DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 366 138 EC 302 732

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TITLE Group Building for Successful Inclusion Programs.
PUB DATE 12 Nov 93
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Flint Hills Educational Research Development Association Special Education Inclusion Conference (November 12, 1993).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Cooperative Learning; *Disabilities; Educational Cooperation; Elementary Secondary Education; Group Experience; *Mainstreaming; Normalization (Disabilities); *Professional Development; *Social Integration; Staff Development; *Team Training; *Teamwork
IDENTIFIERS *Inclusive Schools

ABSTRACT

For inclusion of students with disabilities to work successfully in schools, a sense of community among faculty and students, a shared mission, and the ability to successfully collaborate with others are essential. Activities to promote collegial relationships among faculty should be a part of each inclusion team's plan for implementing inclusion at a particular school site. Group building activities can help faculty members become better acquainted with each other, nurture respect for personal differences, build awareness of professional strengths of team members, provide an opportunity to practice skills needed to work together, and provide opportunities for team members to share what has been going well. Essential components of group building activities, which are similar to cooperative learning activities, include: working in heterogeneous groups, promoting positive interdependence, providing success, rewarding the group for success, and encouraging individual accountability. To generate a classroom climate conducive to acceptance of individual differences and cooperation, group building activities involving students are also needed in classrooms where inclusion will take place. Two sample group building activities are described. (JDD)

Group Building for Successful Inclusion Programs

Flint Hills Educational Research Development Association
Special Education Inclusion Conference
Sponsored by FHERDA and the Kansas State Department of Education Special Outcomes Team
Emporia State University
November 12, 1993

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Those who would try to make a program of inclusion work in a school setting must realize that the concept of inclusion does more than challenge teachers to work with more diverse and challenging students. To some teachers, allowing other educators access to "my" classroom and to permit other professionals to have input into "my" decisions made about "my" students intrudes upon a carefully guarded "turf".

If inclusion is to work successfully in schools, a sense of community among faculty and students, a shared mission, and the ability to successfully collaborate with others are essential. As faculty members are called upon to work together more closely and to share in decision making regarding students, they will need to be able to appreciate the strengths of their colleagues and to collaborate with them in a collegial manner. Activities which promote these collegial relationships among faculty should be a part of each inclusion team's plan for implementing inclusion at a particular school site.

Purposes of Group Building Activities

With faculty members, group building activities can serve five important purposes. The most basic goal of group building activities is to help faculty members become better acquainted with each other. Some teachers may have worked with peers for years without knowing even the most basic information about them. As group building activities help staff members get to know their peers, and to value them as colleagues and friends.

Nurturing respect for the personal differences among fellow staff members is the second purpose of group building with faculty. Each staff member has their own personal characteristics, preferences, and styles. Team members need to appreciate and respect personal differences in order to function effectively as colleagues who can share ideas and opinions and disagree constructively without attacking the self-esteem of other team members.

Building awareness of the professional strengths of team members is the third purpose of team building activities. Each team member has unique strengths to offer their colleagues. Through interaction in group building activities, team members can become aware of the strengths of other faculty members, and will be more likely to call upon their peers for assistance and ideas in working with students.

Group building activities can also provide an opportunity to practice skills the team needs to work together. For example, active listening to colleagues, students, and parents is crucial to the success of inclusion activities. The leaders of an inclusion team may, therefore, decide to do one or more group building activities which promote listening and show the importance of this skill with team members.

Finally, group building activities can provide opportunities for team members to share what has been going well. The importance of time to share positive happenings and celebrate as a group cannot be overemphasized. A brief time for sharing positives is a productive part of most successful inclusion team meetings.

Components of Group Building Activities

There are five essential components of a group building activity which are similar to the components of any well-planned cooperative learning activity, according to Lyman and Foyle (1990). First, students must work in heterogeneous groups with other staff members. Because of teacher isolation, perceived differences, or time constraints, some teachers have had little opportunity to work with and get to know their colleagues.

Group building activities must be structured so that positive interdependence is present in the group. The individuals working together must have reason to do so. This component can be facilitated by providing only one set of materials for a group, structuring the activity so that

it would be unlikely that any one group member would know all the answers, or structuring the activity so that all must participate if the activity is to be completed.

A third component of successful group building activities is that the group must be rewarded in some way for their successful work together. For adults, group reward is usually the fun inherent in a group building activity. Activities which encourage creative thinking and problem solving in fun ways can stimulate interest and cooperation without additional reward being necessary. Food can also be an appropriate reward for working together. Some cookies can do wonders for group collegiality!

Individual accountability is another component of a successful group building activity. Individuals in the group must be held accountable for their participation in the group. This includes both individual effort to help the group accomplish its task and appropriate social interaction with others in the group, which may include listening, disagreeing constructively with other group members, or encouraging others in the group. If some faculty members are continually unwilling to participate constructively in group building activities, it may be necessary for the administrator to hold an individual conference with the teacher to work toward more positive interaction.

Finally, group building activities must provide the groups with success. Appropriate group building activities provide a base of success on which further accomplishment as a team can be built.

Group Building Activities with Students

To generate a classroom climate conducive to cooperation, positive feelings, and acceptance of individual differences, group building activities involving students are also needed in classrooms where inclusion will take place. Students also need opportunities to get to know

students with whom they have had limited contact, to appreciate personal strengths, and to nurture friendships.

Conclusion

The interaction and collaboration expected of faculty members involved in a program of inclusion demand that students work together harmoniously and effectively. Group building activities can be effective in helping team members to get acquainted, to accept personal differences, to appreciate professional strengths, to practice collaborative skills, and to celebrate successes. While these activities are time consuming, the misunderstanding, alienation, and lack of trust that can occur when group cohesion is absent make group building an essential part of the process of building a successful inclusion team.

