WHOLE SCHOOLING RESEARCH PROJECT

III. MICHIGAN TEAM SUMMARY FINDINGS

The Five Principles Of Whole Schooling

From one perspective, the Whole Schooling Research project has validated the Whole Schooling framework as a comprehensive, valuable way to understand how school cultures are built where all children are included in a learning process, and the ways in which children are excluded and their learning diminished. We have come to understand just how interactive are the different principles and practices of whole schooling.

From another perspective, our research has served to clarify, deepen, and sharpen our understanding of philosophies and practices that support inclusive schooling, deepening our original understanding of the principles of Whole Schooling, suggesting additional considerations that build on and strengthen the original framework. Our research data point to the centrality and importance of democracy at multiple levels, particularly school-wide and classroom practices in creating inclusive schools. We have come to believe that building an inclusive school is impossible unless staff collaborate democratically and also promote democracy among students. Two key components, however, may need to be made explicit in the next articulation of the Whole Schooling principles, though they can be considered reasonable parts of existing principles: (1) design and use of space in the class and the school, including the use of assistive technology, and (2) assessment of student learning.

Interactions
Inclusive Education and Schooling Practices

Inclusive education is not a matter of having one or two children with disabilities, even significant disabilities, be 'included' successfully in a school over one or more years. The key is moving beyond such isolated happenings, often born of the influence of persistent parents, to build a culture of inclusive schooling.

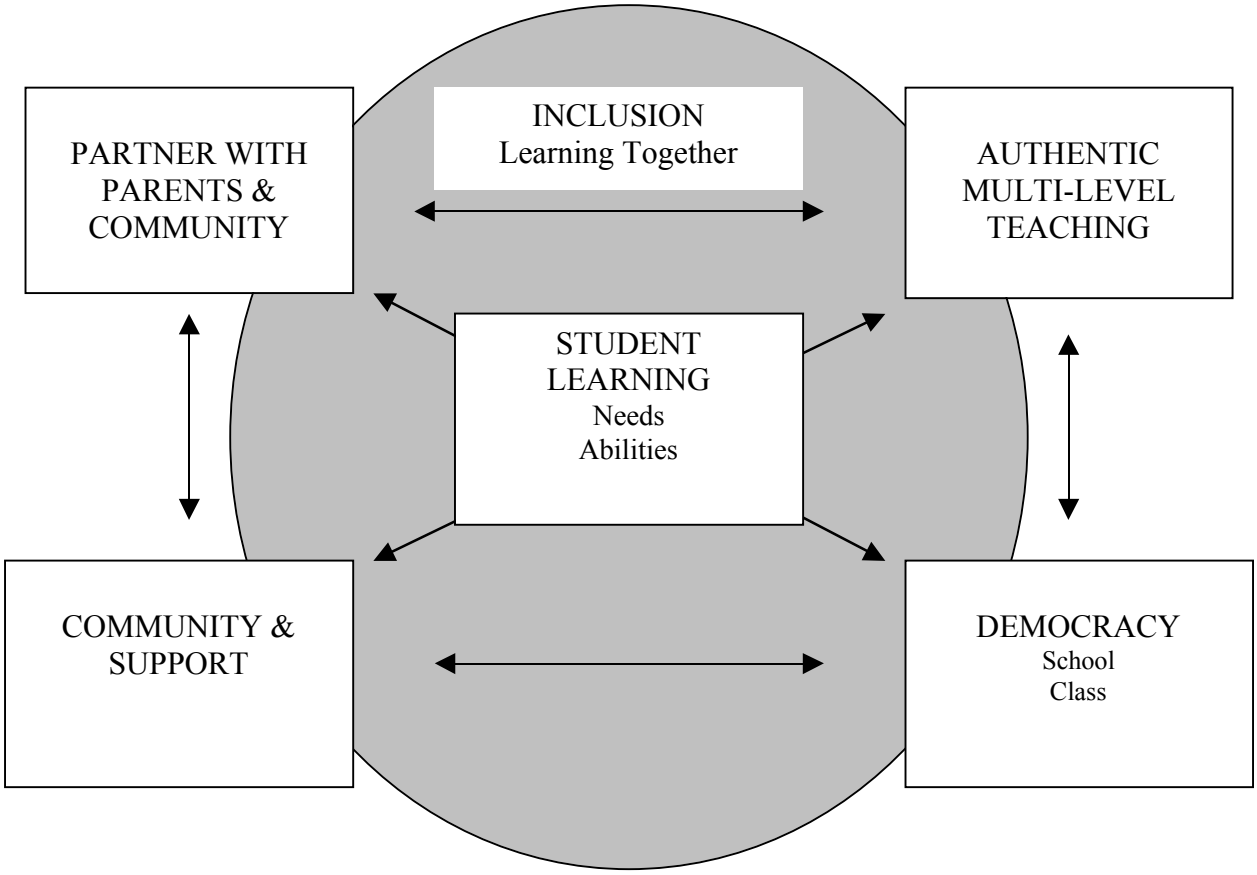
The Five Principles of Whole Schooling have both formed a hypothesis and a lens for seeking to observe complexities of schools. As cultures in schools are formed, two focal points

