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Integrating Support Personnel in the Inclusive Classroom

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ALTHOUGH CLASSROOM TEACHERS have a range of curricular and instructional skills, educating some students in inclusive classrooms requires contributions from professionals representing a variety of disciplines. The need for the services of support personnel in inclusive classrooms is not a negative reflection on the adequacy of classroom teachers. Instead, it reminds us that no single individual, no matter what her or his discipline or experience, has the ability to meet the range of diverse student needs that may be present in a heterogeneous classroom.

One of the most significant contributions any educational team member can make is to identify and build on an individual student's strengths and gifts to form a basis for future success in personal, academic, and vocational pursuits. When given a choice, people rarely

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spend a majority of their days engaged in activities that focus on their weaknesses. One of the great ironies of education is that even though most professionals presumably have selected their careers based on personal interests and strengths, many educators attempt to teach students by focusing on what is perceived to be their deficits. This does not mean that remediation of, or accommodation for student challenges are inappropriate educational pursuits. Rather, approaches that emphasize individual strengths are more likely to result in student success, positive self-esteem, and interest in being a lifelong learner.

Increasingly, students with even the most severe disabilities are receiving educational and related services in general education classrooms (Ford & Davern, 1989; Forest & Lusthaus, 1990; Giangreco & Meyer, 1988; Giangreco & Putnam, 1991; Sapon-Shevin, 1990; Stainback & Stainback, 1990; Thousand et al., 1986; Williams, Villa, Thousand, & Fox, 1989; York & Vandercook, 1990; York, Vandercook, Macdonald, Heise-Neff, & Caughey, in press; York, Vandercook, Macdonald, & Wolff, 1989). Progressive inclusion and relocation of students with disabilities from special education classes and schools to general education classes has not automatically resulted in appropriate education or effective teamwork among those hired to support students. Ineffective collaboration and lack of programmatic integration among professionals results in a large part from: 1) differing values, orientations, and experiences of various disciplines (Giangreco, 1990a); 2) lack of preservice preparation in knowledge of other disciplines and of collaborative teamwork (Askamit & Alcorn, 1988; Rainforth, 1985; Sapon-Shevin, 1988; Stainback & Stainback, 1987); 3) confusion about the types of support personnel available to inclusive classrooms and their supportive knowledge; and 4) logistical and pragmatic barriers.

The purposes of this chapter are to: 1) discuss the characteristics and types of support offered in inclusive classrooms, 2) outline considerations for selecting needed supports and helpful personnel, 3) present several myths about various disciplines, and 4) provide general guidelines for providing support in inclusive classrooms.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SUPPORT

Providing support to the inclusive classroom requires more than having specific disciplinary expertise and being physically present in the classroom. In this section a definition of support and a description of four types of support are provided. In addition, questions regarding who decides the type and amount of support needed are addressed.

What Is Support?

support... 1. to carry or bear the weight of; keep from falling, slipping, or sinking; hold up or to give courage or bear (a specified weight, strain, pressure, etc.) 2. to give courage, faith, or confidence to; help or comfort 3. to give approval to or be in favor of; subscribe to; uphold 4. to maintain or provide for (a person or institution, etc.) with money or subsistence 5. to show or tend to show to be true; help prove, vindicate, or corroborate (evidence to support the claim 6. to bear, endure; submit to; tolerate 7. to keep up, maintain; sustain; specific to maintain (the price of a specified commodity) as by purchases or by making loans 8. Theater to act a subordinate role in the same play as (a specified star)... (Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language, 1986, p. 1431)

This dictionary definition of support refers to various forms of help. Shel Silverstein's (1974) poem *Helping* reminds us that "... some kind of help is the kind of help that helping is all about, and some kind of help is the kind of help we all can do without" (p. 101). While well intended, efforts to help students, families, and teachers often lead to the assignment of support personnel; merely labeling someone as a support does not ensure that he or she will be perceived as helpful by those receiving the intended support.

The provision of real (as opposed to intended) support is contingent, in part, upon a mutual understanding of the outcomes sought as a result of the support. In the case of an inclusive classroom, there are at least two major desired outcomes: 1) that all students are successful in their educational and social endeavors, and 2) that the classroom teacher feels genuinely supported in his or her efforts to promote student success and positive interdependence in the classroom.

