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What Have We Learned About Creating Inclusive Elementary Schools?

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Robert Coles (1989) began his book, *The Call of Stories: Teaching and the Moral Imagination*, with a description of his work as an intern at a psychiatric hospital. He wrote about the two supervisors with whom he was assigned to meet each week to report on his patients. The first doctor asked him about his diagnosis of the patients' conditions. This doctor wanted labels, terms, numbers, and psychiatric definitions. The second doctor, Coles recalled, was strangely uninterested in such conclusions. Instead he urged Coles to gather the patients' stories—not merely the histories composed during preliminary interviews, but the true stories of his patients' lives. He suggested that Coles might learn more by respecting ambiguity rather than by denying it, by embracing the details that initially seem trivial, and by recognizing that conclusions of any kind are seldom final. When reading about how Coles followed this second doctor's wise advice and listened to the stories of his patients, one becomes unexpectedly suspicious of black-and-white charts, graphs, and summaries and surprisingly confident in the gray area that lies among them.

This chapter describes in a broad sense what we—the authors of this chapter and the people with whom we worked to support inclusion in New Hampshire—have collectively learned about creating inclusive elementary schools. Although there certainly is sufficient information to be quantified, we

have chosen to share what we have learned through four personal stories, one from each of the authors of this chapter. It is our hope that, as was the case for Coles, these stories will allow for a more meaningful exchange of information than might occur were we to simply list, graph, and chart our experiences thus far. The stories are interspersed with some general commentary about where we have been, what we have learned, and what we are still trying to understand.

Our vision is that all students with disabilities can be supported to learn and grow in general education classes alongside their peers. Many aspects of our educational system, on the local and state levels, do not support that vision. Therefore, our work on the behalf of students with disabilities has needed to be of a systemic nature. It began with courageous and committed families and educators who dreamed of new possibilities for children and schools. Over the years the nature of the work has changed, but the heart of the effort remains the same. We are strongly interested in making schools welcoming places.

Four stories follow. We begin with Frank, an inclusion facilitator who, years ago, worked in an institution. His tale chronicles some of the history of education for students with disabilities in New Hampshire and reminds us of how far we have come, as well as how far we still have to go. Next, we look at inclusion through the eyes of Beth, a parent, who trusted her sense about what her son's education could and should be, even when professionals told her it was not possible. Her story illustrates the power of a vision. The third story is that of Susan, a former special education teacher, who, by having more questions than answers, realized the bottom-line difference between mainstreaming and inclusion. Her story is a reminder that belonging cannot be conditional. Grace tells the final story. She is a general education third-grade teacher who demonstrates that what students need most is a teacher who cares, works with dignity, and is courageous enough to learn as much as he or she teaches.

WE'VE COME A LONG WAY: AN INCLUSION FACILITATOR'S STORY

A Field Trip, 1969

As a college sophomore, I participated in a field trip to an institution. I was not prepared for the experience. I walked by classes of young children who ran out into the halls to greet us and passed what staff called the "behavior mod" unit, where children sat on the floor along a cinder block wall. They had rags tied around their heads. These children, I was told, were called "the head bangers" and they were in "therapy." It was explained to me that when a child did not bang his or her head or engage in some other self-abusive behavior for a predetermined number of seconds, he or she would be rewarded with a small chocolate candy. It was hard to observe and even harder to understand what was going

on in the minds of the staff members who watched a child hurt him- or herself and then calmly intervene. None of it made sense to me.

Perhaps the first thing we have learned about creating inclusive schools is that we can never go back. We can never return to the practices that Frank describes—which we learned to call "educational" and to regard as being a good idea. It is frightful to recognize that most people were doing the best that they knew how, just as we proclaim to be doing today.

Self-Contained Special Education, 1973

A few years after college I began work as an assistant teacher in a school located in a church basement. My class consisted of 10 students, ranging in age from 5 to 11, who didn't meet the public school system's criteria for entry into its special education program. It was easy to become involved in the lives of these incredible children both in and out of the classroom. On weekends I would make home visits, often listening to parents tell of the hopes and dreams they held for their sons and daughters. I didn't realize then that most of the world did not share these visions. In school we had worked on "self-help skills," "preacademic skills," and "socially appropriate behaviors." These were the skills we thought children needed to enable the parents' dreams to come true.

One day a group of local high school students provided me with a dose of reality. My students and I were out walking in the community, and as we passed the local high school, several students began to whisper and make comments: "Look at that one!" "What's wrong with this one?" I soon realized why they made these comments. The students at the local high school had never met the students with disabilities who lived in their town. The children in my class had been separated from their peers without disabilities from the start. Although many shopkeepers, neighbors, members of the church, and others went out of their way to be friendly, their friendliness was born of sympathy. The children in my class were not valued as individuals in the community. No one looked at any of them and saw a future.

Frank's experience with the students from the local high school speaks directly to one of the greatest limitations of segregated education. Children are divided and hidden from one another so that adults can be more comfortable. Clearly, we must respond by building the capacity of our schools and communities to support and value all children. This is surely a worthy goal.