are key: (1) interactions, patterns, or ways of being that pervade *the total school* – sometimes administrative actions that affect all members of the school community or the structure of support services across the building; at other times, norms of behavior, understood language, mannerisms and ways of talking among teachers, all of which constitute what we would call a 'culture' in a school; and (2) similarly, the way in which teachers, students, parents, and others interact in an *individual classroom*.

Inclusive schooling is a function of the interactions of philosophy, attitude, and practice associated with what we have called the five principles of Whole Schooling. This dynamic interaction is illustrated in the graphic below. Approaches to teaching, partnering with parents, support, dynamics of decision-making and sharing of power, and the building of community in the classroom and school all work together in ways that either supports or hinders students with diverse abilities and needs learning together. This conclusion contradicts the prevalent view that characteristics of the individual student are considered as the 'fault' and 'reason' for the lack of inclusion. To put it simply, in a genuinely inclusive school, there is no such thing as a student with a disability who is an "inclusion student"; rather, teachers build classroom learning communities where <u>all</u> students are "inclusion students".

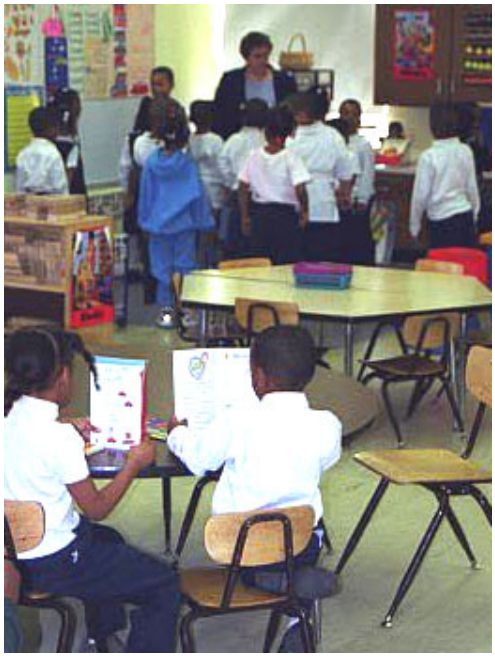
The interactions of what occurs in the classroom and what occurs throughout the school and the local community are complex, but very real. As we explore effective practices in schools for all children, we will constantly attend to these interactions. The chart illustrates graphically this interaction.

