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ABSTRACT

This analysis of the changing role of the special educator to that of the inclusion specialist reviews the logic of these changes, presents results of research on the role of the inclusion specialist, analyzes the limitations of these changing roles, and presents an alternative view of professional roles in which teachers share the teaching of a mixed-ability group. The paper begins by reviewing the changing role of the special educator and contrasting it to the new role of the inclusion specialist in theory and in practice. Results of interviews with 19 inclusion specialists are summarized in a description of three roles: "the teacher with an empty classroom," "the teacher without a classroom," and "the teacher of teachers." Limitations of the specialist role are identified, including logistical problems, the personal loss of less contact with children, and the negative effects of the "expert" role. The proposed mixed-ability teaching group involves shifting from a reliance on individual practice to a reliance on group practice, from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning, and from special educators' efforts to "reform" general education to more fundamental collective efforts to restructure education. (Contains 79 references.) (DB)

From "Special" Educators to Educators: The Case for Mixed Ability Groups of Teachers in Restructured Schools

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FROM "SPECIAL" EDUCATORS TO EDUCATORS: THE CASE FOR MIXED ABILITY GROUPS OF TEACHERS IN RESTRUCTURED SCHOOLS

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As we approach the end of the century, our schools, like society in general, struggle to anticipate the changes that will be demanded of the next millennium. Recommendations abound and teachers in today's schools feel a constant pressure to change that all too often leaves them bewildered and beleaguered (Fullan, 1996). Teachers are being asked to re-examine how and what they teach. Administrators and school boards are experimenting with new management systems in the face of constantly decreasing resources. University educators attempt to refocus their research and theories to better describe and explain effective teaching and learning as students and teachers experience it in these changing schools. Daily reports in the media urge more and more changes in all aspects of schooling, for all types of students and teachers. At the same time, students are more diverse than ever before — in cultural background, learning styles and interests, social and economic class, ability, and disability. Broadly speaking, however, there are three strands of reforms currently challenging teachers in schools. The first two emerge from "general" education, the third from "special" education.

From a broad national and federal policy level, there is much discussion aimed at making schools more effective in terms of how many students complete school and how well they do on achievement measures (United States Department of Education, 1994). Indeed, one aspect of this "top down" reform strand is a call for new, higher, *national* achievement standards; the tests to measure students' accomplishment of these new standards, and the consistent use of consequences when standards are not met (Center for Policy Research, 1996; Gandal, 1995; McLaughlin, Shepard & O'Day, 1995; Waters, Burger & Burger, 1995). While there are other

features to this broad government-initiated reform strand, increased standards and new more consistent national testing stand out as major themes and are echoing in state reform legislation, district directives and teacher staff room conversations.

At the same time, elementary and secondary teachers increasingly experiment with new curricular and teaching approaches that emphasize students' mastery not just of facts and basic academic skills, but also students' mastery of essential thinking skills like problem-solving, analysis, collaboration, and experimentation. Encouraged by business and industry (Carnevale, Gainer, & Meltzer, 1990), various state reform legislation, recommendations of a growing number of educational associations, and some strands of educational research, teachers try to expand their agendas to ensure that students not only *learn*, but are able to use their learning in their lives outside of school (Conley, 1993; Eisner, 1991; Sarason, 1995; Wasley, 1994). One additional feature to this strand of reform is to enable students to acquire an understanding and appreciation for their own learning so that they might better pursue learning in the variety of situations the changing society is likely to present to them throughout their lives and long after their formal public schooling is over.

Within special education the long familiar discussions about where our "special," usually remediation-oriented teaching, should occur — the "mainstreaming" or "regular education initiative" debates (e.g., Biklen, Ferguson, & Ford, 1989; Gartner & Lipsky, 1987; Goodlad & Lovitt, 1993; Rogers, 1993; Skrtic, 1991; Stainback & Stainback, 1992; Villa & Thousand, 1995) — are gradually being replaced by renewed calls for integration and inclusion. The civil rights logic of integration, that focused more on an end to segregation than any particularly detailed educational alternative, has now been expanded to focus not just on where children with disabilities should *not* be educated, but where they *should* be educated (general education classrooms and activities) and to what end (full learning & social membership) (Baker, Wang, &

Walberg, 1994; Berres, Ferguson, Knoblock, & Wood, 1996; Ferguson, 1995; McLaughlin, 1995; NASBE, 1992; NASBE, 1995; Sailor, Gee, & Karosoff, 1993).

