

# Philosophy in Practice

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I want to talk about some general issues about modifying curriculum, and then get down to some specific examples.

The first thing I have to say is that very often when we include a child who has exceptional needs, it can have a catalytic effect, on looking at the curriculum and our teaching, in other words, it forces us, or pushes us, or allows us to look at the whole curriculum and say 'does this make sense?' Not only ask 'does this make sense not only for Michael, but does it make sense for anybody?'

Could it be better? Could it be deeper? Could it be richer? And one of the things that I have found consistently when working with teachers is that when they start to look at making adaptations or modifications for a child with a significant disability, or even a mild disability, they often find that they have made adaptations and modifications that are useful to a lot of kids.

Because I will maintain over and over again that good teaching is good teaching: there's not good teaching for regular ed. and good teaching for special ed., and that having a child with a special need sometimes helps us look at our teaching and make it better all around.

## **Modifying curriculum for inclusive classrooms**

The following steps are essential for inclusive education.

### **Build community**

Unless you have established a classroom atmosphere where kids know each other, and accept each other, and understand each other's differences, then you are continually answering questions like 'how come Jason gets to write his answers on a computer?' 'How come Sally gets to use a calculator?' 'How come she doesn't do the same math that we do?' and if you are continually answering those questions then it indicates to me that the kids do not understand that their classmates differ, that everyone learns differently, it's a real need to establish a solid base that says 'we're all in here together, we're all in here as 8 year olds, or 9 year olds or 10 year olds, or 12 year olds, and that we all learn differently, we're good at different things, we have trouble with different things, and I think that unless you've done a good job on that one, that all the clever modifications in the world won't work because you will be doing it against the

tide, you will be constantly having to justify it, and it just won't work. Another important thing to say here is that you have to establish an atmosphere where children can not only understand each other's differences, but so that they can also appreciate what's hard for someone else, and what 's an accomplishment for someone else, and can celebrate that. And that gets back to it being a non-competitive environment.

So, for example I come to you as my friends, and I say 'hey guess what I ran two miles today'. What do I want from you? I want you to say 'that's great '. Because you know that's an accomplishment for me. Do I really want someone saying 'Big deal I I run ten miles before breakfast each morning'.

Why is that the wrong thing to say?

It's not supportive, but it's also not relevant It's pretty much irrelevant I t 's not important to me that for someone else this came much easier, or sooner, for me this is an accomplishment.

So, that's another way of thinking about your classroom, and showing children that people have different struggles and different accomplishments. I went to a classroom recently, where a little boy came running up to me saying 'guess what? Carol can tie her shoes now'. I looked at him thinking 'yeah?' Carol was a little girl with cerebral palsy, so he knew that for Carol this was an accomplishment. He didn't think 'big deal, I've been tying my shoes since I was five', because he knew it was really hard for her, and that's why building a community is very important.

Now we're going to get into other things like changes in the environment, physical supports, social supports, changing the task - modifying the standards, the rules, all of those kind of things.

Here's an example of a modification flow chart. Questions you need to ask yourself are:

- What is everybody doing?
- Can bill participate like everyone else?
- Yes? Then go have fun.
- No? What can we do to include Bill?
- Can Bill have help from friends?
- Yes? From whom?
- Can Bill have help from an adult?
- Yes?
- From whom?

One of the biggest mistakes I think we have made in inclusion is assuming that help and support always has to come from an adult, and there is a lot of research that shows that the teacher's aide who is 'glued' or as we say 'velcroed' to the side of the child can do a lot of damage to the

ability of include that child, because children start to perceive that 'oh, Mrs Jones teaches us, and Ms Smith works with Michael'. So you've almost got two separate classrooms.

And, so the person who is so closely linked with that child, as per the research that shows that the person so closely linked with that child other children often hesitate to interact or jump in to assist, because it's like 'oh, she'll take care of it, she's the adult, she's meant to do those things'.

So, there's a big push to see how can peers be involved. There's a tremendous amount of research about why peer teaching is so successful. On the one hand it makes no sense, shouldn't a teacher with a master's degree in teaching be a better teacher than an 8 year old? But there are a lot of times when the best teacher is an 8 year old. Why?

They speak the same language, like how long ago did you learn trading (subtraction)? 30 years? 40 years? Long enough ago to call it borrowing! When I was at school we called it borrowing and adding.

But most of us learnt it 20-40 years ago, so it's hard for us to remember where it even gets hard, or why it gets confusing.

But the child who learnt it three weeks ago knows exactly where the problem is because they had the same problem three weeks ago, so there are a lot of reasons why peer teaching is good.

Another reason is the social atmosphere, and the way that kids can relate to each other much more easily. Because the truth of the matter is that if I am sitting here looking over Levan saying 'I've shown you 12 times, do you understand why the 3 is there?' What does he want most in the world?

