

Spring 2011

Inclusion Solutions

A Newsletter for Educators Who are Doing Amazing Things

A P U B L I C A T I O N O F T H E D O W N S Y N D R O M E G U I L D O F D A L L A S

What is *Inclusion Solutions* and Why Should I Read It?

Inclusion Solutions is a quarterly newsletter written especially for educators by the Down Syndrome Guild of Dallas. Our goal is to assist you in your efforts to support students with Down syndrome in your classroom. Each edition will provide you with strategies you can implement with your students to help them achieve their unique potential. We hope this newsletter will become an effective means of exchanging ideas between teachers, parents, paraprofessionals, therapists, and administrators. Each edition of the newsletter will have ideas submitted that have been effective in working with learners who have Down syndrome. We will also share information about upcoming conferences, seminars, and new products that may be helpful to you in your classroom. We welcome your comments, suggestions, and input so *Inclusion Solutions* will benefit all educators. Please send any ideas you would like to share with other teachers to Becky Slakman at dsged@sbcglobal.net.

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Success Stories

Whatever happened to that kid? Remember the one who wouldn't sit still in class and kept jumping around from activity to activity, without completing the specified requirements? Well, that child grew up and became a dancer who loves to express herself through body movements. Or that child might be the CEO who supervises others, multitasking and delegating the details to subordinates. Whatever happened to that child who doodled all day in class? Well, that child may now be the renowned architect or engineer who just designed that incredible building or new prototype for that ingenious car. Maybe the fidgety child who could never sit still learned to work with her hands, create sculpture, be a chef or even work as a sign language interpreter. Maybe the child who had trouble making friends is now a guidance counselor or child psychologist. Maybe the child with Down syndrome is now gainfully employed and has learned to live independently. Maybe the child who couldn't stop talking is now a lawyer or journalist. What about the child who could barely read on level? Well, that child now loves audio books and has figured out how to decipher the written word by using different learning strategies. That child went on to college. Sure, that child might have needed a remedial reading and writing course, but with perseverance and support from friends, educators, and family, that child never gave up on her goals. That child graduated with a college diploma and is now gainfully employed. Maybe that child never went to college but is now taking adult education courses to learn more. Maybe that child learned a trade and is now a whiz with computers, or maybe that child is an electrician or a plumber. Maybe that child learned to focus her strengths and abilities. Maybe that child was helped by a teacher who successfully found a way to include her in the classroom. Maybe that child was included in society, not because it was the law but because it was the right thing to do. Legislation and research support inclusion, but educators are the ones who must support the *child* by turning rhetoric into successful classroom practice.

Karten, Toby J., *Inclusion Strategies That Work!*, California: Corwin Press, 2005.

Universal Design for Learning

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework that addresses the primary barrier to fostering expert learners within instructional environments: inflexible, “one-size-fits-all” curricula. It is inflexible curricula that raise unintentional barriers to learning. Learners who are “in the margins”, such as learners who are gifted and talented or have disabilities, are particularly vulnerable. However, even learners who are identified as “average” may not have their learning needs met due to poor curricular design.

In learning environments, such as schools and universities, individual variability is the norm, not the exception. When curricula are designed to meet the needs of an imaginary “average”, they do not address the reality learner variability. They fail to provide all individuals with fair and equal opportunities to learn by excluding learners with different abilities, backgrounds, and motivations who do not meet the illusive criteria for “average”.

UDL helps address learner variability by suggesting flexible goals, methods, materials, and assessments that empower educators to meet these varied needs. Curricula that is created using UDL is designed from the outset to meet the needs of all learners, making costly, time-consuming, and after-the-fact changes unnecessary. The UDL framework encourages creating flexible designs from the start that have customizable options, which allow all learners to progress from where they are and not where we would have imagined them to be. The options for accomplishing this are varied and robust enough to provide effective instruction to all learners.

The Three Principles of UDL

1. Provide Multiple Means of Presentation (the “what” of learning)

Learners differ in the ways that they perceive and comprehend information that is presented to them. For example, those with sensory disabilities (e.g., blindness or deafness); learning disabilities (e.g., dyslexia); language or cultural differences, and so forth may all require different ways of approaching content. Others may simply grasp information quicker or more efficiently through visual or auditory means rather than printed text. Also learning, and transfer of learning, occurs when multiple representations are used, because it allows students to make connections within, as well as between, concepts. In short, there is not one means of representation that will be optimal for all learners; providing options for representation is essential.

2. Provide Multiple Means of Action and Expression (the “how” of learning)

Learners differ in the ways that they can navigate a learning environment and express what they know. For example, individuals with significant movement impairments (e.g., cerebral palsy), those who struggle with strategic and organizational abilities (executive function disorders), those who have language barriers, and so forth approach learning tasks very differently. Some may be able to express themselves well in written text but not speech, and vice versa. It should also be recognized that action and expression require a great deal of strategy, practice, and organization, and this is another area in which learners can differ. In reality, there is not one means of action and expression that will be optimal for all learners; providing options for action and expression is essential.

