

Inclusion Solutions

A newsletter for educators who are doing amazing things!

Spring 2010

MAKING RELATIONSHIPS A PRIORITY

Paula Kluth

Individuals with Down syndrome have unlimited potential when given the opportunity to succeed.

One of the biggest myths I hear in my work in inclusive education is about friendship. Teachers commonly share that they struggle to facilitate relationships during the middle and high school years because older students simply are not interested in socializing with students with disabilities. As one teacher told me, "When they are little, they are more accepting but as kids get older...they are just more into their own thing. We can't force friendship!"

It is certainly true that no teacher can create friendships between students (nor would we want to), but it is equally true that every educator can create conditions in the classroom that will give students opportunities to strengthen social relationships, learn about and from each other, and get and give support. These opportunities, in many cases, lead to the development of friendships.

Many students with disabilities—including those with significant disabilities—make friends during the secondary school years and sustain those friendships for years. We know this dream is possible. The goal, then, is to create the conditions that will make the dream a reality for a wider range of students. Five ways that schools can encourage interactions, build community, and facilitate relationships are offered here.

Make It a Priority

It almost seems so simple to be true but when students with disabilities do have a robust network of friends it is often, in part, because they are supported by teachers who value and cultivate student collaboration and interaction. In other words, schools that succeed in bringing students together understand relationships as a priority and engage in practices that are related to that priority. In these schools, for examples, social interactions are prioritized on Individual Education Plans and considered in the development of lesson plans.

continued



Down Syndrome Association
of Memphis & the Mid-South

901.547.7588

**Supporting
and
Empowering
People
with Down
syndrome
and Their
Families**

Contact DSAM at 901.547.7588 or admin@dsamemphis.org

Build a School Community

The development and sustenance of a school community involves strategies and practices that purposefully encourage and teach sharing, learning, interdependence, and respect. For example, teachers might encourage community through cooperative learning experiences, conflict resolution opportunities, play and games, class meetings, service learning, social-justice education, cross-age and same-age tutoring and mentoring, and school and classroom celebrations (Sapon-Shevin, 1999). Teachers can also cultivate community by working for whole-school change. For instance, by lobbying for smaller classes, challenging competitive school structures (e.g., cutting students from sports teams), and developing ways to connect students across classrooms and grade levels (e.g., in-school e-mail pals), teachers can not only strengthen the classroom community but help the school as a whole become more responsive to a wider range of learners.

Create Spaces for Sharing

Teachers who seek information about students' experiences, dreams, interests, and needs can use this information to better educate their students and to facilitate relationships between learners. Too often (especially in secondary schools), students are educated in the same classrooms day after day without developing personal relationships. When I was observing one middle school classroom, I asked a young man to tell me the name of one of his classmates. "I don't know his name" the student replied. "I've never talked to him". I later found out that these two students had been in the same classroom for over two months.

Students' voices must be central to work in the classroom and time must be carved out for communication and idea sharing. Teachers interested in incorporating students voices might begin by increasing forums for student participation and leadership. For instance, students might be asked to lead weekly class meetings or to mentor one another. In Kim Rombach's classroom, students have ample time and space for sharing; they are even in charge of managing conflicts. Rombach facilitates this process by providing two "talking chairs" that are available to any two students who engaged in a disagreement. Students in this classroom don't go to the teacher to have their recess scuffle assessed, instead they secure permission from the teacher to use the "talking

chairs". In the chairs they discuss their issues and try to find a solution or explain their feelings (Sapon-Shevin, 1999).

Look to Peers to Teach and Support

Peer support is an essential part of inclusive schooling for students with and without disabilities. In some cases, students succeed when teachers cannot. Often times, peers will learn quite naturally how to support a friend with disabilities. They will know how to calm, how to teach, and how to encourage a classmate without any direction or interference from adults. In addition, peers are valuable resources because they tend to understand each other in ways authority figures or adults do not. Even the best teachers lack the same degree of intimacy with students that students share with each other. Students know each other's secrets and their fears. They often recognize each other's needs and gifts in ways that adults do not always recognize. This type of help and mutual support is great preparation for adult life for all participating.

