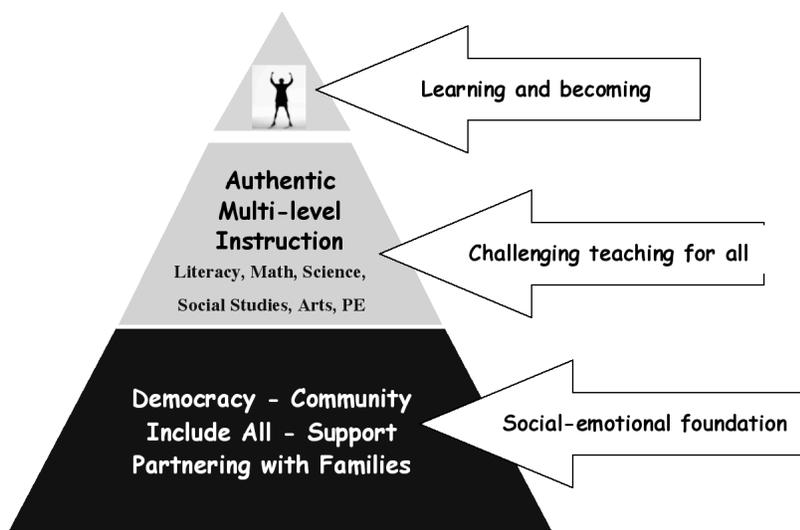
- The central purpose of public education is preparation of citizens to maintain and improve our democracy
- Education must meet the needs of all individual students in a learning community without barriers between special and general education, or between other subgroups
- Educational for students with disabilities is the “canary in the coalmine” of education and efforts at inclusion of all such students can serve as a catalyst for building-wide school renewal
- Accountability is important but needs to be defined and measured in ways that promote effective, inclusive teaching and building of supportive school communities.

Most critically, Whole Schooling focuses on creating a learning environment that is conducive to learning and growth. We know that for learning to occur, a foundation must be laid upon which cognitive development can be built. Such a foundation centers in having a place where the child

feels safe, accepted, a sense of belonging, and cared for.

Including heterogeneous students in classes together is a critical component of this foundation as is the practice of democracy, systematic sharing of power within the school and classroom. Support to teachers and students and partnering with parents and the community helps fill out the picture of social, emotional, physical and cognitive support needed for high levels of achievement.

While the language of school focuses primarily on instruction and the academic subjects of school – reading, writing, math, science and



more, without attention to these foundation building blocks, learning will falter. These relationships are illustrated in the graphic above. Following, we describe how each of these principles play out in concrete situations in schools including an approach to cognitive instruction that builds on the social-emotional foundation to provide challenging teaching for all, beginning where are child is functioning and providing support to go to the next level of competence.

## **1. Empowering citizens in a democracy.**

In the United States, the oft stated purpose of schools, imbedded in federal legislation and found in most mission statements of school systems, is to create thinking citizens who can make decisions and effectively engage in multiple adult roles – community leader, parent, worker. If this is so, research demonstrates clearly that classroom practice must systematically and explicitly provides students the opportunity to make choices, solve problems among a group, develop consensus, and deal with conflict. In such classrooms, students of great differences can all have an effective voice, students are motivated to learn as they develop a sense of ownership of a classroom community, and students are allowed and taught how to use power in their personal lives. Particularly for students with many life challenges who may have little control in their home lives, giving students power and control in the classroom can both prevent problematic behaviors and promote higher levels of learning (Apple, 1995; Oylar, 1996).

A school that seeks to prepare children to be citizens in a democracy must imbed the living and modeling of democracy. What is critical in this process are these three elements that must be at the foundation of the decision making process of the school.

**Leadership.** A whole school is first and foremost built on a vision of what is good for children. Staff care more about children than about their place and power in the school bureaucracy and their salary raise this coming year. These are important, of course. The needs of staff are critical. Yet, all is driven by a vision of what helps children.

**Democracy.** School leadership must be foremost in helping to impel a vision for children ahead. However, all school staff, parents, and children themselves must have a voice in creating an inclusive culture in a school if it is to survive.

**Empowerment.** Similarly, all in the school must be empowered to take action to make the vision of an inclusive school real. Power must not only be in the ‘office’ and principal, but all work towards this goal.