Perhaps it is also a goal that has a corollary. Think for a moment about the business world. Corporate leaders, looking to revitalize their organizations, often strategize ways to fire employees who are perceived as no longer con-

tributing to the forward movement of the company. Increasingly, however, leaders have learned that more important than determining how to excuse the "dead wood" of the organization is determining how that dead wood came to be. What in the organization's culture created it?

What does this example have to do with inclusive education? Although countless individuals work to learn all they can about creating schools in which all students belong and although this chapter is dedicated to this effort, working to understand how segregated education came to be is equally important. Otherwise, it might happen again.

Laconia State School and Training Center, 1978

After receiving a graduate degree, I accepted a position as a teacher at Laconia State School and Training Center—at that time, New Hampshire's institution for people with intellectual disabilities. For the first two years I taught in the Toll Complex, which was the institution's school. My involvement, however, went far beyond the classroom. Laconia wasn't just a school for individuals with severe disabilities, it was their home. Each child had his or her own story of abandonment, love, abuse, or hope.

I remember Ross, one of my students. On a few occasions, I would awaken on a Saturday morning to a pounding on my door. Even though I lived several miles from the institution, I knew that the knock belonged to Ross. After visiting my house once on a field trip, he began to see my home as a possible escape. A call to let the school know where Ross was, a conversation, and some breakfast were inevitably followed by the trip back, complete with my halfhearted admonishment for Ross not to run away again. We both knew I really didn't mean it.

Several years after I began working at Laconia, the deinstitutionalization exodus began. The process was difficult and at times just as devaluing as the past had been. Well-intentioned professionals "shopped" for the individuals with pretty faces and quiet manners; these people would be the first to leave. The rationale at the time was that these individuals could be integrated into the community more easily, as the public would be more accepting. The selection process was difficult to watch—as though you were seeing your own child being the last to be chosen for a team, over and over again.

I left Laconia in 1987. Before doing so, I had the opportunity to visit a number of former residents who now were living in the community. Though the closing of the institution was a victory, some individuals' situations were only slightly better than what they had left behind. Isolation and loneliness were a way of life for some. The closing of the institution's doors—doors that absolutely needed to be closed—did not

guarantee that other doors would open for the former residents. There was much work to be done.

We have learned and are still learning that systems change is more than the mere cessation of one system; it's the simultaneous creation of something new. We learned this when we closed institution doors, and we learn this today when we place students with disabilities in general education classes but do not adequately address their support needs. It is common knowledge that meaningful experiences for children do not just happen, that they must be grown and developed by adults. So when we fail to do this work of cultivation in schools, students with disabilities are at risk of living on an island in the sea of their inclusive classroom. This is true regardless of how beautiful the class photograph might be.

New Hampshire Department of Education, 1988

I was hired by the New Hampshire Department of Education as the one and only state consultant for students labeled as having "severe" and "profound" disabilities. These students were now being educated in public schools, and school personnel needed guidance. I provided assistance to classroom teachers and special education teams throughout the state regarding inclusion and least restrictive environments. I was responsible for overseeing two demonstration projects supporting students with severe disabilities in general education classrooms. In addition, I acted as the liaison between the Department of Education and the New Hampshire Statewide Systems Change Project.

A great deal of planning and discussion in those days centered on bringing students who attended separate schools and out-of-state residential facilities back into their home communities. The battles were often emotional, and the decisions—to come back home or remain in an institution—were often made by lawyers and judges who barely knew the child.

In other instances, my involvement with school districts originated with parents who were frustrated that their sons or daughters were being educated in a segregated rather than a general education classroom. And finally, some parents, whose children already had been placed in general education classrooms, requested assistance with integrating their children's related services into the general education curriculum.

Belonging is something that we have needed to learn a lot about. We have often tied belonging and placement together. Doing so really is not hard to justify at first, but on closer inspection may make one presume a stronger connection between the two than actually exists. Having a child move from an

institution to the local school may have appeared to be an invitation to the child to belong, but the segregated classroom in that school where he or she ended up spending the day solidly reconstructed past segregation. Welcoming students with disabilities into general education classrooms is a closer approximation of belonging but often still is incomplete. Frequently, when push comes to shove, and a class meeting occurs at the same time that a student with disabilities is scheduled to receive physical therapy, the meeting may continue without him or her and without anyone's even acknowledging that this exclusion is happening. What was hoped to be belonging proves only to be situational membership. Here's another scenario: A student with disabilities is a full-time member of a general education classroom, supports are provided, and related services are integrated. She has a desk just like her classmates, uses a gym locker, and is a member of a Brownie troop—she even gets in trouble during class sometimes. But she does not belong. How do we know? Because she shows us—with her eyes, as she watches her peers giggling and holding hands as they run by her, and with a cringe on her face as she hears her teacher apologize, once again, for forgetting to include her in the class project. It does not yet seem that we know how to respond.