Table III – 1: Elements of an Inclusive School and Classroom



Inclusive education is highly influenced by race and class. Specifically, the lower the socio-economic group, the higher the concentration of children of color, the more likely that segregated educational options are the norm, and the more behavioral concerns lead to exclusionary practices. It has been most difficult to identify schools with significant numbers of children of color who have any close approximation of Whole Schooling practices. Except for the schools actually included in the study, the small handful of such schools who nominated themselves engaged in pull-out practices and very retrogressive curriculum practices – heavy reliance on worksheets, straight rows or desks, control of behavior, and major emphasis on keeping students quiet and in their seats. Even in these schools, we found evidence of tracking by perceived ability level.

Effective inclusive education of students with disabilities, mild through severe, depends upon the effectiveness of three key interacting variables: (1) authentic, multi-level teaching, (2) support for teachers and students by other adults in the classroom; and (3) the building of community and student-to-student social structures in the classrooms.



Several corollary findings are further evident. The best practices associated with each of the Five Principles of Whole Schooling are mutually reinforcing. For example, authentic, multi-level instruction virtually requires effective community building and peer support where adult support strengthens both.

However, in some cases there are interactive trade-offs. For example, in some situations adult support was so strong that children were given little opportunity, modeling, or instruction in learning how to work with and help one another in a learning process. It is notable that in such instances there often was a reliance on ability grouping, moving away from multi-level teaching. Such strong adult support led to "inclusive" ability groups within the classroom, but a failure of inclusion with respect to the total classroom community.

In general, educators cannot articulate solid philosophies about learning and teaching. This is even more true with respect to inclusion. Teachers have often not thought deeply about why it should or should not be pursued and who suffers if we do not we do not pursue it. In other cases, the comfort level of adults is valued above possibilities for children. The inclusive philosophy felt very fragile, even in most schools with a strong to inclusive education There is a crying need for theoretical and philosophical grounding of teachers that will allow them to look at what is, evaluate it, and develop practices based upon a philosophy that is coherent and consistent.

On the other hand, we also saw evidence that when inclusive education, at whatever level, becomes established as part of the operating structure of the school, even when political dynamics shift these structures may remain relatively stable. That is to say, once inclusion becomes part of a school culture, significant changes such as a change in school leadership, will not necessarily mean a loss inclusive practices, at least in the short run.

In most of the schools we studied, the identification rate of students with disabilities was substantially lower than the state and national norms. School staff expressed a belief that this was

due to effective instruction, in many cases providing exemplars of authentic multi-level instruction, and effective support services in the general education classroom, where individualized help was not dependent upon evaluation and labeling.

Most of the schools that we visited were successfully including students with mild disabilities in general education classes with various models of collaboration and support between general and special education. The greatest difference among schools we saw was their approach to students with moderate to severe disabilities.

In some cases, school districts had adopted board level policies promoting inclusion. In these school districts, however, the school district special education practices seem to have remained very segregated, despite this policy, particularly for students with moderate to severe disabilities. In most schools, students with moderate to severe disabilities were most often educated in segregated classes. Where we saw students with moderate to severe disabilities in general education classrooms, it was typically a result of exceptional advocacy by a parent on behalf of his or her child.

Teachers beliefs and willingness to risk inclusion comes from within, often based on personal experiences of abuse, close family connections to people with disabilities, and other factors apart from their training and experience as teachers. For example, one teacher had many years ago adopted a child with autism and learned gentle teaching strategies that enriched her teacher. Another teacher was abused as a child and articulated a life-long mission to "heal children".

Democracy, Leadership, And Inclusive Education

Schools whose inclusive efforts are motivated primarily by social justice concerns tend to be more successful and resilient than those who view inclusion as a special education program. Commitment to a democratic school environment creates healthy tensions in the effort to establish and maintain strong leadership while at the same time instilling personal empowerment in all members of the school community. A wide variety of leadership and teaching styles can support schools and classrooms operating within the Whole Schooling framework. However, regardless of those styles, creation of a professional community climate where colleagues routinely confer about educational practices and beliefs is a major challenge.