In response to the pressure of these various reform strands, and despite ongoing debates, three results are becoming evident. First, classroom diversity in general education increasingly includes the diversity of disability along with race, culture, learning style, intelligences, personal preferences, socioeconomic class, and family and community priorities. When asked to identify changes in education over the last five years, any group of educators will quickly identify increasing student diversity near the top of the list. Teachers seem quite clear that the *norm*, if it every really existed in the untidy worlds of schools, has nearly disappeared as a useful construct for the design of learning and management of classrooms (Pugach & Seidl, 1995; Putnam, Speigel, & Bruininks, 1995).

A second result of various educational reforms is that separate special education classrooms and schools are gradually decreasing in number. Although national educational statistics and reports continue to show dramatic variation in this result from state to state (Davis, 1994; United States Department of Education, 1995), the shift to more options for labeled students seems well established. As a consequence of both these shifts, the third result is a shift in the role and daily duties of special educators. They are shifting from *classroom teachers* to a variety of specialist, support, consultative, and generally itinerant roles. These changes are the focus of this chapter because regardless of the position one takes on inclusion, or any other of the current reforms in American public schooling, the shifting roles are real for an increasing number of both special and general educators.

We have organized our analysis of these changing roles to explore first the logic presented in much of the special education reform literature for these changes. Second, we briefly present the results of our own research (Cameron, 1994; Ferguson, Ralph, Cameron,

Katul, in review; Katul, 1995;) with special educators exploring these changes in role. Third, we will analyze the limits of special educators' changing roles and propose an alternative. Finally, we will explore the implications of our alternative for students with disabilities in schools, for our changing educational policies regarding special education, for teacher education, and for teachers' continuing professional development.

From Special Educator to Inclusion Specialist

For some advocates of inclusion the emergence of the new role represents movement toward merging the parallel systems of general and special education into

> a single unified system of public education that incorporates all children and youth as active, fully participating members of the school community; that views diversity as the norm; and that ensures a high-quality education for each student by providing meaningful curriculum, effective teaching, and necessary supports for each student (Ferguson, 1995, p. 286).

For others, this shift in role threatens a loss of tradition, status, influence, and the very core of what makes special education "special". That special core involves being able to bring highly specialized and technical teaching approaches to individual students in order to attenuate, and sometimes repair, highly individual and idiosyncratic differences in cognitive functioning and learning accomplishments (e.g. Gallagher, 1994; Zigmond, 1995). Regardless of the position one takes, however, the shifting roles are fact for an increasing number of special educators.

Descriptions of the roles and responsibilities of "inclusion specialists" vary as do the titles assigned this new role. Sometimes called "integration specialists" or "support facilitators," or even "inclusion teachers," the most consistent themes for these professionals are to be coordinators, developers and organizers of supporters of students and teachers in inclusive

settings. (Stainback, S, Stainback, W., and Harris, 1989; Tashie, et al., 1993; Villa & Thousand, 1995). In an earlier publication we described them as adapters of curriculum and brokers of resources (Ferguson, et al., 1993). Others emphasize being a "team member", or a "provider of technical assistance" (e.g., Sailor, Gee, & Karasoff, 1993; Van Dyke, Stallings, & Colley, 1995; Villa & Thousand, 1995).

Our more recent research with 19 teachers in this role turned up sixteen different titles – some new, some old – being used by educators who defined themselves as exploring this role (Cameron, 1994; Ferguson, Ralph, Katul, Cameron, in review; Katul, 1995). A quick glance at the list in Table 1 confirms the major themes found in the descriptions of the inclusion specialist role by proponents. First, the role is supposed to be less about working with students and more about working with grownups. Most examples include the specifically teacher-oriented language of "consultant," "specialist" or "facilitator". Only the "Teacher of Inclusion" example seems unclear about the recipient of the role's activities. Second, special educators serving in a wide variety of roles seem to be assuming these responsibilities: in some cases, inclusion support is added to the duties of the Chapter 1 teacher, in others the Special Education Director. In the interest of brevity, we will continue to use the term "inclusion specialist" to capture this role because it seems to us to best capture the various recommendations in the literature.