Real support exists when: 1) the recipient of support perceives that he or she has been helped; 2) the responsibility for achieving desired student outcomes is shared among team members (i.e., positive interdependence among team members develops); 3) the goal of meeting diverse educational needs of students is better accomplished; 4) the effort required for collaboration is worth the outcomes; and 5) priority outcomes for students at school, at home, and in the community are achieved.

Whether or not real support is achieved depends on how the actions of one person affect another. Support personnel can engage in a variety of behaviors, but unless those behaviors result in supportive effects for the recipient, support has not been provided. Quasi-support occurs when a mismatch exists between the content, type, or intensity of support desired and the support provided. Table 1 provides examples of practices that would likely fit this description of support and those that would not.

Table 1. Examples of what support means and what support does not mean

Support means:

helping students and families realize their own vision of a good life
 listening to and acting on the support needs identified by students, families, and other team members
 reallocating resources so that students can be included in regular school life, and teams can learn and work together
 remembering that the students are the "stars" and that the educational team members are the supporting actors
 acknowledging the efforts of fellow team members
 designing curricular and Instructional methods that assist the student to be an active learner
 designing curricular and instructional methods that assist the classroom teacher to effectively include the student
 designing curricular and instructional methods that promote positive interdependence among students in the class
 providing constructive feedback to fellow team members that results in more effective team member interactions and ultimately improved student learning
 providing enough information, but not too much
 being around and available, but not too much

Support does *not* mean:

conducting a classroom observation and then writing and depositing notes on the teacher's desk with no opportunity for follow-up discussion
 giving your opinions, advice, and recommendations and then leaving before a discussion can ensue
 requesting to meet with the classroom teacher during instructional time without making prior arrangements
 presenting the classroom teacher with a list of skills or activities to be integrated into the classroom day
 telling the teacher or family what to do
 giving the classroom teacher a file folder of resources when she asked for problem-solving support
 hovering near students with disabilities in the classroom
 doing "therapy" in the back of the room
 suggesting interventions that interfere with the classroom routine
 providing more support than is needed

What Are the Types of Support?

Support for inclusive classrooms can be classified into four types – resource, moral, technical, and evaluation. The type and/or the intensity of support provided in an inclusive classroom will vary depending on needs at different points in time.

Resource Support Resource support consists of providing a consumer with tangible material (e.g., tab equipment, adapted computer

keyboard), financial resources (e.g., funds for community experiences), informational resources (e.g., professional literature), or human resources (e.g., instructional assistant, peer tutor). However, resources alone do not ensure quality of support. More money or people do not necessarily meet the support needs of an inclusive classroom. Likewise, a paucity of resources does not necessarily preclude the availability of needed support for a classroom. For example, in some resource-scarce schools, teams are forced to find creative and often more positive and interdependent ways to address challenges. Some of the best examples of inclusion-oriented classes are in economically disadvantaged, rural areas.

Moral Support Moral support refers to person-to-person interactions that validate the worth of people as individuals and as knowledgeable colleagues. It includes active listening characterized by nonjudgmental acceptance of ideas and feelings. The person providing moral support does not always agree with the speaker, but adequate trust exists so that perspectives can be shared without fear of putdowns, criticism, or breeches in confidentiality.

Technical Support Technical support refers to offering concrete strategies, methods, approaches, or ideas. Providing a teacher with a journal article on instructional methods is a form of resource support (informational), not technical support. Technical support can be provided through inservice training, staff development activities, on-site collaborative consultation, peer coaching, or other methods. It provides the recipient with skills that can then be implemented, adjusted, and reimplemented in a cyclical fashion to meet student needs. Technical assistance is a dynamic process that is individualized and requires interpersonal interactions.

Evaluation Support Evaluation support refers to assistance in collecting information that allows support to be monitored and adjusted. It also refers to assistance in determining the impact of support on students, families, and professionals. The scope of evaluation should extend beyond acquisition of specific targeted skills by students to include outcomes of educational experiences on the lifestyle or quality of life of the students and their families (Horner, 1991; Meyer & Janney, 1989; Schalock, 1990).