Authentic, Multi-Level Teaching

A major impediment to effective schooling for all children and youth, and to the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education, is instruction that presumes that all students are, or should be, on what has come to be called 'grade level'. Such instruction aimed exclusively at a sometimes imaginary "average student" insures that both academically able students and students with greater cognitive limitations will not be taught effectively.

In schools seeking to be inclusive, educators are trying different strategies to deal with ability differences within the general education classroom, rather than segregating students according to intellectual or academic ability. These strategies include stable ability grouping (within and across classes), adapting curriculum, differentiated instruction, and what we have termed authentic multi-level teaching. We were concerned as we saw teachers grouping children within the class by presumed abilities, thus re-recreating segregation within the classroom. Adapting curriculum, while a move in a more inclusive direction, assumes that the existing curricular goals, methods, and outcomes are established and that individualized adaptations are the only route to teaching a broader range of students.

Observing teachers who were highly effective at instructing students with vastly differing levels of ability together made us conceptualize a different way of thinking about dealing with difference – designing lessons from the beginning that would allow students to work together on common projects, but at their own level of ability. Such effective instruction was always centered on authentic, meaningful, relevant tasks rather than direct skills instruction or simulated activities designed to appear authentic but which were actually contrived for schoolwork with no effort to insure student ownership of the task.

Through observations and almost two years of dialogue forums with a small group of teachers, we were able to sketch out principles and key instructional strategies for authentic

Table III-2: Designing for Diversity
Domains And Individualized Adaptations

	Academic	**Emotional/ Behavioral**	**Physical**
Authentic, Multi-Level Learning	Authentic instruction Project learning Micro-society Multiple intelligences	Build community Promote caring Encourage friendships. Teach social skills and "emotional intelligence"	Heterogeneous grouping. Space for wheelchairs Use multiple learning modalities
Adapting	Advanced projects Use drama to teach social studies. Provide additional help and support. Read stories to students with reading difficulties.	Identify interests. Understand needs & communication. Provide positive alternatives. Peer support. Circles of friends.	Talking computer for a blind student. Rearrange books so student in wheelchair can reach them.
Evaluate & Revise	Incorporate drama and art in all subjects.	Use circles of friends to build community.	Use talking computers for all students.

multi-level teaching, as well as to provide examples from a variety of classrooms. Combined with strategies to build community in a classroom where students assist, collaborate with, and encourage one another, and specialized support services from professionals working as a team to assist classroom teachers, authentic multi-level instruction holds great promise for creating

classrooms where all children are challenged at their own ability levels while learning to work as a heterogeneous, inclusive community.

While we have sketched strategies for authentic multi-level teaching and have documented many examples, much needs to be done to investigate this broad approach in greater detail, including connecting with the professional teaching standards put forth by the national professional educational organizations, creating guidelines across grade levels and educational disciplines, and collecting more detailed examples across the full range of curricular activities.

Building Community
Responding Pro-actively to Social and Behavioral Needs

Effective teachers put much energy into building a sense of community in their classrooms. Effective schools support teachers in this process and engage in school-wide efforts to reinforce community, making parents and children feel welcome, facilitating mutual support and encouragement to staff. Community building occurs through a wide range of strategies that are interactive with and complementary to academic instruction and learning. As one teacher said, "We teach academics through community and build community through academics". Clearly, schools and classrooms in which community is built provide an environment that is more conducive to the mental health of children, thus helping to prevent emotional and behavioral difficulties and providing a range of pro-active approaches when problematic behavior occurs.

Pro-active approaches to dealing with behavioral challenges that support ongoing inclusion are founded on a solid commitment to all children and a philosophy of inclusion. When a culture of commitment to children with high emotional needs is not established, pressure to remove such children grows, serving to weaken overall community in the building, moving the culture of the school from community towards punishment and rejection. This dynamic is heightened in schools with many lower income children and children of color.