Inclusion Facilitator, 1991

After almost 4 years at the New Hampshire Department of Education, I accepted a position as inclusion facilitator in the Kearsarge Regional School District. I was excited because I wanted an opportunity to reaffirm for myself that all kids could really and truly be fully included in every aspect of the school environment. My job was to work with classroom teachers to support students with disabilities in general education classes. In September I walked into Simonds Elementary School, in Warner, New Hampshire, and was greeted by a teacher at the door with her arms folded telling me that she was a wreck and hadn't slept for days in anticipation of the first day of school when Abby would arrive in her classroom. She went on to tell me she never saw Abby's individualized education program (IEP), hadn't met the classroom assistant, didn't know how or what to teach this student, and so forth. Listening to this frantic

An inclusion facilitator's job is to support classroom teachers to educate students with disabilities in general education classrooms. The inclusion facilitator usually retains the responsibilities of service coordination, or case management, for a student, but provides little or no direct instruction. Instead, this person meets with the classroom teacher and the assistant (if one is assigned) to plan modifications to classroom lessons and activities that can enable the student to participate fully and learn. The role of the inclusion facilitator is vital to the success of inclusive education, yet we have wondered whether this role, over time, might perpetuate the separateness of two educational systems. In New Hampshire, educators in this role are supported with training, technical assistance, and, most recently, a graduate specialization program at the University of New Hampshire.

teacher, I vowed to myself that this would never happen again. In the future, all teachers who had a student with severe disabilities assigned to their class would have the opportunity to observe the student in his or her current classroom, participate in the writing of the IEP, attend workshops and training sessions, and visit other inclusive schools and classrooms prior to the start of the school year. These teachers would also be guaranteed planning time with me (the inclusion facilitator) and with other support staff. If a paraprofessional was assigned, time would be allotted for the teacher to meet with this person as well. Arranging all of this was not an easy task, but we did it—and it worked. It worked very well.

In this instance, Frank was able to recognize the teacher's feelings as justifiable anxiety at the onset of what would be, for her, a new experience. Professionals, however, have sometimes regarded colleagues who are fearful and angry about students with disabilities entering general education classrooms as uncaring, rude, or even unfit for the profession. In some schools there has been an unspoken expectation that a "good teacher" will welcome every student without a moment's hesitation.

In retrospect, we have realized that our colleagues who asked, "Why is it that you want this student to be in my class? What will the student get out of it? What am I supposed to teach her?" were not necessarily trying to keep students with disabilities out. Instead, their personal philosophy strongly held that all students in their classes must learn, and they took this seriously. The introduction of a student whom the teacher perceived that he or she could not teach, made the teacher feel fear—not necessarily fear of the student—but rather a fear of his or her own professional failure. This deepened understanding has enabled us to offer supports that are more meaningful, positive, and relevant than the supports that we may have offered in the past.

A clear shared vision, administrative involvement, and a strong team that values the parents as full members all were significant factors in success at Kearsarge. Flexibility—the attitude that it's okay if something doesn't work because we can just try something else—was another key element. As a team, we believed that no one person had all of the answers but that collectively our knowledge, skill, and creativity would enable us to be successful. Perhaps most essential to the inclusive community we established was the shared responsibility that every educator felt for every student.

The role of an inclusion facilitator as a change agent is complex. It is important to support classroom teachers as much as possible and to listen carefully to a variety of ideas and perspectives. At the same time, the inclusion

facilitator must remain absolutely clear about the goal of full inclusion—regardless of his or her colleagues' views—and must have a range of strategies for reaching that goal.

Children have moved out from behind locked metal doors to school playgrounds and general education classrooms, their rightful place. Our challenge is to make sure that this place works for them and for all children. It has been argued that true school reform is not possible until all students are included in the school community. Therefore, it is essential that advocates of inclusion and educators who are passionate about school restructuring work collaboratively to create a singular vision for school communities that encompasses both equity and excellence.

THE JOURNEY HOME: A PARENT'S STORY²

Our family has shared many adventures. Our youngest child, Andrew, has led us through one of our more significant journeys. Andrew was born a beautiful blonde with blue eyes, weighing 8 pounds and 7 ounces. My husband, Will, and I and our three other children welcomed Andrew with the greatest of joy. Our children looked at him in awe and anticipated the fun they would have watching him grow, smile, walk, and talk. As a family, we talked about all of the cute things that babies say and do, and I recalled for my children stories about each of them as babies.

When Andrew was 7 months of age, we were thrown into a strange and unfamiliar world of disbelief, a world in which we felt incompetent and powerless. Andrew had been diagnosed as having cerebral palsy, and our voyage took its first detour. He started in an early intervention program and was provided with physical, occupational, and speech-language therapy. We waited and hoped that he would somehow be "fixed" and become once again the child we all felt we had lost. We waited.

During the course of the next 2 years, I realized that we hadn't lost anyone. Andrew was the same beautiful child I had brought home from the hospital. He had the same needs that all children have—to be fed, taken to the park, played with, read to, and loved and cared for by his family and close friends. He didn't need to be "fixed"; we accepted Andrew as a complete person.