Who Decides the Type of Support?

Collaboration is required to identify and agree on the type of support needed. The intended recipients of support know their situations best and therefore have a primary role in identifying supports. This means that support personnel are not "in charge" of making support decisions. Decisions about the type of support needed in any particular

situation belong to everyone involved. Furthermore, all members of the team have the capacity to provide and receive support. This seemingly benign concept may be a challenge to actualize since many professionals are socialized and accustomed to retaining authority over decisions related to their discipline (Giangreco, 1990a). At the same time, the knowledge and broad-based experience of many support personnel provide them with perspectives that may assist consumers in making decisions about support needs. Additionally, support personnel may be knowledgeable about whether they can provide the kind of support being requested or whether others could offer that support more effectively. Recently developed strategies such as the Vermont Interdependent Services Team Approach (VISTA) are designed to assist teams in reaching consensus regarding support needs (Giangreco, 1990c).

Who Decides How Much Support?

Sometimes well-intentioned recommendations to provide support services on behalf of a student or teacher can backfire. More is not necessarily better. In fact, providing more services than necessary can have negative ramifications, such as: 1) decreasing the time available for the student's interaction and participation with peers in school activities, 2) causing disruption for students and teachers in carrying out their normal classroom activities, 3) causing inequities in the distribution of scarce resources when other students or educators in need of supports remain unserved or underserved, 4) overwhelming consumer families with an unnecessarily high number of professionals, or 5) unnecessarily complicating communication and coordination among all involved persons. An alternative is to provide supports that are "only as special as necessary" (Biklen, 1987; Giangreco & Eichinger, 1990). In such cases, needed services are provided and caution is exercised to avoid the inherent problems of well-intentioned, yet often undesirable, overservice.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR SELECTING SUPPORT PERSONNEL

Support may be needed by some students and teachers to make school inclusion successful. Supports may be needed to overcome or circumvent difficulties experienced as a result of a student's ability or disability, environmental influences, or a combination of both. Characteristics of students that may influence support selection include skills acquired, experiences, and/or aspects of their intellectual, communication, social, physical, sensory, or health functioning. The knowledge, skills, and previous experiences of teachers as well as the

class members can also have an impact on the type and degree of support needed. In addition, environmental influences including school, home, and community factors can have a dramatic effect on the success of students and teachers in inclusive classrooms and schools.

In a recent book, *The Challenge of Complex School Problems*, Norby, Thurlow, Christenson, and Ysseldyke (1990) present a model of interaction among community, home, school, and student factors that affect student performance in school. Twenty-two case studies dramatically illustrate the complex interaction of variables affecting school performance. Too often, educational team members focus exclusively on challenges related to a child's disability (e.g., physical difficulty, mental retardation) without sufficient knowledge of contributing external factors (e.g., nutrition, expectations at home, peer pressure), or they attribute student challenges to presumed disabilities when, in fact, challenges may be the result of school, home, or community variables external to the child.

The support model that has developed in education is designed to match certain disciplines to specific student or teacher challenges. For example, a student who exhibits difficulty or a teacher who is unsure of how to facilitate skills among some class members, such as getting from place to place in the school or manipulating books and other educational materials, can be assisted by professionals trained in physical therapy, occupational therapy, or adapted physical education. If classroom challenges involve how to communicate, a speech and language therapist or an educator with experience in augmentative and alternative communication might be of assistance. Some students have diverse health care needs that require support for eating, physical activity, and other routines and activities that are part of the school day. School nurses can assist in developing ways to address these special health care needs. Finally, it should be stressed that support personnel need to focus more now than in the past on environmental adjustments and improvements (e.g., better cues and assistance in getting from place to place; more accommodating communication environments, such as learning symbols on a communication board) rather than just focusing on what a particular student can do to better fit into the existing environment.