## **2. Including all students in learning together.**

For high levels of learning to occur for all students, developing inclusive classrooms is necessary, not optional. The literature is clear that for students with and without disabilities, integrated and inclusive classes are associated with higher levels of academic achievement (Baker, Wang & Walberg, 1994; Moore, Gilbreath & Maiuri, 1998; Peterson & Hittie, 2003). Orfield and Gordon (2001) note that for students to become effective leaders in a multi-cultural society, schooling must provide opportunities to engaging students with diverse racial, ethnic and ability characteristics. The sense of community and social safety promoted in inclusive classes, respect for diverse abilities and characteristics, provides an emotional foundation that allows



brain functioning at the highest levels, preventing the downward shifts when fear and rejection are prevalent. Diversity represented in inclusive classrooms provides a stimulus and challenge to deep thinking that occurs less in segregated classes (McLaughlin & Rouse, 2000).

The school and staff together make a commitment that all students should be welcomed into the school and that teachers and other staff will work to have inclusive classes, heterogeneously grouped where students who are gifted through severely disabled learn, play, and work together.

For this to occur and become part of the culture of the school, the total staff must be committed to this as a value for children, be able to articulate the reasons for their belief, be willing to defend this practice against detractors, and be willing to struggle, learn, and seek answers when it doesn't seem to be working for a particular child.

In most schools, this will mean a shifting special education, gifted, at risk, and other students from separate classes into general education; identifying the students who are presently in separate special education, gifted, or other schools who would typically attend our school and invite them back; and redesigning the role of specialists to provide support for inclusive teaching (see below).

*We would not see* children in ability groups in class or children with special needs (learning disabilities, gifted, etc.) clustered in general education classes.

### **3. Providing authentic, multi-level instruction for diverse learners.**

Students with labels ranging from highly gifted to severely cognitively impaired bring a very wide range of abilities to classrooms. While traditional practice has promoted segregating and sorting students by presumed ability levels, the literature is clear that heterogeneous grouping within and across classes promotes higher levels of learning for all involved. For inclusive classrooms to function effectively, however, teachers must shift from monolithic, one level instruction to instruction intentionally designed for students with differing ability levels to learn together well. A growing literature is developing regarding such authentic, multi-level and differentiated instruction that documents such instructional strategies (Armstrong, 1994; Peterson, Tamor, Feen and Silagy, 2002; Tomlinson, 1999).

Schools are typically structured along grade levels and teach using standardized materials as if all children in a particular grade were at the same level. The reality, however, is that any class, whether attempting to be inclusive or not, contains children functioning at 3-6 grade levels apart.

Inclusive schools, and the teachers and staff within them, embrace this diversity of ability and make it part of the design of instruction. Rather than designing instruction around a narrow span of abilities, inclusive teachers design their teaching intentionally allowing for students to be at multiple levels of ability. The idea, however, is not to 'make it easier for those kids who aren't at grade level'. Rather, effective teachers . . .

- ❑ Design lessons at multiple levels
- ❑ That challenge students at their own level (zone of proximal development)
- ❑ Provide support and scaffolding so children can push ahead to their own next level of learning.
- ❑ Using authentic teaching strategies that engage children in learning via activities that relate to their lives at home and in the community, that connect to the real world

- ❑ Engaging the multiple intelligences and learning styles of children so that multiple pathways for learning and demonstrating achievement are availed.
- ❑ Involving students in collaborative, pair or group work where they draw on each other's strengths.

Schools in which teachers teach in this way have few children whose needs are not met. However, since staff are constantly learning, never getting it quite right all the time, there will often be children for whom teaching is not working. Staff then figure a range of *adaptations* to the curriculum, paying attention to what works and how this might be incorporated next time into an overall teaching strategy.



#### **4. Building community and meeting the needs of children with behavioral challenges.**

Brain research has clearly documented the importance for learning of a sense of emotional safety and support. As Caine and Caine (1991) state, for effective learning to occur students must experience a “relaxed state of alertness”. Alertness is promoting by instruction that is engaging and at the level of the learner while a “relaxed state” occurs when a student feels a sense of belonging in the group, caring by the teacher, acceptance by other students, and a lack of anger, tension, competition, or humiliation. Numerous concrete strategies have been documented that have shown substantial impact on a sense of community in the classroom and subsequent impacts on learning