In any peer support model, however, it is critical that teachers seek opportunities to give all students opportunities to both give and receive help and support. Relationships where some individuals are always helped while others are always helping are neither natural nor particularly useful in building a classroom community. It is a teacher's job, therefore, to cultivate a classroom culture that allows all students to give assistance and receive assistance.

Provide Opportunities for Social Connection Beyond Classroom

In order to support the development of relationships in the classroom, teachers may need to help students find social opportunities outside of the classroom. Extracurricular activities with all of the related fun, camaraderie, and socializing can offer some of the richest opportunities for relationship building students are likely to have during their school years.

While some schools offer activities to meet the needs of all students, other schools need to develop a wider array of activities so that every student can find an extra-curricular home. Some schools, for instance, are moving beyond the traditional sports-based and arts-based extra-curricular options and offering clubs and activities related to academic content (e.g., chess club), political issues (e.g., conservation groups, Students Against Drunk Driving [SADD]), and social support (e.g., anti-drug groups).

All schools must be conscientious about offering



options that will interest and engage a range of students in the school (Sapon-Shevin & Kluth, 2003). This means questioning whether or not all students can afford certain clubs or activities; whether meeting times are convenient for students who may have after-school responsibilities; and whether students can get the appropriate supports they need to participate in after-school activities. If a student with a disability, for instance, needs personal support to participate in activities, teachers must brainstorm ways to provide this. Schools may try and provide natural supports by structuring the activities in creative ways or they may ask paraprofessionals or teachers to provide this support or look to student or adult volunteers.

INCLUSION STRATEGIES

Inclusion is more than physical presence in the classroom. Students learn when they actively participate in the academic lessons and interact with others. Here are some tips to create a meaningful and inclusive learning environment.

Attitude is Everything

Believe that all students can participate. Value the student and their independence. Forget past failures. Focus on present potential and future success.



Build a Rapport With Others

Begin by introducing yourself to others on the team. Don't forget to introduce students to the general classroom teacher. If you are a consultant, ensure that people refer to you by your name versus professional title. If you are a teacher, greet the student each day.

References

- Sapon-Shevin, M. (1999). *Because we can change the world: A practical guide to building cooperative, inclusive classroom communities*. Boston : MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Sapon-Shevin, M. & Kluth, P. (2003). In the pool, on the stage, and at the concert. In P. Kluth, D. Straut, & D. Biklen (Eds.). *Access to academics for all students: Critical approaches to inclusive curriculum, instruction, and policy*. Erlbaum Publishing.
- This article was reprinted with permission from Dr. Paula Kluth and can be found on her website at <http://www.paulakluth.com/articles/relationships.html>.*

• Speak to Others Directly

Provide written documentation to the team when needed, but remember the value of a face-to-face conversation. Resist the temptation to rely solely on paraeducators to communicate your message to others or on anonymous correspondence through office mailboxes. Likewise, always speak directly to students, the paraeducator is not their communication tool.

• Listen and Share

Student success is the responsibility of everyone on the team and everyone involved has valuable insights. Share stories, critical bits of information that one learns from daily contact with the student, or ideas from home. Collaborate when identifying lesson goals and modifications. Troubleshoot problems together.

• Recognize Passive Involvement

A seat assignment in the general classroom does not create or ensure learning. When students are isolated from peers, or the classroom tasks are completed for them (including choice making), students are passively involved in your classroom. Students must actively participate in classroom activities, communication with teachers, and interaction with peers.

• Promote Independence

Independence, no matter how insignificant it may seem, builds self-esteem and preserves the student's integrity. Students learn independence by doing, not by watching others do for them. Limit "hand over hand" assistance and use as few prompts as possible when assisting students. Structure academic lessons and social activities to require minimal adult supervision or participation.

• Accept Alternative Products

If a picture is worth a thousand words, then a photo-essay conveys the equivalent message of a five-page paper. Remember students learn through the process of creation not simply from the product.

• Explore Technology

Technology enables many students to participate actively in academic lessons and communication. Don't be shy explore closets and storage facilities for any and all equipment the school currently owns. If you're a novice to technology, play and practice first, then you will help students succeed!