For me to go away! I mean, it's embarrassing, so he has to say 'yeah, yeah, I understand, now go away', when he may not have a clue, so there's a whole different power relationship, and kids can be wonderful teachers and wonderful supports. And the other issue is that if you want a 9 year old boy with Down syndrome to learn how to be a 9 year old boy, it's very difficult for a 43 year old woman to do that! I'm not 9 year old boy! I can be wonderful, smart, empathic, et cetera, but I am not a 9 year old boy!

So utilise the peers. Can an adult help?

When you think this, you have to really think can the child be working with a partner? If the child's working with a partner, if that child's working with a partner what kind of training, support, will that partner need to help understand and support? Again, this is very, very critical. I do a lot of workshops on cooperative learning, and the conference I was actually brought to Australia for [I did the keynote at the International cooperative learning meeting in Brisbane

about three weeks ago] and this whole cooperative learning, teaching kids to systematically work together, help each other, instruct each other has been hugely successful and is growing all over the world) and it's very much also hinging on your attitude towards how people should interact in a classroom. For those of you who grew up, and were taught when the teacher stood at the front, everyone else just sat there quietly and took down the notes without any interaction, this is a real departure. But in one class you go in, and there is Wendy having problems, and Hans leans over to help, and the teacher says 'eyes on me. You have any problems, you talk to me, you do your own work, I want to know what you can do, not what your neighbour can do.'

In another classroom, Wendy is having problems, and he leans over to help. Not only is it ok for him to help, but it is expected to help, not only is it expected but he has been shown how to help, so he has been told 'you don't just give her the answer' for someone who is struggling with reading or math, or 'here's the kind of support you can offer' or 'here's the kind of questions you can provide'.

So, in one class it's called cheating, when he leans over, in another it's called cooperative learning and peer tutoring. So, a lot of this depends on your attitude and your belief about how kid should be interacting with one another.

So another thing you will have to look at when you do your problem solving is the reallocation of control and responsibility. Teachers who think that nobody should talk but them, that all information should come from the teacher, that they don't talk to others, are going to have a very difficult time with inclusion, because inclusion really means using all the resources of the group, and that means using the children as resources to one another.

I've worked with some teachers, who have the children seated in cooperative learning groups, or clusters, where the desks are pushed together in fours and sixes, and the teachers have a rule that if you have a question you have to check with everyone at your table before you come to me.

What do you think happens to the number of questions to the teacher?

Way down. And, if six of them have all checked, and none of them know why the's' goes after the apostrophe in boy's, what does this tell you?

You didn't teach it very well, and you need some more work! But the thing that's wonderful is watching children to be resources to each other, not just over apostrophes, or which colour to paint the map, but also I lost my lunch money and I don't know what to do, or there's a kid out in the playground who's threatening to beat me up, and I don't know what to do. I'm scared.

You can really watch children use different resources.

Can Bill use different materials?

What materials?

How will they be used?

What else can Bill do that is related to what the class will be doing? And we're going to look at a lot of different forms, because maybe one of them will trigger in your head a lot of different responses.

Now, I have to say one thing that kind of gets in the way of this problem solving. Unfortunately it's some of the rigidity of the way our schools are structured, and the way curriculum is structured. Because if I gave you an example from your real life, not your school life, of this you would have a different set of responses. If I asked you 'how many of you have had a dinner at your house where there were, like, 20 people, or a lot of people, ranging in ages from a 2 year old to grandma who is 60 years old. How many of you have ever had a dinner like that, or a family gathering where there's a real diversity of ages? And if I said 'can you find a job for everyone to do to get ready for supper that would be a real contribution.

Could you find something for everyone to do? Would it be the same thing? No, you don't give the two year old the platter with the turkey! What do you give the two year old to carry? The spoons, the napkins... Can you find something for the 5 year old to do? Can they be counting out cutlery? Can they be setting the table? Can you find something for grandma who can only sit, and who can't walk around very easily? Can she be doing the place cards?

We would come up with genuine tasks that would be necessary to make the dinner go well that were real work, not 'make' work, it would be real work that would be appropriate for everyone, we could do that. But unfortunately, when we get to school we start thinking 'everyone has to read the exact same book, and answer the same questions at the end of the book', so we stop looking for, well we stop using our common sense, and we start being kind of rigid.

What I want to walk you through are some adaptations that you might start thinking about, and then I want to walk you through one of the checklists that you have.

So, this is appropriate supports for students with disabilities in cooperative groups.

Because I am assuming that you are not going to have children working in isolation. You're going to have children working together.

### **Physical assistance**

Will someone need to support the child, to help them sit up, if that child has to go from desk to desk to deliver papers will someone need to walk with that child, to help push their wheelchair,

if the child is going to be asked to write their name will they need someone to hold their hand, if they are going to be doing cutting and pasting will they need someone to help them?