Table 1: Job Titles in Use

- ✓ Support Specialist
- ✓ Supported Education Consultant
- ✓ Instruction Facilitator
- ✓ Supported Education Specialist
- ✓ District Learning SPED Facilitator
- ✓ Inclusion Teacher
- ✓ Handicapped Learner Teacher
- ✓ Teacher of Inclusion
- ✓ Teacher Consultant
- ✓ District SPED Coordinator
- ✓ SPED Chapter 1 Coordinator
- ✓ Education Service District Supervisor
- ✓ Collaboration Consultant
- ✓ Supported Education Consultant/Autism Specialist
- ✓ Educational Specialist
- ✓ SPED Director

The New Role in Theory

As inclusion reforms have spread, a literature has emerged describing the features and duties of the inclusion specialist (e.g., Ferguson & Ralph, (in press); Stainback & Stainback, 1990; Stainback, Stainback, & Harris, 1989; Tashie, et al., 1993). One recommended prerequisite for the role is that the person be knowledgeable about available supports and resources for students with disabilities assigned to general education classrooms. An important responsibility of the specialist is to get resources and supports to other members of the school community. A second responsibility, and value, is that the inclusion specialist's work should be "consumer driven." That is, the requests and needs of students, parents, and teachers should direct the allocation and provision of supports and resources. Being flexible enough to be consumer driven requires the specialist to be familiar with classroom routines and curricula, knowledgeable about students' learning styles and preferences, and aware of family priorities so that their advice and assistance is maximally useful. Finally, inclusion specialists are advised to be flexible and "fade" their support when it is no longer needed. Proponents' expectations are that as teachers and students become more adept at supporting each other, more natural support networks will emerge, diminishing the need for an official inclusion specialist. Through all this, the specialist is further advised to act as a "team member" rather than an expert or supervisor in order to encourage and model an atmosphere of unity and cooperation (Givner & Haager, 1995; Pugach, 1995; Stainback & Stainback, 1990; Tashie, et. al., 1993; Villa & Thousand, 1995; Warger & Pugach, 1996).

The picture drawn of this role, and the reasons for it, seems to be that including students with disabilities into general education classrooms will make everyone uncomfortable for awhile. Students and teachers alike are simply unfamiliar with children and youth with disabilities and initial contact is bound to be discomforting, the logic goes on. However, the discomfort will pass

and the specialist's role is to provide "resources and supports" in the interim. Exactly what constitutes "resources and supports" cannot be very clearly specified since their identification and delivery should be "consumer driven". This very effort to be non-prescriptive may have contributed to some early dissatisfaction with the way various individuals interpreted the role, and certainly contributed to our questions. According to Stainback and Stainback (1990), for example,

> When facilitators were first used in schools, they were generally employed to work only with students classified with disabilities. They often followed or shadowed these students around in regular class and school settings. This tended to draw attention to and set such students apart from their peers, interfering with the development of natural supports or friendships (p. 33 - 34).

As a consequence, inclusion specialists are now encouraged to support all students in the classroom rather than focus on certain labeled students so that, from a student's point of view at least, all grownups are teachers, no longer labeled by their expertise (Ferguson, et. al., 1993). Yet even recent educational and informational videos seeking to illustrate the best available inclusion practices (e.g., Dover, 1994; Goodwin & Wurzburg, 1993; NY Partnership for Statewide Systems Change Project, 1995; Thompson, 1991) are still peppered with phrases like "these special students" or "my inclusion students", suggesting that both general and special educators struggle still with students, tasks, and responsibilities.

Apparent contradictions between the inclusion specialist as envisioned by reformers and as experienced by teachers prompted our further investigation. How much has the role of inclusion specialist actually evolved towards serving all students? Does "serving all students" mean that the need for the specialist's resources and supports will in fact not fade as everyone becomes more comfortable with a new "inclusion student"? Or, is the strategy of "working with

all students" just a tactic to disguise the extra resources and attention afforded labeled students so as to reduce stigmatizing them during this period of adjustment? Is the role really needed or just an administrative strategy for using special educators who no longer have classrooms? Can schools really be organized to educate all students without labeling either students or teachers given current federal and state laws and policies?