After everyone involved agrees on which educational supports are needed to modify the environment or accommodate an individual student or teacher, appropriate support personnel can be identified. As shown in Table 2, there are several disciplines that could provide support for any particular type of situation. In addition to professionals, the direct experiences of family members and classmates make them invaluable as support for meeting various challenges. In

Table 2. Support personnel to assist in meeting specific student challenges

<u>Student challenge</u>	<u>Potential support personnel</u>
Cognitive/learning processes	
Curricular/instructional adaptations or alternatives	Educator, speech-language pathologist, occupational therapist, psychologist, vision or hearing specialist, classmate, support facilitator
Organizing assignments, schedules	Educator, occupational therapist, speech-language pathologist, support facilitator
Communication/interactions	
Nonverbal communication	Speech-language pathologist, teacher, family members
Socialization with classmates	Speech-language pathologist, teacher, psychologist, classmates
Behaving in adaptive ways	Educator, psychologist, speech-language pathologist, classmates
Physical/motor	
Functional use of hands	Occupational therapist, physical therapist, family member, classmates
Mobility and transitions	Physical therapist, occupational therapist, orientation and mobility specialist, educator, family member, classmates
Posture (body alignment)	Physical therapist, occupational therapist
Fitness and physical activity	Physical therapist, physical educator, nurse
Sensory	
Vision	Vision specialist, occupational therapist, orientation and mobility specialist
Hearing	Audiologist, hearing specialist, Speech-language pathologist
Health	
Eating difficulty	Occupational therapist, speech-language pathologist, physical therapist, nurse, educator
Medications	Nurse
Other health needs	Nurse
Current and future living	
Career and vocational pursuits	Vocational educator, counselor, educator
Leisure pursuits	Educator, occupational therapist, community recreation personnel
Support from home and community	Social worker, counselor, educator

deciding who can be supportive of specific student challenges, the range of school, home, and community supports should be considered. Final decisions about support personnel and the type and amount of support needed are reached by team consensus. Consensus decision making reduces the risks of overlap, gaps, and contradictions in service provision (Giangreco, 1990c; Giangreco, Dennis, & Edelman, in press).

DISCIPLINE MYTHS

There are a sufficient number of myths that exist about the roles and responsibilities of the various disciplines. The authors present these discipline myths here as they frequently represent a source of team conflict, sometimes without those people involved recognizing their influence.

First, it is a myth that a person's expertise is the primary prerequisite for carrying out the role of a support person. Of equal importance to an individual's disciplinary expertise is his or her ability to work collaboratively. This includes: 1) letting go of strong disciplinary beliefs when they get in the way of a holistic view of the child, 2) solving problems even if the problems are not considered in the arena of an individual's expertise, and 3) providing support to improve interactions within the inclusive classroom and school community. An individual with outstanding disciplinary skills will be hampered in his or her support efforts if he or she has inadequate collaboration skills.

Second, strictly defined boundaries among disciplines is a myth. There is, in fact, tremendous overlap among many disciplines. Case management, for example, is a responsibility now claimed by at least six different disciplines that support students and teachers in schools (e.g., social workers, parents, teachers, counselors, psychologists, nurses). When working with children, there is considerable overlap in the knowledge and skills of physical and occupational therapists. In the area of daily living skills, occupational therapists and teachers have overlapping competencies. In the area of reading difficulty, any number of licensed reading teachers have overlapping expertise.

In a time of curricular and economic crisis in the public schools and increasing decentralization of students with common characteristics and needs, educators are encouraged to employ service provision models that use support resources efficiently. Instead of fighting over "turf," professionals could acknowledge overlap and divide up work accordingly. For example, if a physical therapist and an occupational therapist have overlapping areas of knowledge and skill needed

to support a particular student, the persons involved (including the families) could designate one of the therapists as the primary specialist for the student (Rainforth, York, & Macdonald, 1992). The result is fewer children on each therapist's roster and more time to spend with each student. This can facilitate increased continuity in a student's educational program and decreased logistical constraints due to having fewer people to coordinate. When using a primary specialist model, it is appropriate to provide opportunities for specialists to work together occasionally with regard to an individual student.