3. Provide Multiple Means of Engagement (the “why” of learning)

Affect represents a crucial element to learning, and learners differ markedly in the ways in which they can be engaged or motivated to learn. There are a variety of sources that can influence individual variation in affect including neurology, culture, personal relevance, subjectivity, and background knowledge, along with a variety of other factors presented in these guidelines. Some learners are highly engaged by spontaneity and novelty while others are disengaged, even frightened, by those aspects, preferring strict routine. Some learners might like to work alone, while others prefer to work with their peers. In reality, there is not one means of engagement that will be optimal for all learners in all contexts; providing multiple options for engagement is essential.

Mark Your Calendar for Down Syndrome Guild Annual Fall Conference *Learning Together, Focusing on Possibilities*

Saturday, October 22, 2011
8:00 am– 4:30 pm
Crown Plaza Hotel

7800 Alpha Road, Dallas, TX 75240

Each year, the Down Syndrome Guild of Dallas' annual conference brings together members of the community to learn from our collective accomplishments, and the expertise of professionals. This conference acts as a platform to share cutting-edge developments and information from specialists in their respective fields, as it relates to Down syndrome and other intellectual disabilities. You'll experience first class presenters and hands on sessions full of information you can take back to your homes, businesses and classrooms and use immediately.

Topics

Topics this year include:

- Differentiated Instruction and Brain Based Learning
- Making Math Accessible to Students with Special Needs
- Teaching by Design: Using Your Computer to Create Materials for students with Learning Differences
- Transition: The Middle School Years

Resource Fair

The conference also provides a great opportunity to network with fellow participants and to shop the resource fair for products and information that will help support people with intellectual disabilities both at home and at school. Be sure to stop by the Down Syndrome Guild of Dallas table to find out more about our programs and resources available.

Outstanding Educator of the Year Award Nominations

Each year the Down Syndrome Guild of Dallas recognizes individuals and/or teams working with students with Down syndrome in an inclusive educational setting, public or private. Experience, education, and community involvement, as well as teaching philosophy are all criteria that the Award Committee will consider. Past winners have included teachers, transition specialists, speech therapists, paraprofessionals, and others working at all grade levels. Any Down Syndrome Guild member may nominate their favorite educator by going to our website at www.downsyndromedallas.org and downloading the nomination form.

Deadline for nominations is July 31, 2011. Nominees will be recognized at the DSG, *Learning Together, Focusing on Possibilities* Fall Conference on Saturday, October 22, 2011. Members may also contact Becky Slakman at the DSG office at (214) 267-1374 or dsged@sbcglobal.net and request that a form be sent to you.

Strategies for Supporting Friendship for All Students

by Carol Tashie and Zach Rossetti

Most of us agree that friendships are important for all people. So then, why do so many students with disabilities still not have the meaningful relationships they deserve? When we ask adults this question, we often hear concerns about students' lack of social skills (or language skills, or personal care skills...), discrepancies between students' interests, and/or information about labels and developmental ages. However, when we ask students, we hear a very different story. From them we hear of classmates being pulled out of classes, taken to rooms where "no one knows what really goes on." Of students being over-supported by paraprofessionals who sometimes make it difficult for "kids to just be kids." And of classmates going to the back of the room when the "real work" begins. In short, we hear of barriers embedded in the very systems set up to support students with disabilities. What follows are some strategies that students, teachers, and families have found useful to value and support all students to have the rich and enviable social lives they deserve.

Difference not Deficiency

We often hear how friendships between students with and without disabilities happen more easily when children are young, but become more difficult as students age. A commonly accepted explanation is the growing discrepancy between

students' interests, abilities, needs, and desires. We believe a different interpretation is in order. Inherently, young children see disability as a difference – just as any other difference within and among people. Thus they respond to classmates with interest, honesty, and curiosity. Friendships result based on shared interests, playthings, location, and respect. As children grow older, they begin to realize that



much of the adult world views disability not as a *difference*, but as a *deficiency*. They see their classmates with disabilities being pulled out of classes, given different materials and lessons, talked to in ways more appropriate for younger children, and being over-supported by paraprofessionals. From these actions, they learn that the student with disabilities does not simply have unique ways to move, dance, talk, and learn, but that those ways are less valued by the world around them. Thus, the discrepancy that grows as children age has less to do with student personalities and interests, and more to do with society's beliefs and conventions.