The New Role in Reality

Our own research involved interviews with 19 teachers who understood themselves to be taking on the responsibilities of the inclusion specialist role. In addition to hour long interviews (in most cases), we shadowed eight of the inclusion specialists during a typical day's routine. These observations carefully logged the minutes each spent in five tasks: (1) driving, (2) pulling students out or aside for instruction, (3) teaching or observing in general education classrooms, (4) talking with teachers and/or parents, and (5) doing paperwork, phone calls, and other desk work. We also interviewed seven general educators who worked with several of the inclusion specialists we had interviewed earlier, although some of these interviews were briefer. Finally, we collected job descriptions, when they existed, for the 19 specialists we interviewed as well as schedules and appointment records in order to expand our understanding of how inclusion specialists spent their time.

Perhaps not surprisingly, all the inclusion specialists we interviewed were special educators. All had been trained as special educators, and eleven had spent at least part of their careers as teachers in self-contained classrooms. Two others had experience as resource room teachers and two had spent some time as general educators. Nine had spent at least part of their career in some kind of specialist/consultant role to general educators before assuming duties as an inclusion specialist, and two had completed initial teacher preparation in special education and immediately assumed roles as inclusion specialists. A common career pattern was to begin as

a self-contained classroom teacher and then move to a special education specialist role of some sort before becoming an inclusion specialist. The two general educators left the classroom to become either self contained or consulting special educators.

Interestingly, of the 19 inclusion specialists, only five had current job descriptions specific to the role. Ten either had no job description at all or had job descriptions that were being revised. Four were working under their old job descriptions as self-contained classroom teachers – nothing to do with their current role. Perhaps the status of these changing job descriptions is simply an artifact of the newness of the role. Still, that explanation, while at least partly true, does not entirely explain these three comments made during interviews:

There is no job description in place, and I don't expect one soon.

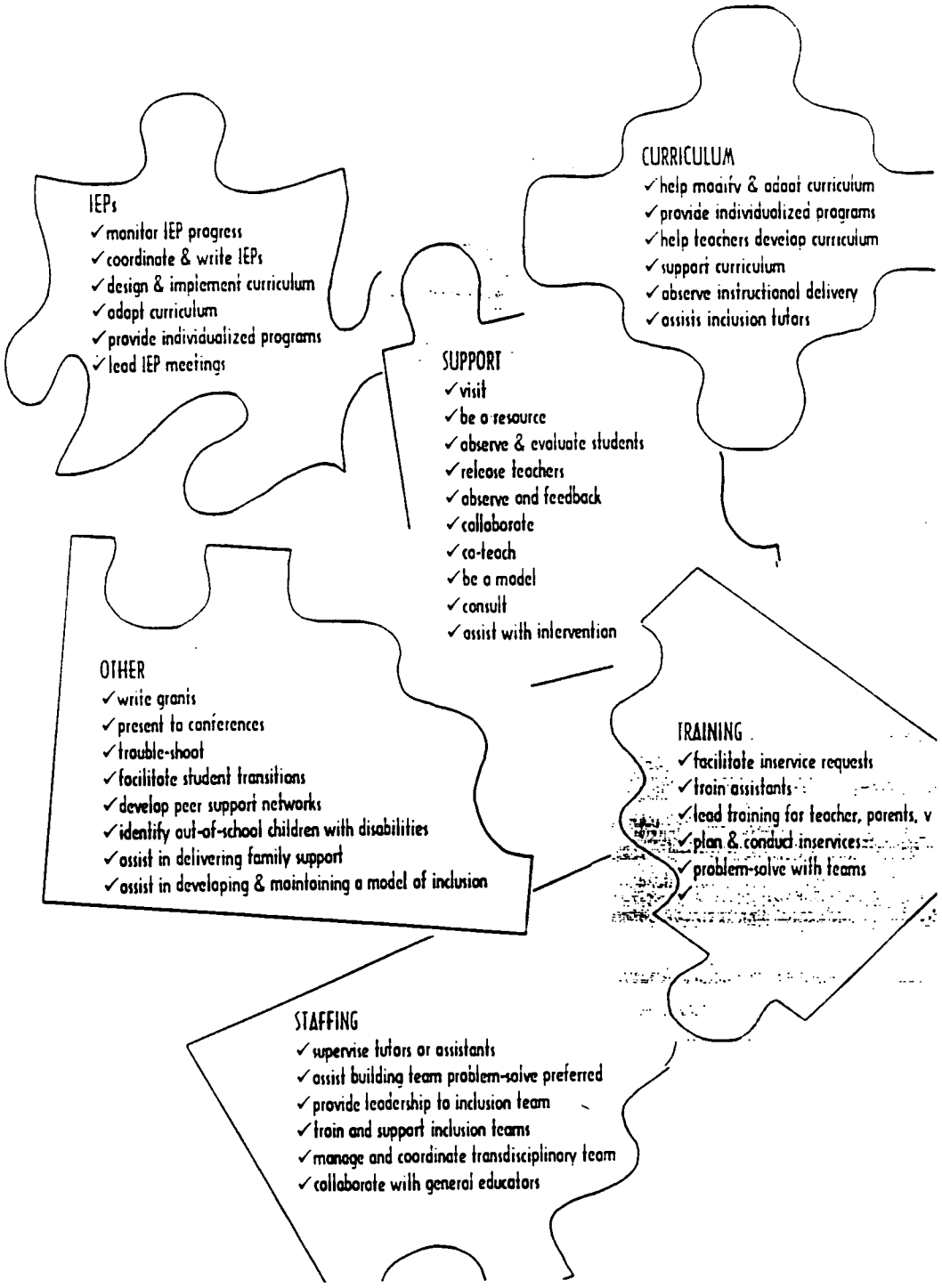
My responsibilities change every year. It is just sort of up to me to figure out what to do. . . through trial and error.