A third myth is that each individual trained in a particular discipline has the same competencies. Most professional fields of practice or disciplines have diverse arenas of practice. Physical therapists, for example, can work in sports medicine, obstetrics, neonatal intensive care, nursing homes, orthopedics, pediatrics, and developmental disabilities. Individual professionals within a discipline tend to be more or less interested and skilled in selected areas of practice. The key to determining appropriate support personnel is to focus on the competencies of the individual, not his or her specialty label.

The final myth is that individuals with a specific discipline label own an area of expertise. In other words, only an individual trained in a particular discipline can execute the skills commonly associated with it. As mentioned previously, there is considerable overlap among specific disciplines (Giangreco & Eichenger, 1990). Furthermore, all professionals have a responsibility to learn as much as they can to assist students be successful learners. If one person learned to correctly implement a given procedure, it is very likely that other people can do so as well with appropriate training and support. The knowledge and skills that need to be transferred from one team member to another are identified based on the needs of an individual student in his or her educational program. There is a core group of people (e.g., family members, classroom teachers, paraprofessionals, classmates, friends) who surround and support students and teachers all day, every day. These individuals know the student and teacher best and are most accessible for assisting them to be successful in the classroom and school. For example, if a student uses alternative forms of communication or mobility, the core people in that student's life can and must learn effective means of facilitating these forms. To do this they need support, recommendations, and training from various disciplines. This is not to say that individuals trained in various disciplines need to pass all of their skills on to other people. It would be inefficient, for example, to teach everyone involved with a particular student specific disciplinary, diagnostic, and evaluation competencies.

The specific methods of support vary tremendously. Any number of creative variations are possible to more effectively meet the

needs of students and teachers (Skrtic, 1987). The most important issue is deciding who has or could develop the competence to support a student – not who has the correct label. After the priorities of an individual in an educational setting have been identified, the specific person(s) who is able to assist in meeting the needs can be determined.

STRUCTURES FOR PROVIDING SUPPORT

Traditional approaches used by the numerous and diverse professionals providing support to an individual student consist of spending individual or small group time with the student to focus on a specific challenge. For example, a physical therapist might have worked with a student on improving walking skills using parallel bars in a separate therapy room. Or, a speech and language therapist may have spent individual time increasing a child's response to greetings by practicing in the therapy room. Greater inclusion of students with diverse needs into general education classes and other integrated environments has created the need for support personnel to modify their traditional methods of service provision. Specifically, structures that allow support personnel to observe and work with students and their teachers and peers in the context of their educational programs is essential to ensure the educational relevance of their support. This requires two major logistical changes: 1) flexible scheduling so that support personnel can spend time in general education classes and other integrated environments, and 2) scheduling opportunities for the people involved to collaborate.

Scheduling Time In Integrated Environments

An alternative to traditional scheduling of specialist time (i.e., back-to-back direct sessions of 30-45 minutes in a separate environment) is the use of *block scheduling* (Rainforth, York, & Macdonald, 1992; Rainforth & York, 1987; York, Rainforth, & Wiemann, 1988). Block scheduling refers to allocating longer periods of time (e.g., a half or full day) for a specialist to move flexibly to each environment where students and teachers may require assistance, input, and/or support. For example, a speech-language therapist might spend one full day every other week in an elementary school where four students and/or teachers require the therapist's expertise. Prior to block scheduling, the therapist would meet briefly (10-15 minutes) with classroom teachers (primary level) or case managers (secondary level) to: 1) identify priorities that need to be addressed, and 2) determine where the therapist needs to be and at what times in order to attend to the priorities.

There are countless ways to implement a block scheduling

model. The specific strategies will vary given the array of demographic, student, district, and scheduling variables. Perhaps the only two guidelines to follow are: 1) allow adequate flexibility for meeting the differing needs of those individuals requiring assistance and for changing needs over time, and 2) be certain that scheduling is communicated among everyone involved to maximize preparation and efficiency. Typically, a block scheduling model results in less frequent direct service provision to students, but provides the flexibility needed to ensure educational relevance. (See Rainforth, York, & Macdonald, 1992, for more detailed information about scheduling support personnel in inclusive classrooms.