²Part of this story is adapted with permission of Singular Publishing Group, Inc. from Calculator, S., & Jorgensen, C. (1994). *Including students with severe disabilities in school: Fostering communication, interaction and participation*. San Diego: Singular Publishing Group.

Perhaps this family's lesson is one that our educational system needs to learn as well if we are to ever achieve true systems change: that a disability is just one part of a person. Although most people nod in agreement with this statement, educational practices and policies often do not reflect it. Educational plans for students with disabilities are, in many instances, centered on a student's label or diagnosis. Never mind that a child is an avid fan of dinosaurs. If he or she has mental retardation, there is a strong precedent that, for this child, functional life skills curricular goals are far more important than studying dinosaurs. When planning curriculum, it should never be denied that the child has a disability, nor, however, should it ever be denied that he or she likes dinosaurs. We must be vigilant in our attention to this matter.

Early Intervention and Kindergarten

School at age 3? My other children had played with their friends in the neighborhood at that age and in so doing had learned to communicate, play, and interact. I listened to the experts explain how Andrew was not "ready" to be with children his own age. Instead, he would spend 2 hours every day on a little yellow bus to attend a 2½-hour readiness program. There he would receive intensive one-to-one instruction from teachers, assistants, and therapists in a cubicle or behind a partition.

Just before he turned 4, Andrew began walking independently. He had us all running as he moved to touch all of the things he had previously been unable to reach. He had a sparkle in his eyes as he explored his world. We thought that this was usual until his teachers began describing him as a child with no attention span and no concept of danger.

Parents know their children best, yet it is still difficult for some professionals to understand this simple truth. Unfortunately, the aura of professional expertise is often strong enough to convince even the most confident of families that what they want for their son or daughter is not as appropriate as what the professionals feel that the child needs. For this reason, we need to be mindful about the composition of a child's educational team. Although it is customary to bring together a group of adults who know the most about children, disabilities, and schools, it is equally if not more important to bring together the people in the child's life who care the most. Though we seldom consider caring to be a prerequisite for team membership, the advice and contributions of these people will ensure that the hopes, dreams, fears, and nightmares of the student and his or her family are recognized and respected.

Our team requested a consultation from a communication specialist to discuss augmentative and alternative communication for Andrew. He was not speaking yet, and our team felt that it was time to bring in

ther "expert." I couldn't sleep the night before the assessment. I tried to figure out a way that I could prevent this professional from hearing all the things that Andrew couldn't, shouldn't, wouldn't, won't, or cannot do before even beginning his evaluation. I found the communication specialist in the hallway and, because I was nervous, could only think to say, "Please keep an open mind."

The communication specialist looked at Andrew and smiled. Andrew was crazy about him right away. Together, they tried a basic sign of signs and functional gestures, and Andrew responded. I am used to saying that my tears were unfounded because this man looked at a child and saw the same Andrew I saw. It was the first time that an expert offered positive observations about my son before launching into a list of recommendations.

m Special to Typical

At the time I began to question the wisdom of programs that separated children according to their levels of ability, Andrew's special education teachers were telling me that he lacked imitation skills, but when I thought about all of the time he spent working in a cubicle, my mind changed. "Who is he supposed to imitate?" I knew that children learn in each other, so I asked the team to enroll Andrew in a typical preschool. My suggestion was met with stares of disbelief and knowing looks that meant that I was clearly a parent "in denial."

The next big hurdle was kindergarten, which meant another big change for Will and me. We worked out our game plan ahead of time—Will would play the "tough guy" as we tried to secure a typical kindergarten experience for Andrew. We quickly learned that the team wasn't ready for such a bold move, so we compromised. Andrew would attend a special education program 4 hours each day and would then attend the kindergarten at that school (not our neighborhood school) for a part of the day. The plan was to gradually extend the amount of time he spent in the kindergarten as he demonstrated success in this setting.

One day I visited the kindergarten to see how Andrew was doing. I arrived a few minutes after me, accompanied by his entire special education class. I kept watching. The kindergarten teacher greeted the children by announcing to her students, "Here come our special friends." Andrew and I slouched in their chairs. No one interacted with Andrew except the adult who was seated beside him.

We requested a team meeting the following day. We expressed our concerns that Andrew's time in the kindergarten was more like a field trip than the beginning of his membership in the class. Six weeks later, Andrew was fully included in kindergarten. Soon after, his teachers asked that he often looked to his peers for support rather than to

adults for help as he had always done before and that the other kids were truly enjoying being with him.

There are school districts that have spent years preparing for one student to be fully included in general education. Other school districts have decided to close all special education doors and include every student in a matter of minutes. There is not one pace for change that guarantees sustainability or that ensures success. A given school system's unique history and experiences with initiating and sustaining other change initiatives seem to be the best indicators of how that district might most effectively proceed with inclusion. But we must remember that children are waiting.

Just a Kid in the Neighborhood

One day while Andrew and I were walking around the annual local fair in our town, a young girl about Andrew's age approached us and asked if Andrew would like to go on one of the amusement rides with her. He was 5 years old, and it was the first time that he had been asked to play with a friend—unlike my other children, who had gone to dozens of places with their friends by the same age. It was uncommon that we ever ran into one of Andrew's classmates, as the kids in his class lived on the other side of town. I decided right then and there that it was time for Andrew to come home to our neighborhood school.