For Further Reading

Lyman, L. and Foyle, H. C. (1990). Cooperative grouping for interactive learning: students, teachers, and administrators. Washington, D. C.: National Education Association.

Maeroff, G. I. (1993). Team building for school change: equipping teachers for new roles. New York: Teachers College Press.

Resources for Student Group Building Activities

Foyle, H. C., Lyman, L., and Thies, S. A. (1991). Cooperative learning in the early childhood classroom. Washington, D. C.: National Education Association.

Gibbs, J. (1987). Tribes: a process for social development and cooperative learning. Santa Rosa, CA: Center Source Publications.

Lyman, L., Foyle, H. C., and Azwell, T. S. (1993). Cooperative learning in the elementary classroom. Washington, D. C.: National Education Association.

Sample Group Building Activities for Getting Acquainted

Matching Game

Objective: Faculty members will work in pairs to identify common answers to given statements.

Procedure: Faculty members are paired and each pair is given copy of the game sheet. Five to seven minutes is usually appropriate for the pairs to write one response they agree on for each of the twelve given items. After the pairs have finished, two pairs can be grouped together to play another round of the game.

Matching Game			
Something we like to do on Saturday mornings	Something we would like to see more of in the world	Something we like to eat for a snack	A television show we watch
A famous person we would like to meet	Something that would make schools better	A holiday that we wish would come more often	Something that we like about our students
Something we like to do	One thing that we wish would happen at school this year	Something we expect of a good friend	One thing our staff does well

Adapted from Cooperative Learning in the Elementary Classroom, by Lawrence Lyman, Harvey C. Foyle, and Tara S. Azwell, National Education Association, 1993.

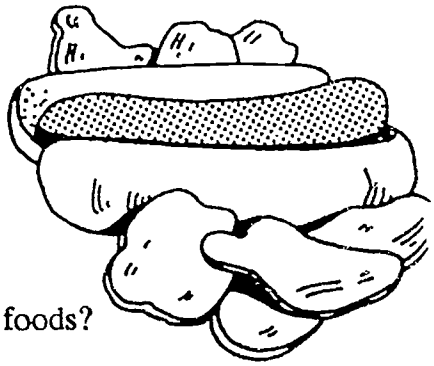
What's for Lunch?

Objective: Faculty members will work in groups of three or four to identify foods when given the food's ingredients list.

Procedure: Faculty members are grouped randomly and each group is given a copy of the ingredients list (next page). Five to seven minutes is usually appropriate for the groups to decide on an answer for each item.

Answers:

1. strawberry yogurt
2. vegetable soup
3. dog food
4. beef hot dog
5. ketchup
6. gelatin dessert
7. fortune cookie
8. chocolate candy bar
9. vegetable juice



What's for Lunch?

Below are lists of ingredients from familiar foods. Can you name the foods?

1. Cultured pasteurized grade A milk, skim milk, strawberries, sugar, corn sweeteners, nonfat milk solids, pectin, natural flavors, and lemon juice.

2. Beef stock, tomatoes, potatoes, carrots, peas, green beans, corn, high fructose corn syrup, enriched alphabet macaroni, onions, celery, salt, potato starch, vegetable oil, yeast extract and hydrolyzed vegetable protein, monosodium glutamate, beef fat, dehydrated garlic, caramel color, natural flavoring, and oleoresin paprika.

3. Meat by-products, water sufficient for processing horsemeat, beef by-products, poultry by-products, soy flour, salt, potassium chloride, guar gum, methionine hydroxy analouge calcium, DL-Alpha tocopheryl acetate (source of vitamin E), citric acid and ethoxyquin (preservatives), magnesium oxide, choline chloride, sodium nitrate (to promote color retention), iron carbonate, copper oxide, cobalt carbonate, vitamin A palmitate (stability improved), manganous oxide, zinc oxide, ethylenediamine dihydroiodide, thiamine mononitrate, D-Activated animal sterol (source of vitamin D-3), and vitamin B-12 supplement.

4. Beef, water, dextrose, salt, corn syrup, spice, sodium erythorbate, flavorings, sodium nitrate, and oleoresin of paprika.

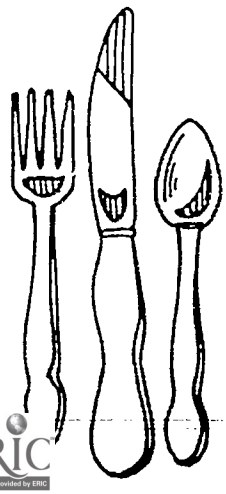
5. Red ripe tomatoes, distilled vinegar, corn syrup, salt, onion powder, spice, natural flavoring.

6. Sugar, gelatin, adipic acid (for tartness), disodium phosphate (controls acidity), fumaric acid (for tartness), artificial flavor, artificial color.

7. Enriched wheat flour, malted barley flour, potassium bromate, sugar, eggs, vegetable shortening, salt, artificial vanilla flavoring, lecithin, baking soda, and a small piece of paper.

8. Sugar, milk, cocoa butter, chocolate, soya lecithin (an emulsifier), and vanillin (an artificial flavoring).

9. Tomato juice from concentrate (water, tomato concentrate), reconstituted juices of carrots, celery, beets, parsley, lettuce, watercress, spinach, with salt, vitamin C (ascorbic acid), natural flavoring, and citric acid.



from Cooperative Learning in the Elementary Classroom, by Lawrence Lyman, Harvey C. Foyle, and Tara S. Azwell, National Education Association, 1993.