Scheduling Time To Collaborate

Collaboration opportunities occur informally during block scheduling times as well as during regularly scheduled team meeting times, special purpose meetings (e.g., JEP meetings), and staff development and/or training meetings. When support personnel working with other involved persons (e.g., teachers, family members, students) are just starting to design and implement individualized education programs (IEPs) in inclusive classrooms, more collaboration time is required. As those involved learn to collaborate more efficiently and as the program of support is worked out, less time is needed for collaboration. Initially, the authors suggest scheduling regular meeting times and classroom times for support personnel – but only those support personnel who are recognized as necessary for the student's and/or teacher's initial priorities. For a small number of students who have very intensive support needs, weekly team meetings may be necessary in the beginning.

To maximize meeting efficiency, the following parameters are offered:

1. Begin and end the meetings on time.
2. Identify a facilitator and recorder for each meeting and rotate these roles among all members of the group (additional roles might be assigned, such as timekeeper or "jargon buster" (term coined by staff of the Addison-Northeast Supervisory Union in Bristol, Vermont depending on individual team needs).
3. Generate an agenda prior to the meeting.
4. Review and prioritize items at the beginning of the meeting if necessary.
5. Identify follow-up activities and assign responsibility for each.
6. Copy and disseminate minutes to each person present within 2 days following the meetings.

Classroom and meeting times both provide a forum for all types of support (e.g., resource, moral, technical, evaluation). In an effort to be efficient, teams may focus all their attention on resource, technical, and evaluation support and forget what can be the most important and easiest support to provide – moral support. Although moral support can be demonstrated by the manner used to address other support needs (e.g., active listening to the resource concerns of an involved person), specific strategies for validating individual and team efforts are important as well. For example, adding a "celebrate success" item to the meeting agenda would be one way of attending to the provision of moral support.

CONCLUSION

As the student population in inclusive classrooms becomes more heterogeneous, models of providing support will evolve to meet increasingly diverse learning and social needs. In fact, recent education reform initiatives aimed at developing capacity at the school building level (e.g., site-based management, teacher empowerment, adhocratic school organization) reflect a shift to empower the people closest to students, as well as the students themselves. The safeguard against any one individual not acting in a student's best interest is the collaborative support group structure. Empowerment of direct service personnel is a departure from traditional school organizational models in which support has been part of a unidirectional hierarchy; that is, support and direction from higher up in the organization or from external resources (e.g., "expert" consultants). The evolving interdependent models of support create opportunities for multidirectional, more immediate, and possibly more relevant support. In addition, to gain even more relevant support, there may eventually be a group structure that involves fewer members. However, more intensive involvement by these members is preferred over a structure that involves a large number of disciplines that have very little time to spend in each situation or to provide ongoing problem-solving support.

Regardless of the specific disciplines that will be involved as support personnel, it is likely that the two most important areas of "expertise" for assisting students to become valued and contributing members of schools and larger communities are: 1) expertise specific to the student and teacher (i.e., knowing student and teacher well and having a stake in their success), and 2) community-building expertise (i.e., knowing local resources and working collaboratively with others to achieve the needed support).

Although much of the focus in this chapter has been on support

personnel with ascribed professional discipline labels, schools are increasingly drawing upon educators, parents and families, students, community members, and others to provide support within the inclusive school community. Members of collaborative educational teams provide support to one another. Those traditionally considered recipients of support (e.g., classroom teachers, students, family members) are assuming more active and collaborative roles in planning, problem solving, and implementation (Giangreco, 1990b; Giangreco, Cloninger, & Iverson, 1990; Vandercook, York, & Forest, 1989).

Several summary guidelines are offered to assist educational teams in making decisions about the support personnel needed and the nature of that support. First, priority educational needs and other learning outcomes are identified through consensus decision making by a group consisting of students, family members, the classroom teacher, and others identified as essential in this process. Second, goals and objectives related to accomplishing the priority needs are determined. Third, support personnel who have the knowledge and skills, regardless of their discipline label, to address the needs are identified. This, too, is accomplished through consensus decision making in order to decrease overlap, gaps, and contradictions in service provision. Fourth, an organizational structure that allows the support personnel to be involved in natural, ongoing educational contexts and to collaborate with other persons involved is developed. Finally, as educational priorities and needs change, the provision of support is reexamined and altered as necessary.

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