### **Equipment or adaptive devices**

Will this child be able to contribute as long as he has a computer? Can this child dictate his story into a tape recorder instead of writing it? Can this child use a calculator? Is there some piece of equipment? If this child uses a rack to hold their cards can they play the game, instead of holding them in their hands? Is there some piece of equipment that will allow that child to participate?

### **Emotional support or encouragement**

This is very important. Is this a child that is likely to go off task, or have a struggle, and if so, how can I make sure that they are going to have support there? I don't think this is limited to children with disabilities. How many of you know that you are going to have to set yourself up with some support for some tasks? For me it is the end of the term when I have to grade 400 exams. So I have made a deal with my daughters, where at the end of every five something nice has to happen for Mommy. So after five, I will get a cup of tea, and after five more I will get my back rubbed, and so on.

### **A change in the rules**

Not everybody has to do everything the same way. We really don't have to be rigid in that way. One of the advantages of conceptualising our classrooms as a cooperative environment, remember the game, if because when it's cooperative and we're all trying to achieve something together, if somebody does it differently, that's not cheating. That's just what they need to do to help group get it done. If this child needs to put their materials on a walker and walk that way, you don't say 'oh that's cheating; we have to carry them in our hands'. We say 'good, you were able to get your materials to the table in a different way'. If you think about it, the competition and that notion of everybody has to do everything in the same way really gets in the way of our thinking of modifications.

Ok, here's the idea. I'm going to split the group into two; I'm going to give a math's problem. If you know the answer, raise your hand, and I'll call on someone, and I'm going to give points to the side that knows it.

3x7x4. Ok, she knows. Now here is this child who is just beginning to master multiplication, but he needs to put down markers, or chips or something, so what chance does he have with this activity? None. Absolutely none. But she could do it with a calculator. She could punch in the numbers, but somebody would say that's cheating right? So automatically, this activity doesn't allow him or her to be successful. But if this were a cooperative activity where each group were

to get a problem, and they could figure out the problem in their own way, and then we're going to add up those numbers in whatever way, then if he needs to use chips and she needs a calculator, it's ok. It's really critical that we think broadly.

Some other things that you might want to consider when you are working with smaller groups. Like, dealing with problem behaviours. If we already know that we have a child that needs to move around a lot, design your activities so that's part of the activity. If I've said that the activity is to sit at your desk and colour the map of Australia with six states and two territories, and I already know that I have a kid who can't sit still long enough, this is a chance to say 'maybe it would be better if we went out into the playground and drew a big map of Australia and we did this activity where you said run to Perth. Run to the Northern Territory.

And one- of the things that I would wager if that it would turn out to be a better activity for all the children because we have thought about involving everyone.

Making thoughtful choices about grouping. Who do we have work with whom? How many have you seen surprising combinations in your classroom? A kid who assists another kid, or two kids that work together you never would have thought of. But when you are thinking about small groups, how do you think about who works with whom? Some teachers that I work with who have a child with a disability will form the group around that child. They'll say 'Ok, here's Jason who wants to work with Jason?' So really thinking about how to put together combinations that work. Now, it might be your goal that by the end of the year, you could put any kids together and have them work well together, it's a good goal, but it's probably not where you start. In the beginning you have to think very hard about who you put with whom.

### **Assigning role that provoke active participation.**

You can't say to me that kids are going to be in groups of four, and they're going to write a skit, and the kid that doesn't write, he can hold up the sign at the end that says applause.

I'm going to want to know what that child is doing for the 45 minutes when they're writing the skit, because he's not involved. What else could they be doing as part of that activity? An example, cooperative learning groups, groups of three, doing to three step story problems, you know, pencils costs 25 cents each, if you have \$4 how many can you buy? In one of the groups was a kid whose learning objective was to read and write numerals 1-10, what was her role in the group? She wrote down the answers. Someone dictated it to her, and she wrote it down on the answer sheet. She checked in on the calculator. Was she doing the same maths as them? No, but was she doing math's that involved her in the group? Yes, she was writing 3, 2, 1 and you'd better believe that they were very sure that she was writing down the correct answer, because that was their answer sheet. So how can you actively involve the student?

In talking about inclusion to children, I put that on there because I think we sometimes forget to tell the children why it is we're doing what we're doing. Unless we've been very explicit with students by making a statement something like, 'we're all different here, we all learn differently, I give you the work that will help you learn and grow', you know, something that says there's differences in here, and here's how I accommodate, and here's how we accommodate, it's the same thing as before, when you would be constantly answering questions about why some people do things differently.