At Andrew's next IEP meeting, I explained that we had no plans to move and that because the neighborhood children would ultimately be congresspeople, friends, employers, and neighbors in his future, he needed to go to our neighborhood school. It wasn't easy, but the team agreed. Andrew came home to our neighborhood school the following September.

In some towns a particular school is designated for all students who have a certain disability, as the special education program at that school has been designed for students with that label. This can be troublesome on many fronts but is especially problematic when there is talk about student's being educated in a general education classroom at that school. Instead, the student should attend his or her neighborhood school. Although this point may seem obvious, many schools have initiated great efforts at system change only to realize later that a percentage of the students at their school belong somewhere else.

Socialization

When Andrew's principal asked me what I most wanted to achieve by including Andrew at his neighborhood school, I told him that I wanted Andrew to go to a birthday party. He replied, with his head in his hands,

that he definitely could not guarantee that this would happen. Two weeks later, I called him to let him know that we had achieved our goal. Andrew was going to a party that weekend!

In the beginning, as advocates of inclusion, we tended to focus on the opportunities for socialization that the general education classroom provides. Our stance was, in effect, "It doesn't matter whether this student learns much of the academic content in the general education classroom, we just want him or her there to learn social skills." Over time this stance changed mostly because students with disabilities were gaining a lot of academic skills and knowledge in spite of low expectations. Classroom teachers also deserve credit for this shift, as many of them questioned the limited goals and objectives listed on students' IEPs. We realize now that no student should have to choose between learning to read and making a friend. We now know that both academic learning and social relationships are important and that for many students—both those with and those without disabilities—they are linked.

Communication

Speech-language therapy was part of Andrew's day in the classroom. The therapist would observe what the class was doing and then determine (in collaboration with the paraprofessional and the teacher) how Andrew could participate to the fullest extent while simultaneously working on some of his speech-language goals. Andrew needed to learn to communicate—and where better to learn communication than in a classroom with his peers? Communication boards were developed, and soon Andrew was able to make choices, indicate likes and dislikes, and answer questions by pointing to pictures that corresponded to a variety of events and activities.

Paraprofessionals

I had been questioning the wisdom of "attaching" an adult to my child for several years, but ever since I could remember, Andrew had always had an assistant assigned to him. It seems obvious that if an adult is constantly with a student, there is the danger that both individuals will become dependent on one another. At one point, the team decided to increase the number of assistants who supported Andrew during the day to reduce his dependence on one particular person. Andrew made the transition beautifully and interacts well with many people, but the basic problem still exists—dependence on adults!

Teachers of inclusive classrooms often say that the one thing without which they could not survive is the additional adult that often "comes with" a

student with disabilities. The use of paraprofessional support, however, has been and continues to be an aspect of inclusive education that requires careful attention, long-term planning, even delicacy. When paraprofessional support is provided, the rate at which general education teachers welcome students with disabilities tends to increase. This allows for larger numbers of students with disabilities to be educated in general education classrooms. With paraprofessional support, however, there may be a future price to pay in terms of the teacher's sense of responsibility to and for the student, the degree to which inclusive curriculum is developed and used, and the student's friendships and social relationships. The use of paraprofessional support can at times adversely affect each of these, but the opposite is also true. The paraprofessional in the classroom may better enable the classroom teacher to know the student and may be an asset to both the development and the implementation of inclusive curriculum and instruction. The student's social relationships and friendships may also benefit from this person's facilitation.

This dynamic is with many types of supports, such as modifications to a math assignment, time with an occupational therapist, or use of a personal computer. Often the very elements that can make a situation work well are the very same elements that can make that situation problematic. The ways in which supports are utilized are equally as important, if not more so, as the kinds of supports we put into place.

For example, in one classroom a modified math assignment may be merely one assignment in a pile of many that have been individualized for students. The teacher sees his or her students as diverse, respects their unique learning styles, and carries on. The modified math paper in this scenario supports meaningful academic learning for the student with disabilities and does not compromise social inclusion or the student's self-esteem. Imagine a second scenario in which the rest of the class is doing a sheet of word problems and one student receives a modified math assignment. With the greatest of care, the student's dignity might be maintained in this scenario, but our experience tells us more than likely it is not. Perhaps the classroom teacher feels that the student's need for a different assignment is a nuisance. Unfortunately, there is arguably no such thing as the privacy of one's own mind when working with children, so of course the other children sense this and learn that this student's difference must be tolerated but not necessarily valued. What then happens on the playground later that day, when this same student with disabilities wants to play kickball but needs assistance to do so? Are kids going to see this as an opportunity for creative problem solving, or will they emulate their teacher's "Well, okay, I guess I've got to do this" approach? In this case, the modified math assignment—designed simply to address math goals on a student's IEP—presents a subtle but fundamental attitudinal barrier to the student's true membership in the class. In other words, what was designed to be supportive is not—and is in fact the opposite.