Schools and teachers who are committed to keeping children in their classrooms and buildings develop a wide range of strategies to make this happen, building on the strengths of the students, and providing support to both student and staff. School-wide strategies include child-study teams that focus their energy on positive strategy development rather than documentation for exclusion, use of specialists and paraprofessionals to provide support to the teacher in a team effort, and crisis teams that are on call as needed when situations arise that the teacher cannot handle. Classroom-based strategies include engagement of children in problem-solving with adult support through classroom meetings; teacher to student dialogue and peer mediators; focus on helping children think about their behavior and learning different ways to handle their emotions or express their needs, rather than on control, punishments or rewards; looking at student behavior as expression of student needs and seeking

ways to meet those needs; seeing through the problematic behaviors to the humanity of the student and seeking to build on the student's strengths.

Teachers who were strong community builders were more likely to struggle to support and include students with challenging behaviors than teachers who sought to manage their classes through control, punishment, and rewards. However, this linkage was not automatic and depended upon the teacher's development of a philosophical commitment to inclusion. In this domain, as well as others, the dynamics that helped to create such a commitment were not clear.

Support in the Inclusive School

Support by adults is most effective when it occurs in the general education classroom and aids the general education teachers both in developing effective, authentic, multi-level instruction for all students and in helping to problem-solve on behalf of specific children. However, implementation of effective support is highly complex. A wide range of models of support is being utilized that range in their purpose and format.

Teachers judged that inclusive outcomes were better when one of the two following conditions prevailed. When both conditions were present, the process and outcomes for both teachers and students was judged to be highly satisfactory: (1) supports provided in the class by a respected colleague; and (2) effective teaching using a range of teaching methods, typically involving cooperative learning, hands-on projects, a range of strategies for presenting information, and adaptations based on ability levels and learning styles.

Support is provided by a range of individuals, some funded through special education such as special education teachers, speech therapists, occupational therapists, and paraprofessionals. Other support personnel may be funded through gifted education, at risk or Title I, bilingual, and other programs, or through general school funds.

Most effective schools developed a *support team* that developed building-wide, coordinated support services including coordination and collaboration among support staff in individual classes and with respect to individual students. Such schools operated *child study* meetings where teachers had the opportunity to obtain input from other staff. Support staff most effectively provided assistance in the context of the general education classroom. We observed four approaches being used to guide support services: (1) remediation, (2) adaptations (3) teacher need, and (4) collaborative multi-level teaching. We judged the latter two as the most effective. Within these two approaches, students were most often heterogeneously grouped and staff involved in collaboration, designing lessons that worked for all students, rather than one teacher 'teaching' and the other 'helping'.

Students explore the idea of community while watching young chickens just hatched.

The philosophy and resulting practices of support staff, as well as issues of competence and personality, impacted on the partnership between support staff and general education

teachers. Frequently, even in generally effective schools, general education teachers relied on a child-centered, holistic approach while many support staff were trained in a pull-out, deficit-based, behavioral approach to instruction. This caused tension and difficulty. Other special education teachers and support staff, however, provided significant leadership for professional development and seeding of innovative teaching practice from one classroom to another. Special educators, psychologists, speech therapists, and other support personnel who begin to work towards multi-level teaching and community building with the general education teachers can be a powerful resource. Such individuals have the potential to act as staff development agents, helping to move highly successful and effective practices from one classroom to another as they work in several rooms in a building.

Paraprofessionals served many roles, in some cases essentially helping to segregate the student from other students in the general education classroom, in other cases playing a facilitating role for inclusion and collaborating in teaching all students in the class. Again, neither teachers nor paraprofessionals typically had any training or support to help them define their roles and working relationships.

In most project schools, some version of co-teaching between general and special education teachers was being used. We saw various models. In some cases, special education teachers functioned largely as "helpers" in the general education rooms. In these cases, students with disabilities tended to be more separated and segregated in the context of the general education class. In other cases, special education teachers were more integrally involved in delivery of instruction. In most such situations, the general and special education teachers regularly switched roles between providing the lead instruction and providing support to students.