I was in a secondary school the other day, and a teacher explained to me that she had some students with learning difficulties in her class, and that what she had decided was that she would give them a different exam for the end of semester, and she mixed them in when she was handing them out, so it looked random, but she knew what she was doing, and this was very clever because this way the other children didn't know. I believed that for about three seconds! And the other message is what? Differences are bad; they're like a secret because they're so bad? Don't you remember you used to compare answers to questions on the test, so it's like this big secret or surprise that they're doing something different. I don't think that's the message we want to get across.

This is just one checklist that might help you think when you sit down with your case study. You can imagine that you've got in mind the activity, what everyone will be doing, and then it says:

Can the student participate in the activity like any other student, no adaptation necessary? You might decide that.

Then it says: Can the student participate in the activity with changes to materials, equipment, input output mode, or skills sequence rules, eg. this child can do it, but they will need a brail test, this child can do it, but they will need the story on a tape, this child can do the same activity but they will need their calculator, this child can do the same activity but they will need a number braille on their desk, they can do the same activity but they will need it differently,

This child can do the math's problems, but they will need a little frame to put over it so they only see one problem at a time, otherwise they go crazy trying to find it on the page, so what adaptation is necessary for the child?

Can the student participate on the activity, but work on different level material in the same goal area?

The example is the math's group. Where the child was working on writing the numbers 1-10, as part of the activity. She's still doing math, but she doing maths at a different level.



Another example would be everybody is using decks of cards, some are working out probability of cards, some are sequencing, some are sorting into piles, so everyone is using cards, but they are doing math's at very different levels using the same materials.

Can the student participate in the activity, but work on a skill from a different curricular area? That is, everyone is doing something, but that child is working on a different skill. For example: a group of kids are listening to a story on a tape recorder, and they are supposed to stop the tape and ask each other questions about the story; there's a child in the group who has a serious physical disability and one of the objectives of that child is to tum on and off the tape for the other children, by pushing stop, rewind, fast forward, pause and so on. So what's that child's role in the group? He runs the tape recorded. So he's actively involved in the group, go forward, go back, let's hear that part again, but he's not working on that story, he's working on that physical skill.

After implementing the modifications of students, observe the student. Is the student involved throughout the activity? What are they doing? Is it something that will keep them genuinely involved and interested in the whole activity, or is it something that will involve them sitting watching everyone for a long period of time?

Is the student working on the identified priority or some specific that he or she is supposed to be working on?

Interaction which is appropriate to the setting. Do you have an activity that you have designed where one child is racing from one end of the room to the other, counting how many times he can do that, when everyone else is sitting quietly doing their maths? That's not going to be appropriate.

Presented in a valued social role. Do they get to do something that is important? Something that other people will think matters?

Are they engaged in something that has congruence with the subject taking place in the classroom? A colleague of mine was in a class with a teacher's aide the other day, where all the children in the class were doing map skills, they all had maps in front of them, except one child, who the teacher's aide was playing cards with. Not congruent.

Now, couldn't that child have been doing some map skill, or some activity, even if it was taking the sheet that they all had and slicing it into pieces and reassembling it, or numbering the pieces as they' were named up there, or something that was more congruent with the activity?

I think this is a difficult one, again my real life teaches me what this means. We've always taken our children to synagogue, those who have ever taken your children to church will realise that they start going at an age where maybe they can't follow the sermon, or read the prayer book.

It doesn't necessarily mean anything to them, but here's the setting, it's quiet, it's reverential, our solution was that our child was allowed to bring a picture book of bible stories, so they could sit there and read their bible story book while the sermon was going on. It's not the same activity, but it seemed appropriate, it seemed related, it seemed much more appropriate than having the child play Nintendo during the sermon, which may also keep them quiet, but didn't seem congruent with what you do in church or synagogue. The kid would say let's see how many times we can find the word Dad on the page, and we would point, or 'can you see if you can find page 343 in the prayer book' and the child finds the prayer, so something that seems to match up somehow. Again these are just ways of thinking.

I want you to think about things so that you ask yourself, are there ways that I could take an objective and just mesh it into the routine?

If I was to say to you as a parent, your 3 year old child needs to work on colour words. How many of you would sit down at a desk three times a week with cards? You wouldn't do that for a 3 year old. Where would you work on it? In the kitchen. On the washing line. In the supermarket. You would say 'hand me your red shorts'.

If you had it in your head that my child needs to work on colours, you would find all these times during the day to talk about colours. 'Do you want to wear your red overalls, or your green overalls? Let see what vegetable is red?

So if I said to you this child really needs to learn how to count, you would count the number of boys at the school, you would count out the pencils to hand out, you could find lots of activities within your school without disrupting your whole routine, to count. if you said this child had to have as many opportunities to have interaction with other kids you could get that child to be the one who delivers notes, or get that child to hand out the materials, you just have to try to work out how to blend that particular child's objectives in with your regular classroom day.



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