The supports we provide are simply people, things, and ways of thinking that we have determined will facilitate meaningful learning and social inclusion for students with disabilities. It is the way in which those supports are offered, utilized, and regarded that ultimately allows us to evaluate their—and our—effectiveness.

Looking Toward the Future

Will and I have the same hopes and dreams for Andrew that we have for our other children. We want him to be happy, healthy, loved, and accepted for who he is. We want him to have good friends, to have choices in his life, and to have the supports to make those choices possible. These choices include whether to go to college, what kind of work he wants to do, where and with whom he lives, and what he does for recreation.

For Andrew, we know the end we're traveling toward is more typical than special. There may be roadblocks along the way, but we keep in mind that wherever there is a roadblock, there is a detour. On some of these detours we find beautiful places that we might never have discovered otherwise. In the end, we know that Andrew's journey will have mattered and that he will have made a difference in the lives of everyone whom he has met along the way.

Andrew is now a sophomore at his local high school. He recently took his English class mid-term exam by answering the multiple choice questions by pointing to sections of a quadrant board. Andrew's classroom teacher said that he earned an A.

Parents often are the driving force behind organizational change because they are the ones who hold and articulate a vision for their child's future in the context of the family and the community. Whereas others come and go in the child's life, many times parents are able to hold a long-range view.

FROM VISITING TO BELONGING: A SPECIAL EDUCATOR'S STORY

In 1988, about the same time the Institute on Disability (IOD) at the University of New Hampshire began administering the New Hampshire Statewide Systems Change Project, I was working as a special education teacher. I would bring my special education class to the cafeteria against the wishes of the school's principal. According to the principal, my students had not yet demonstrated "proper eating skills." During that year and still today, the IOD provided intensive training and technical assistance to my school district in which families and educators were rethink-

ing the ways in which students with severe disabilities were being educated in our state.

As a first-year teacher, I learned a great deal. Among other things, I learned that "proper eating skills" are not a prerequisite for eating in a school cafeteria. I also learned that if I merely taught my students the skills on their IEPs, as I had been told to do, I would only increase their proficiency in our special education classroom. My job, instead, was to support these young children to work, play, and learn in the real world of their school community. The only problem was that they had never been invited to be there.

It is interesting to look back at the late 1980s and recognize that the barrier being addressed at that time was basic physical access to general education. Today we fight that battle far less often and now face the challenge of finding ways for students with disabilities to have access to the general education curriculum as well as to the social community of the class. Pearpoint, Forest, and Snow (1993) framed this as shifting the agenda from "in" to "with."

Early Mainstreaming Efforts

I asked Mrs. Jackson, the first-grade teacher, if my students and I could spend some time in her classroom. She would tell us when to arrive (usually around noon) and when to leave (when one of my students got noisy). I always knew that Bobby was going to get noisy because he had a lot in his 6-year-old life to get noisy about. So, we'd go into the first-grade classroom, hear the first page of a story or carve just one eye on the jack-o'-lantern, and then turn around and leave. The next day I'd put a note in Mrs. Jackson's mailbox thanking her for the "mainstreaming opportunity." In the note I'd ask if she wanted me to take her recess duty on Wednesday, if she wanted to borrow my math manipulatives, or if she would like me to bring her chocolate or wine every day for the rest of her life. I would have done anything to keep her classroom door open for my students.

In those days mainstreaming was a favor, and teacher deals were the currency of exchange. Spending time in a general education classroom was thought to be a good idea for certain students at certain times, but not for all students all of the time. We have since learned the crucial difference between mainstreaming and inclusion and have learned that as long as eligibility criteria exist and a student can be "bartered" in or out of an inclusive setting, two separate systems of education are operating in our schools.

Membership in General Education

"Fairly soon after the school year had started, I realized that if I kept up with the food and the compliments, my class could continue to visit Mrs. Jackson's first-grade class. There was nothing, however, that I could do to ensure that they could stay. In response, I shifted my mission from 'ensuring mainstreaming opportunities' for this year to ensuring first-grade membership for next year. I arranged a meeting with Mrs. Jackson and asked her to write down everything my students would need to know and be able to do before entering first grade. She gave me a long list, and I got to work right away.

With hindsight being 20/20, it is easy to realize that Susan could not teach her special education students everything that was on the first-grade teacher's list or guarantee their membership in the first-grade class. This was not due to novice instructional skills but instead to the fact that she had agreed to—and even asked for—a list of prerequisites for entering first grade. But what really are the prerequisites for first grade: Being able to be read to? Making a paper plate mask? Acting the part of the cranberry sauce in the Thanksgiving play? On one hand, Susan's question about prerequisites was an attempt at ensuring inclusion in general education, not just visitation rights, for her students the following year. On the other hand, Susan's question to the first-grade teacher revealed the reason that her students were segregated in the first place.

This incident exemplifies what has become a long-winded conversation among educators about what constitutes any child's "readiness" for first grade, second grade, eleventh grade, honor's English, or the school band. What is the purpose of education? To draw a line in the sand and determine who can jump far enough to reach it, or to draw a line in the sand and work hard to support all students to reach it? Our emphasis on educational outcomes and high standards makes this issue even more relevant.

