



AT A GLANCE

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Lessons Learned

January 2012 Newsletter

The best part of my job is being able to observe students in classrooms and then working with a team (educators, students and parents) on ways to increase a student's meaningful participation in typical school routines and general education classrooms.

At a recent brainstorming meeting, the IEP team discussed how to help a preschooler ("Tracy") feel more comfortable with fire drills. The team came up with the idea for the student to put on headphones before the loud alarm went off to minimize the loudness of the alarm. It seemed like a workable solution, so right before the next fire drill the teacher handed Tracy a pair of headphones and told her they would help make the alarm sound not as loud. Unfortunately, Tracy was adamant about not putting on the headphones; she was also anxious and did not want to leave the classroom. The teacher was disappointed that the "easy" solution didn't work.

At the next meeting, the parent provided valuable feedback she learned from her daughter. Tracy knew that when she wore the headphones to listen to a story, the sound comes through the headphones. She believed that if she wore the headphones when the fire drill went off, this would make the alarm noise even louder in her ears. What an Ah-Ha moment for everyone!

Lesson learned: Include the student in the brainstorming process and evaluate any possible solutions from the student's point of view!

A high school student ("Daniel") was preparing to start the second semester of the year. The secondary special education teacher ("Mrs. Jones") knew how important it was to tailor the Daniel's classes to his interests and future goals. Mrs. Jones interviewed Daniel and used several inventories to determine the appropriate classes.

She discovered that Daniel was interested in learning how to cook so he could be like his older brother who was attending culinary school. Daniel also wanted to attend college, get married, and have a family. Mrs. Jones decided that Life Skills classes would be best since Daniel had significant support needs. In addition, she had recently bought new kitchen equipment for her Life Skills classroom, and the special ed department had curriculum on "dating for people with disabilities" that would be perfect for Daniel. But Mrs. Jones wrestled with how she would handle the "unrealistic expectations" that Daniel could attend college.

Fast forward to the meeting with Daniel and his parents. With great enthusiasm, Mrs. Jones described the newly-furnished kitchen in the Life Skills classroom and the "dating" curriculum. Then she detailed the many reasons why Daniel could not possibly be successful as a college student.

Needless to say, Daniel and his parents were very disappointed with the "program" presented. After much discussion, they were able to identify a Consumer and Family Studies class that taught cooking skills to the general ed population, as well as general ed classes for Personal Relationships and Child Development. They developed a plan to use a co-teaching model and natural peer supports in these regular high school classes, as well as in other classes Daniel would be taking

(Sociology, Earth and Space, and American Literature). The team determined that Daniel's participation in these classes met his current educational needs and would also be excellent preparation for his future as a college student!

Lessons Learned: Determine what existing general ed classes might meet the student's needs; do not automatically assume that a separate curriculum and/or segregated classrooms are necessary. A co-teaching model and natural peer supports provide many more opportunities for students to be successful in general education.

Identify your vision:

Think outside of the special education box!

Use your voice:

Talk with students and their peers to get fresh perspectives and new ideas.

Work together:

Commit to including parents AND students on teams.



Resources

How can we respect, honor, and value the contributions of people with disabilities?

Norman Kunc's [*Credo for Support*](#) is a powerful video that will push your thinking. [Click here](#) to view it.

Check out, [What's On My Bookshelf](#) on my website.



Websites

What does inclusion look like at middle schools and high schools?

Dr. Lisa Dieker and Selma Powell share common themes of how secondary schools successfully include students with disabilities.

Read their LeadCast blog [here](#).

Would you love to have an easy to read, magazine-like format blog to read? Some of the articles are written by me and others are scooped from a variety of sites. Go to [Beyond Special Education](#), then click on the blue Follow button in the right hand corner.



As a parent and an educator, I bring 30+ years of experience and enthusiasm to create positive change for students, families, and educators! How may I support you? Click the links below to learn more.

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