Person-First Language

Through respectful language ("Trey, who loves Led Zeppelin, soccer, and has cerebral palsy"), you can model for others that the student with disabilities is a "person first." By talking to and with the student in ways respectful to his or her age, you will show the world that all students must have age-appropriate expectations. You can model your belief that the student with disabilities is not deficient but simply moves through the world in different ways.

True Inclusion

It certainly goes without saying that students need to be together in order to develop respect, mutual interests, and real friendships. However, for too many students with disabilities, even those who are in general education classes, school days still consist of pull-outs and separate lessons. Reject the notion that some students must leave the classroom in order to learn. Object to inclusion in name only by exposing the hypocrisy of "inclusion rooms," "inclusion teachers," and "inclusion students."

Support Communication

All students have the ability to develop effective ways to communicate their thoughts and knowledge. For students who do not speak or do not speak easily, advocate for augmentative or alternative means of communication. Make it clear that you presume competence in all people, and never assume a student who is not able to speak is unable to understand and learn. Learn to listen to all of the ways a student communicates and recognize that some students use "behavior" as their only way to get their points across.

Continued on pg 5

Ask the Most Important Question: Who Is This Person?

An essential step to facilitating social relationships is to get to know the student. What is her story? What are her interests and dreams? What does he like? What does he dislike? What are her gifts and strengths? Most importantly, what does he want? Let the student's dreams and desires fuel the process. How you gain this information is almost as important as the information itself. While many educators are accustomed to looking into student's educational records for information, the answers to these questions are better obtained by asking the people who know the student best: the student, family, classmates, and teachers.

Talk and Listen to Kids

As adults it is impossible for us to truly know what it is like to be a student. However, the solution to this dilemma is close at hand. Schools and classes are filled with students, all brimming with ideas, suggestions, and unique perspectives on our questions. Therefore, when working to improve the social life of a particular student, it is extremely valuable to ask classmates to tell you what you need to know. A student's classmates can give you information about what friendship is like for students their age. They can tell you how they meet, where they go, why they like to hang out together. They can inform you about opportunities for social connections and let you know what students with particular interests do to get together. Students can advise you on who a student may want to spend time with and can serve as inside connectors to introduce one student to another or to a group.

Pay Attention

One of the greatest barriers to the formation of relationships is missed opportunities. Too often, the adults in a student's life have difficulty paying attention to the natural relationships that are forming or the natural opportunities for these relationships to develop. A valuable strategy involves the commitment to spending the time to observe the natural opportunities for friendship, and then stepping in and supporting those to happen. When paying attention to what is really going on, the process becomes easier and common sense can fuel decisions.

Conclusion

The search for the perfect strategy to facilitate relationships between people with and without disabilities is an impossible quest. There is no perfect strategy; there is simply the one (or two or five) that works for a particular student. As you think about strategies, it is crucial to keep in mind that unless a student is truly valued, fully included, and consistently treated with the highest of expectations, well-meaning strategies can easily result in relationships based on benevolence and pity, not mutual respect and appreciation.

Reprinted with permission from Impact: Feature Issue on Revisiting Inclusive K-12 Education 16(1). Minneapolis: Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota. The entire issue is available online at <http://ici.umn.edu/products/impact/161/default.html>

Benefits of Inclusive Friendship and Play

When children with a disability learn to play well with other children, they'll have:

- relationships that are fun
- other children they can rely on for support
- lots of new skills and talents – children are fantastic teachers of other children
- more confidence – children realize they have lots of special strengths and talents
- a sense of belonging and acceptance by peers
- new ways of talking, listening and communicating
- more social skills.

Children are also less likely to have behavior problems later on. Many problems occur because a child hasn't had a chance to learn social skills or have relationships with other children.

Typically developing children also benefit from getting to know children with disabilities. When the interactions go well, typically developing children can learn to:

- be comfortable with people with disabilities
- understand differences in people and be helpful and empathetic.

Inclusion on the Playground

Inclusive schools should be places where children not only achieve...but enjoy. The playground or inside play areas are oftentimes the center of a young child's social world. It is the place where friendships start, social networks form, and the rigors of the classroom seem far away. Children with disabilities and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may find it challenging to fit in during playtime. Here are some ideas to help facilitate social interaction and acceptance on the playground.

- Facilitate fun structured games and activities on the playground. An adult supervisor can ensure that all children understand the rules and are able to participate.
- Introduce games and activities that include repetitive actions and are not too complex. These kinds of activities can be easier for children to learn and master; helping them to feel accepted and successful during playtime.
- Make sure children come to the playground with a functional communication system. A portable augmentative communication device, picture communication book, or object system is imperative to allow social dialogue to happen on the playground.
- Make small or grand changes to the physical layout of the playground to make it more accessible to children with disabilities. On a grand scale there are several companies who construct accessible play areas. For those on a tighter budget, there are store bought items such as water and sand tables or handmade items, such as an object exploration area, that can be easily accessed by children with physical disabilities.
- Discuss the topics of sharing and friendship before heading out to the play area. Encourage students to meet new friends and to include others in their activity.
- Have an adult supervisor in each area of the playground instead of adults congregating in one area. This facilitates a safe play environment and allows adults to facilitate social interactions among children without hovering over an individual student.