Within educational circles professionals often agree on the value of high learning expectations for students. These standards often prevent educational discrimination. For example, we expect both male and female students to obtain a high level of skill in math and science. We expect students of all ethnicities to demonstrate sophisticated literacy abilities. Yet, thinking back to the first-grade teacher's list of prerequisites, it has become apparent that there is also the danger that high standards in and of themselves are discriminatory. What if a student never learned to use scissors? Would that mean that he or she would never be ready for first grade? Would it mean that if the student were to participate in first grade, he or she would never be considered successful? As with the use of supports, the ways in which we utilize standards—not the standards themselves—matter most. Education is not a science, it's an art.

Quality Education for All

A fellow teacher once asked me whether I had a sibling with a disability. I answered that I did not, and she looked surprised. She wondered why I cared so much about students with disabilities and specifically about inclusive education. I did not know how to answer at the time. Today I realize that my passion for education is not limited to special education issues. I have realized that the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education often forces us to ask important questions about the education of all students. Sometimes these are questions we may not have otherwise thought to ask.

Special educators are in a unique position to support inclusion in a school, though for some, the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms may feel threatening. With time, training, and opportunities to observe inclusive classrooms, many special education teachers find ways to fit themselves into their new role of inclusion facilitator. They know their students well and are able to offer classroom teachers supports and strategies. For other special educators, the role of inclusion facilitator is one that they would rather not take, and it has become increasingly common for these educators to become general education teachers instead.

OPPORTUNITIES ARE THERE ALL ALONG: A GENERAL EDUCATOR'S STORY

As a general education third-grade teacher, my first direct contact with Marc was in the lunch room. I was on cafeteria duty and asked him to take his tray up to the counter. All of the second-grade children were cleaning up and getting ready to go outside for recess. At first Marc just looked at me, then he shook his head no. He proceeded to throw himself onto the floor. I reacted without the luxury of time to think the matter over. I immediately sat down with him and placed my arm over his shoulder so that he couldn't hurt himself or me. He was very agitated and started to spit. I think this is when I fell in love with Marc. Funny as it may sound, I felt a connection. I talked quietly to him.

Because Marc didn't talk, he made sounds to let me know that he was still upset. Eventually, his body relaxed, and I told him that he needed to take up his tray up before going out to recess. He nodded yes, took his tray up, and went outside. I went in search of our school's inclusion facilitator, as I wanted Marc to be in my third-grade classroom next year.

Regardless of personal opinions about inclusion, every teacher is faced with the daily incidents of school life and has to react quickly in a countless variety of situations. Grace handled the interaction with Marc by using respect for his dignity, not by using knowledge gained in a training session.

The Importance of Caring

At the end of the year, I attended Marc's IEP meeting and learned that I would, in fact, be Marc's third-grade teacher. I was thrilled and told Marc's parents that I had requested that their son be in my class. They were delighted and surprised to hear this. They told me that no teacher had ever requested to have Marc in his or her class.

Grace wanted this student to be a member of her classroom. She wanted to be his teacher, to teach and learn alongside him, and to play a significant role in his third-grade year. This desire is more significant than we have acknowledged in the past. Many parents of students with disabilities report that although they do want their son or daughter included in general education and although they do value the respectful provision of supports and services, the classroom teacher's attitude about their child's membership most affects their sense of how well things are going. A teacher who greets a child in the morning with a smile, who enjoys the gifts and talents the child has to share, and who truly likes the child and is comfortable being with him or her means more to many parents than inclusion advocates once realized. We should not be surprised. Hundreds of parents of children without disabilities would say the same—that they would prefer a teacher who really liked their child yet used instructional strategies with which they did not agree rather than a teacher who was at best indifferent about their son or daughter's membership yet used state-of-the-art instructional practices. It is possible that in our drive to get all of the inclusive pieces in place for students with disabilities, we have forgotten to attribute due importance to this matter.

The Other Students

Parting ourselves on the back because including Marc in our classroom was going so well, Leslie, the classroom assistant, and I were shocked one day when Marc appeared to be extremely upset right before art class. He really seemed to love art class, so we didn't understand what was happening. Before we knew it, Marc was on the floor, and Leslie was supporting him. I quickly lined up the rest of the students and had them go to art class. I'll never forget the look of fear on their faces—they just didn't understand what was happening. About half an hour later, I heard my students returning from the art room. I did not want them to enter the room and see Marc still on the floor with Leslie next to him, so

I met them in the hall and redirected them to the library. I asked them all to sit down.

As they took their seats, I held my breath because I wasn't at all sure what to say. (They never taught me this in college.) I decided to just tell them the truth as simply as possible. I asked them to remember a time when they were less able to communicate their feelings with words. We talked about what they had done in those situations, and I suggested that what Marc was going through today was similar to their experiences. He had become very frustrated and upset at not being able to explain what he was feeling. I asked them to remember how they felt after they had gotten very upset and had acted in a way that showed their frustration. Most of them agreed that they had been very embarrassed in those instances.