It doesn't describe what I ***actually*** *do, but rather, what I* ***would*** *do if I had the time.*

The job descriptions that did exist outlined five areas of activity, along with the ever-necessary category of "other." Figure 1 briefly summarizes the range and variety of tasks within (1) support, (2) curriculum, (3) IEPs, (4) staffing, and (5) training others, plus (6) other. Notice how "support" gets elaborated across these job descriptions. Also notice that some of the support activities are relatively benign, like visiting classrooms, releasing teachers and "being a resource". Others have a more hierarchical flavor, like "observing and evaluating students, "consulting," "being a model," and "observing and providing feedback." A few suggest equality in the adult-adult relationship through co-teaching, collaborating, or assisting with interventions.

The job description components also reveal a kind of split personality. On the one hand, inclusion specialists are charged with teaching and supervising other adults, leading meetings

and teams, and helping teachers to design and deliver curriculum and teaching. On the other hand, they are also directed to teach and monitor students through the development of IEPs, adapting curriculum and teaching, and the provision of individualized programs. Even though we've collapsed together the components of several job descriptions, we found this split personality feature within each of our examples.



Left with the limited assistance of changing or missing job descriptions (for those that had any at all, of course), we found the inclusion specialists drew upon their own experiences, abilities, and preferences to create three quite different roles, which we have described as: (1) the "teacher with an empty classroom", (2) the "teacher without a classroom" and (3) the "teacher of teachers." While many of the inclusion specialists we interviewed talked about a

broader role of "educational consultant" – someone who works with all students – none really found themselves able to accomplish the role.

Of course, none of the inclusion specialists we interviewed fit precisely into one of these roles. Most did an amazing array of tasks and activities that reflected features of all of the roles. In fact, some were quite explicit about the constantly changing nature of what they were doing. Leo, for example, explained to us

> *You are constantly trying to define your role --- trying to define what that role is in every single situation. Every time you go to a meeting you have to define your role. . . . I'm a "troubleshooter", "mediator", "negotiator", "problem-solver", and "consultant."*

"And all that just before noon," we expected him to add. Still, in most cases one of the roles tended to dominate. We will describe each of the roles through a composite teacher that combines the experiences of the inclusion specialists we interviewed for whom the role dominated. Of course, our references to schools and towns are also constructed from the composite experiences of the teachers we interviewed.

Ben: A "Teacher with an Empty Classroom"

After receiving his initial special education license and a Master's degree in special education, Ben was hired almost immediately as a resource room teacher at McKenzie Middle School. Ben provided supplemental and remedial instruction in math, reading and language arts to students designated "learning disabled" in his fully equipped classroom. After his first year, however, the school district decided to adopt a more inclusive model for providing special education services and decided to stop using resource rooms for pull out instruction. Suddenly, Ben found he had a new title, a new role, and an empty classroom.