• Use Technology Effectively

Using technology as a tool to keep students occupied does not promote learning. Likewise, communication technology used randomly fails to promote socialization. Select simple, efficient technology EVERYONE can understand and operate. Create goals for the student to use the technology for learning and communication in the classroom.

• Outline Roles and Responsibilities

Who will escort the student to class? Who is responsible for obtaining a book on tape? Who is going to ask the student questions about the day's lecture? Name and itemize all tasks completed by adults, or the student's participation will decrease.

• Conduct Assessments Everyday

The annual IEP (Individualized Education Plan) meeting is too late to assess student learning. Remember the value of informal assessments and communication. Ask a student content-related questions everyday. Strive to understand how the student best learns and demonstrates knowledge. Adjust teaching methods or learning activities accordingly.

• Visit the Classroom

Understand the dynamics and the culture of a classroom, before making any recommendations for a student. Observe the student in the classroom to gain awareness of the teacher's expectations, the benefits of particular adaptations, or which adaptations need modification.

• Enlist the Administrators to Participate!

Seek input and support from principals and assistant principals. Their guidance creates accountability and ensures teachers communication and collaboration. Ask administrators to assist, honor and provide scheduled planning time for team members.

• Supervise Paraeducators!

Paraeducators require explicit instructions and on-going supervision to facilitate the participation of students in the classroom. Although the paraeducator may have the most contact-hours with the student, the teachers should make content decisions for individual lessons.

• Respect Paraeducators

Include paraeducators in weekly planning meetings as well as IEP meetings. Paraeducators have valuable insights into the student and the classroom dynamics. Their participation in meetings creates a clear idea of what is expected of students and themselves.

• Create and Design Universally

Design instruction and choose materials that make the learning activities accessible to all the students in your classroom. Plan and consider all differences in abilities including speaking, sight, hearing, movement, reading, writing, attention, memory, and organization skills.

• Positive Peer Power

A student's peers are an excellent resource. Consult peers for jazzy comments to put on communication devices, suggestions or advice on new ways to increase participation, and create meaningful interactions.

• Generalize and Broaden Your Efforts

When you create a new activity for a specific lesson, choose content that will apply to future students and other students in the class. Remember that a technique used for one particular class will work for a different class. Share your efforts with others and a student's participation will increase in new places.

This article was adapted and reprinted with permission from Project Participate.

WHAT'S A "BEHAVIOR"?

Revolutionary Common Sense by Kathie Snow,
www.disabilityisnatural.com

Heard in places here and there is a newly-coined phrase, "He had a behavior." Now what, pray tell, does this mean, and why, for Pete's sake, are people using these words?

Let me digress for a moment and state a maxim that, if adopted by all, could have an extremely positive impact on people with disabilities and their status in society. Here it is: if it's not right for a person without a disability, it's not right for a person with a disability.

What is "it"? Anything! The way a person is treated, talked to, talked about, and anything else.

Thus, most of us would not say, "He/she had a behavior," when talking about a husband or wife, a co-worker, or a boss. (You wouldn't, would you?) Therefore, we shouldn't say it about people who have disabilities!

Based on the context of the conversations, when parents and professionals (but never people with disabilities) say, "He had a behavior," I'm going to infer this means the person misbehaved (according to the speaker). And I'm going to assume this terminology is supposed to replace the more familiar terms, "acted up," "threw a fit," "had a tantrum," and so forth. Furthermore, I'm assuming this phrase refers specifically to one or more particular actions that the person with a disability is supposed to know he is not to do; e.g., his "behavior plan" details actions which are big no-no's and which have definite consequences and/or punishments. (But we must wonder if he knows what's in his "behavior plan," and if he was involved in the writing of same.)

Furthermore, it seems a "behavior" is a descriptor intended to identify actions relative to a person's diagnosis and/or environment. When a person with autism bites himself, that's a "behavior." When a person with a cognitive disability refuses to "comply," that's a "behavior." And maybe when a resident of a group home or a worker in a segregated work setting doesn't follow the rules, the action might be called a "behavior."