Have fun with your students. There is no better way to teach than by example!

Inclusive Schools Network, May 2007

Having difficulty getting your student with Down syndrome to come in from recess? Try one of these tips:

- Have the student be responsible for blowing the whistle/raising the flag to end recess.
- Have the student be responsible for getting everyone lined up to come in.
- Give the student a reason to go in from recess such as delivering a note to a teacher or bringing in the play equipment.
- With parental permission, have the student "give back" any wasted time coming in at the end of the day.

Transition Skills Checklist

It's critically important that students with Down syndrome be prepared to go out into the world when they graduate from high school. In addition to academic goals, it is helpful to focus on the following skills which will help them be successful out in the community and on the job.

Vocational Skills

Can your student:

- Get to and from class on time
- Perform work satisfactorily
- Work cooperatively with others
- Take break/lunch appropriately
- Follow directions
- Accept supervision
- Ask for help when needed
- Wear suitable clothing

Community Skills

Can your student:

- Use public transportation
- Shop for groceries/supplies
- Make/keep appointments
- Manage own funds
- Be safe in the community
- Know how to seek help

Domestic Skills

Can your student:

- Plan menus
- Shop for groceries
- Prepare meals
- Wash dishes and laundry
- Keep house clean
- Know when/how to answer door
- Dust/mop/vacuum
- Take trash out

Social and Personal Skills

Can your student:

- Use appropriate identification
- Greet people appropriately
- Manage personal grooming
- Be courteous
- Be responsible
- Use appropriate voice tone

Recreation & Leisure

Can your student:

- Use free time appropriately
- Choose good activities
- Pick a hobby
- Be in a new setting comfortably
- Use community resources
- Order in a restaurant
- Express preferences in activities
- Call friends to make plans

Other Useful Skills

Can your student:

- Use a cell phone
- Dial 911 in case of emergency
- Take prescriptions as prescribed
- Use sunscreen/umbrella
- Make change
- Operate appliances

Let the Down Syndrome Guild of Dallas Be Your Resource

The Down Syndrome Guild of Dallas offers a variety of workshops and seminars to help teachers, paraprofessionals, administrators, counselors, and parents but did you know that we also have a lending library? Our library consists of books and other resources with a wide range of topics that can help with a troubling issue or improve an already fantastic classroom. Many of the books have extensive sections of reproducible forms. Resources can be checked out and used at your leisure free of charge, we just ask that you please return it as soon as you are done so that others can reap the benefits as well.

Some of the latest additions to the library include:

- Inclusion Strategies that Work! Research-Based Methods for the Classroom
- The Paraprofessionals Guide to Inclusive Education
- Joyful learning: Active and Collaborative Learning in Inclusive Classrooms
- Inclusion: Strategies for Working with Young Children



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Pictured Above: Kendall Tignor

MISSION STATEMENT: THE DOWN SYNDROME GUILD OF DALLAS PROVIDES ACCURATE AND CURRENT INFORMATION, RESOURCES AND SUPPORT FOR PEOPLE WITH DOWN SYNDROME, THEIR FAMILIES AND THE COMMUNITY.

VISION STATEMENT: PEOPLE WITH DOWN SYNDROME - VALUED AND INCLUDED

Upcoming Workshops and Conferences

Person Centered thinking and Plan Facilitation

May 9-10, 2011 & May 11-12, 2011

Texas Christian University
Dee Kelly & Alumni Center
2820 Stadium Drive
Ft. Worth, Texas 76109

www.pcpinstitute.org/about.htm

Texas Council for Exceptional Children Annual Conference

June 9-11, 2011

The Historic Menger Hotel
San Antonio, TX

<http://www.tceceweb.org/conference.htm>

Positive Behavior Management Workshop: "Why Problem Behavior Occurs and Why It is Important to Know the Answer" hosted by DADS

August 4-5, 2011
Waco Convention Center
Waco, Texas

<http://www.kessjones.com/PBMWorkshop.html>

National Down Syndrome Congress 39th Annual Conference

August 5-11, 2011
JW Marriott San Antonio
23808 Resort Parkway
San Antonio, TX 78261

<http://convention.ndsccenter.org/>

Learning Together, Focusing on Possibilities- The Down Syndrome Guild of Dallas Annual Fall Conference

Saturday, October 22, 2011

Crown Plaza Hotel
7800 Alpha Rd.
Dallas, TX 75240

www.downsyndromedallas.org/