I asked them to respect Marc's feelings and to please go back into the classroom and start their reading assignments without staring at him. I assured them that Marc would be fine but that as his classmates, they had the power to make Marc feel like he was still a part of the class. When I felt sure that everyone was comfortable, we returned to the classroom. I could have kissed every one of those children—they acted like they did this every day.

In many of our earliest efforts to include students with disabilities, we seldom proposed changes regarding what children in general education classrooms were learning. Ours was a position of gratitude, and even as adults, we sometimes felt we had been granted only conditional membership to general education. We didn't want to rock the boat.

Some people might read Grace's account of handling this difficult situation as time "off task" for the rest of the class. They might be wary of the priority that was placed on having all students understand the feelings and behaviors of one student. They might ask whether time was taken away from "real" learning.

As advocates for quality education for all students become more knowledgeable, experienced, and confident, we become more comfortable questioning what all children are learning. Anyone who has read a newspaper in the 1990s could argue that lack of tolerance for diversity in American society is troublesome. With all due respect to the curricula operating in schools today, it is time to expand on what we teach our children. Educating students with disabilities in general education classrooms is not the reason that this expansion is needed—these students have simply helped alert us to an issue that we have sometimes pretended not to see. Along with teaching math, science, literacy, and the like, it is imperative that we help students learn to live and work with one another (which is exactly what Grace was teaching her students).

When taken seriously, this notion has systemic implications that reach much farther than the curriculum used in the classroom.

They Already Had It Figured Out

As I grew professionally and personally as a teacher that year, I often found myself holding my breath and saying a little prayer that I would be able to handle situations as they arose. One such situation involved a little girl named Rose and a cooperative learning lesson. Rose is a student who won't quit. She has Down syndrome and is well liked by her peers.

That day, the class was working in small cooperative groups in which their roles and responsibilities rotated. One of the roles assigned on this day was note taker. I remember well the moment that I realized that it would soon be Rose's turn to write, because in my mind, she wasn't yet able to do so. As I roamed around the room, I purposely saved Rose's group for my last stop. I didn't know what I was going to say or do. I was concerned about Rose's feelings.

My concern was unnecessary. When I walked over to Rose's group, thinking that I would simply have to ask another student to take on her job as note taker, one of the group members told me that the group had figured something out. "You see," he said, "Rose knows how to write the letters—she just can't spell the words, so we are going to spell them out for her while she writes them down." Kids are the best teachers.

I believe that my students sensed from the beginning that I was committed to making all students valued members of our class. When students without disabilities observed my interactions with students with disabilities, they saw no difference. Don't get me wrong, there were numerous times when I had no idea what to do and the only activity I could think of for a student with disabilities was something unrelated to what the rest of the class was working on. This was probably due to a lack of confidence left over from the days when I believed that special education teachers were magicians.

Our year together went well. All of my students learned, and I did too. I began the year both excited and anxious about educating students with disabilities in my classroom. By the end of the year, when a student with disabilities entered the room, I simply said hello.

General education teachers, as catalysts for change, represent the "typical" world and can approach situations without introducing a stigma of difference or specialness. Their impact is greatest when they take responsibility for each child's schooling and when they communicate that good teaching for students with disabilities is just that—good teaching.

CONCLUSIONS

What have we learned about creating inclusive elementary schools? Our answers fall into two categories. First, there are things we can do. Second, there are ways we can be. The list of things we can do—strategies that make inclusive schools more likely—grows everyday. We know the necessity of a school philosophy, administrative support, and common planning time. We know the value of technology, teacher training, and innovative instructional strategies. We have learned that the involvement of parents, inclusion facilitators, and paraprofessionals is vital. We know what we can do to create inclusive schools.

Our experience tells us that we must learn more about the second category. There are far too many schools in which a list of things to do to create an inclusive school is in place, yet students with disabilities are still offered a "continuum of placements," inclusion facilitators are seen as the enemy, classmates question the fairness of curricular modifications, and families feel segregated. Why? These situations may have more to do with who we are than what we do.

To varying degrees, inclusion is still seen as a mere option in many schools, even those we call *inclusive*. Membership in general education for students with disabilities may be their right, but it is not always an assumption. Although people value diversity more now than in the past, the belief still exists that although all children are unique and different, some children are *really* unique and different. Then, once again, these children are set apart from other children—perhaps not in our schools but in an even more powerful place, our minds. Change is in the air, and although we espouse to be proponents of it, it is by its very nature threatening. There is always the risk that we will change only to the point to which we still feel comfortable, and there is always the chance that the changes that matter most lie beyond that point.

We have learned that who we are matters greatly to the process of creating inclusive schools. This is both bad news and good news—bad news because orchestrating human commitment, building human community, and gathering courage are far more difficult than writing a school philosophy, scheduling common planning time, and providing teachers with training. Recognizing the essential role that our human integrity plays in the creation of inclusive schools is also good news—because the power is in our hands.

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