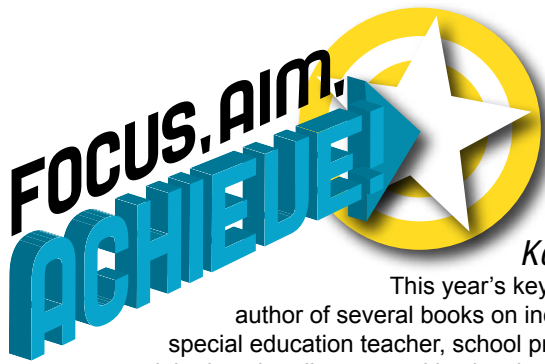
What's the purpose of this new way of talking? I'm not really sure. But one of the outcomes is that any and all behaviors of a person with a disability are frequently attributed to the disability! When a six-year-old with a disability is not interested in the boring lesson at school, her refusal to complete the project is labeled "manipulation." The teacher "knows" that "all children with disabilities learn to be manipulative at an early age." But the same behavior in a six-year-old without a disability does not evoke the same response.

I've learned from many wonderful experts (Joe Schiappacasse, Herb Lovett, and others) that behavior is communication, whether one has a disability or not. Biting, head banging, withdrawal, outbursts, and other typical and not so typical actions are all forms of communication.

People with disabilities who don't have effective means of communication (oral speech, communication device, etc.), as well as those who have never been listened to, may have no other way to communicate their wants, needs, or feelings except by physical actions. And in too many instances, parents, teachers, service providers, professionals, and others view these actions as "inappropriate behaviors," instead of as the person's best efforts to communicate! Consequences or punishments are delivered; the person tries to communicate his resulting sadness, fear, or frustration through physical actions; these are once again viewed as inappropriate behavior" and the cycle continues and even escalates!

There's much to learn about communication and behavior. Instead of saying, "He had a behavior," perhaps we could more accurately and respectfully state, "He's trying to tell us something."

Copyright 2002-09 Kathie Snow, All Rights Reserved, used with permission. Contact kathie@disabilityisnatural.com for reprint permission. Visit www.disabilityisnatural.com for new ways of thinking!



SAVE THE DATE

DSAM will be hosting our 2nd annual conference. Focus, Aim, Achieve will be held on **Saturday, April 17, 2010 from 8am-4pm on the campus of Christian Brothers University.**

Key Note Speaker

This year's keynote speaker will be Michael Remus. Mr. Remus is a national consultant and author of several books on inclusion who has served in various roles such as, a general education teacher, special education teacher, school principal, college instructor, school district special education director, Kansas State special education director, and is also the parent of four children, two of which have disabilities. Most of his professional career has been spent in the field of education and in training parents and educators how special education works. Currently the Director of Special Education for Deer Valley Schools he continues to consult with school districts, provide individual assistance and training to parents and educators on special education issues, and serves as a consultant to other districts. He is co-author of five books for parents on how special education works and of two training curriculums based on these books. Mr. Remus will speak on inclusive practices.

Lunch Key Note Speaker and Self-Advocate

The lunch keynote will be from Lee Jones. Lee graduated from Graceland University in Iowa in 2000 with a B.A. degree in Recreation and a minor in Theatre. Since that time, he has been living independently and pursuing a career that utilizes his education and experience. Presently, he is a fitness attendant at Sylvester Powell Community Center in Mission, KS and has been certified as a personal trainer. Wednesdays are one of his favorite days because he teaches an exercise class for people with disabilities called "Fitness with Lee" He is also an intern at the Kauffman Foundation where he works in the legal department. Lee is a former board member of the NDSC and currently serves on the Self-Advocates Council. In 1997, he received the Outstanding Citizen Award – given by National Down Syndrome Congress in recognition of his actions creating a positive public awareness through work as a leader and role model.

Breakouts will cover early childhood to adult topics. There will also be self-advocate sessions for individuals with Down syndrome and other disabilities, open to ages 14 and up. Watch for registration forms in the mail in March or log on to www.dsamemphis.org for more information.



DSAM
2893 So. Mendenhall Rd. Suite 3
Memphis, TN 38115
www.dsamemphis.org

**Non Profit Org.
U.S. Postage Pcd.
Germantown, TN
Permit # 105**