(Sergiovanni, 1994; Peterson, 1992; Thousand, Villa and Nevin, 1994). In a classroom and school that systemically builds a community of learners many behavioral problems are prevented. However, many students with high needs continue to challenge teachers. Positive behavioral support strategies have been proven valuable in helping such students develop alternative means for having their needs met (Lantieri & Patti, 1996; Sugai, 2002). Therefore, building community in the school is critical. This involves many dimensions:

- ❑ Collaborative, supportive, respectful relationships among staff, parents, the community – study groups, school teams that focus on different issues, team teaching, etc.
- ❑ Building structures in the classroom among children so they know one another help one another – peer partners, circles of support, peacemakers (a program for conflict resolution where children are taught to resolve conflicts among one another under teacher supervision and guidance), sharing of lives and feelings in talk, writing, the arts, class meetings, and more.
- ❑ Giving children choices and teaching them responsibility for choices – for example, children going to the bathroom on their own (rather than a whole group lined up), selecting among several classroom activities, allowing students to sit, stand, move around, lay on the floor, etc, as they study or work together.

In such a school, ‘behavior problems’ are much less frequent. Children feel cared for, have choices, do not feel constrained, and yet are intentionally taught responsibility in the process. However, given the problems children have in their lives, students will still cause problems and staff seek to respect children and develop proactive solutions.

Rather than viewing children as needing to be ‘controlled’, teachers understand that all behavior communicates a message. When a child ‘acts out’, this is his or her way of telling staff about something they need. The challenge is to help figure out what that need is and to help them learn alternative strategies for meeting it. Glasser described five needs of human beings that can provide a way to understand children: (1) survival, (2) love and belonging, (3) power, (4) fun, (5) freedom. Most often, schools ignore many of these needs and actually *create behavior problems* in their attempt to thwart children having these needs met. The goal in an inclusive school is to create a school culture and specific strategies that help students meet their needs in positive ways. But what do staff in an inclusive school DO? Here are some simple but powerful steps.

Step 1: Clarify the behavior that is a problem. It’s also helpful to figure out *why* the behavior is *considered* a problem. Are rules too rigid? Are children treated poorly so that they are responding in kind? What can be done to help meet Glasser’s Five Needs?

Step 2. Why is the behavior occurring? What need does the behavior signal? These are the questions underlying a good ‘functional assessment’. They are critical for only by answering them do we understand the child and develop a way to meet needs. Other parts of this may involve analysis of the following questions: What occurs before, during, and after the problematic behavior? What is going on in the child’s life?

Step 3. Develop strategies to meet the needs of the child in more positive ways. Develop these ideas *with* the child. Help the child to understand that the behavior is not good, we understand and care, but there are other ways he can get what he needs. Develop an action plan, do it, evaluate it.

Step 4. Evaluate how well the change worked. How do we know? Traditionally, we know an intervention worked if the problematic behavior went away. In this case, the strategies only worked *if the needs of the child were met*. Who determines this? The child.

School staff can do other things to deal with problematic behavior in a positive way. Some of these include:

- ❑ Dialogue and joint planning with the parents.
- ❑ Create a room where the child can go, under supervision, when he ‘needs a break’ to deal with emotional stress. This can be the library, a support room, a secluded place in the class (like under the teacher’s desk).
- ❑ Build social support for the child. Get a circle of support together of classmates who together plan with the child and teacher, using MAPS for example, how to help him or her.
- ❑ Do a “Meeting Needs Audit” of the total school to determine how well the school is meeting the five needs identified by Glasser for children in the building. Develop a range of activities that may address discrepancies.

## 5. Supporting learning.

In a school committed to high levels of learning for all students, research has shown that specialists and support staff develop an effective, collaborative, trans-disciplinary support system for teachers, students, and families. Such schools use specialized school and community resources (special education, title I, gifted education) to strengthen the general education classroom, developing support teams to assist with academic, social, and medical needs (Evans, Lunt, Wedell & Dyson, 1999; Idol, 1997; Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin and Willaims, 2000).

Supporting teachers in working with students at multiple ability levels, who have emotional and social challenges in their lives is critical. This is particularly important as the shift towards building an inclusive culture in the school is occurring. Teachers who are used to trying to teach at only one level have difficulty figuring out how to teach at multiple levels. Even teachers who do this well sometimes don't know that they do or what is multi-level and what is not.

A range of specialists are available to most schools to deal with special needs and problems of children – social workers, special education teachers, bilingual teachers, psychologists, nurses, occupational therapists, speech therapists, and others. In a traditional school, most of these people work on their own with limited consultation with others and pull children out of class for various services.

In an effective school, however, specialists work to support the general education classroom teacher. Further they work as a *team*.

Special education teachers play an important role in an inclusive school. How this role develops, however, can vary dramatically depending upon philosophy and purpose. Four roles are emerging out of research related to in-class special education support by teachers and aides.



1. Remediation or enrichment – the goal is to ‘fix’ the child or ‘enrich’ the child’s experience, often in pull-out classes or one on one work in the back of the general education class;
2. Adapting – teaching strategies are not questioned and if the ability of the child does not match requirements, curriculum adaptations are developed – eg. different worksheets, less work, more time to do work.
3. Inclusive, multi-level, authentic teaching. Here the support teacher and general education teacher work together to design lessons that engage children at multiple levels.
4. Teacher need. In this situation, a support teacher provides assistance to the teacher in strengthening or areas of relative need in the teacher’s repertoire. This might include helping the teacher to learn skills in literacy, science by developing a lesson and teaching it.

In quality schools, we put our focus on #'s 3 and 4. #1 has little place. #2 will be needed little as teachers learn how to teach starting from children’s present abilities and strengths. In this way of working we might see:

- ❑ The support team meeting weekly together to talk about children with special problems and needs and brainstorm together how to deal with the issue.
- ❑ Scheduled meetings at least every two weeks between the general education teacher and the specialists who are providing support in the classroom to develop plans on teaching together and address concerns of specific children.
- ❑ Special education teachers (Inclusive Support Teachers) assigned to several rooms where they collaborate with teachers. When we observe the room we would see the teacher or aide working with all the students in the class while assuring that the students with special needs were receiving the help they need. The special education and general education teacher would work together with each taking responsibility for all students.
- ❑ General education teacher along with specialists – special education teacher, aide, speech therapist, social worker – working together with small groups of children who are working on different projects – centers, inquiry projects, and more.



*We would NOT see.*

- ❑ An aide at the back of the class with a student with a disability,
- ❑ An aide or teacher sitting constantly with a student with a disability clearly working only with him.
- ❑ Students in ability groups working with the special education teacher.
- ❑ A student with special needs separated from the rest of the class.

## **6. Partnering with parents and the community.**

Finally, research has demonstrated the critical importance of developing meaningful partnerships with parents and connecting the school to community resources. Whole Schooling recognizes the need to

develop multiple strategies to reach out to parents, bringing them into the life of the school and the classroom in meaningful ways, listening to their input regarding their children, developing collaborative instructional and support strategies. All this begins, of course, with simply welcoming all children into the class. Further partnerships are needed in an effective school that link with community resources, on the one hand, and use the resources and learning activities of the school, on the other hand, to strengthen the local community ((Fagano & Weerber, 1994; Hildebrand, Phenice, Gray& Hines, 2000; Taylor, 1997).

Parents of children with special needs have typically gone through much with their children. In traditional schools, these parents receive much negative feedback from the school. Their children are rejected and ‘sent away’ to special education classes or separate schools.

In a whole school, however, we turn this around by the following actions:

- ❑ Parents are *immediately* invited to have their children in inclusive classes.

- ❑ Meeting with and listening carefully to what parents have to tell us about their children. We seek to understand the child's gifts, strengths, and needs, strategies that work, and interests of the child from the parent.
- ❑ Welcoming their child into our classes. We communicate that we want their child in our school and obtain their input for his or her educational plan.
- ❑ Invite the parent into the school and class. Make them welcome and a part of the school family and community.
- ❑ Insure that they are involved in the full life of the school.

*We would NOT see:*

- ❑ Parents who must fight to have their children included in general education classes in the school.
- ❑ Separate PTA for parents of children with special needs.
- ❑ Special nights just for children with special needs. They will be fully included in any after school program or activity.
- ❑ Teachers sending constant negative notes home to children without balancing this with positive communications.

### **Conclusion**

We know so much now about how children learn, about how to build a community, how to help children with significant emotional and behavioral challenges. But our challenges and problems are also many. We hope that we will work together to move beyond repression, punishment, rejection, boredom, and isolation to create schools that lead to communities which are empowering, democratic, inclusive, engaging, all based on a sense of community, partnership, support, and care.

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