As a new "inclusion specialist", Ben's job description specified that his primary responsibilities were to provide modified and adapted instruction for "included students" in general education classrooms. He was also directed to monitor their progress on IEP goals and objectives and model appropriate teaching methods for the general education teachers - at least with regard to the students with disabilities. Encouraged by the principal and with the cooperation of several teachers, Ben moved his instruction out of the resource room. Now Ben's classroom shelves were filled with teacher's manuals and curriculum materials and the walls papered with inspirational posters and signs instead of student work.

But Ben and his students found the transition difficult. With little joint planning time, Ben and the general educators decided that the needs of his students would be best met if they were gathered together into small groups when Ben could come to the classroom. As chairperson and primary author of all the students' IEPs, Ben was naturally more familiar with students' needs. So in the end, Ben transferred the materials and skills he had always used in the resource room to create separate instruction for the "included" students in each of their assigned general education classrooms, remaining responsible for much of their education.

> *In our school the classroom teacher is the case manager. They are the ones who know supposedly what the kid needs and where they are going. I am just a resource. . . .But under the law, someone needs to be there watching what's happening. I am simply the district watchdog. I can't leave it because sometimes if you leave it up to people who don't know the law, who aren't qualified to know, then we have problems. And so if I see problems, or hear about problems, I step in to problem solve. . . They are still my kids.*

> *I have some groups in which I teach kids reading and math directly and I handle a large bulk of the paperwork. . .I attend the meetings for the children that I serve and I also*

provide consultation through the building [when there are] behavioral or academic concerns. I have periods when I can go observe and provide support – give the teacher a break for instance.

After a relatively short time, however, Ben and several of the general education teachers decided that trying to teach their separate groups at the same time in the same room was not working well. They, and the students, they believed, were distracted by each other. Besides, Ben now had so many different schedules to keep that sometimes he was late or came early and teachers weren't ready for him. The logistics seemed too difficult, so Ben began to pull students out into the hall or another room, and even into his old empty resource room.

I would like to do more of what we call "push-in". . .I would like to go into more classrooms and be with the classroom teacher. I don't want them to leave when I come in.

Joni: A "Teacher Without a Classroom"

Before becoming an inclusion specialist, Joni worked as an educational assistant in a resource room for students with learning disabilities. After earning a teaching license to work with students with moderate and severe disabilities, she began teaching in a self-contained classroom that served more significantly disabled students from several surrounding towns. She and her 9-12 students spent their days in a classroom tucked away at the end of a hall in Alder Elementary. Two full-time educational assistants provided most of the actual instruction that Joni had designed, leaving her able to supervise their teaching, organize and manage everyone's schedules and manage paperwork.

Worried that she was still not adequately addressing her students' learning and social needs, she convinced the principal to let her integrate her students into general education

classrooms for parts of their day. With little fanfare, students began attending P.E., art, and music classes with their nondisabled peers. Soon, however, Joni started worrying that things still were not working the way she'd hoped. Even though one of her assistants accompanied students to their general ed classes, the students didn't seem to be making friends or meeting the expectations of the general education teachers. Instead, the teachers pretty much left the students alone, expecting the assistants to teach as best they could.

Given her experiences, Joni was excited when her district decided to reassign her students to schools in their home communities. As the district emptied Joni's classroom, they created a new "inclusion teacher" position that Joni seemed perfect for. Joni had some experience integrating students into general education classrooms, she was interested in achieving better inclusion, and had a special education background in IEP writing and curriculum modification that the district believed would be needed by someone in the inclusion specialist role.

As the "inclusion teacher," Joni now has more students and more assistants (though now called "inclusion tutors") to schedule, coordinate and manage not only across all the classrooms at Alder Elementary but also across several other schools. She must also continue to design instruction for the assistants to deliver in the general education classrooms where unfamiliar and uncertain teachers are eager to have her presence for help and support.

Her carefully orchestrated schedule is a masterpiece, but frequently unravels as little things happen — like a student's mood, an assistant's health, or a classroom teacher's decision to change the lesson. The day we visited her began with a call from a sick tutor, prompting Joni's to complain,

Actually, the coverage is so tough. . . .I find myself going to a school for fifteen minutes just to give the inclusion tutor a break. . . .Coverage is a problem. It seems like I am always looking for somebody to cover for something.

Joni is everywhere at once and feels like she is accomplishing less than ever. Take John. He is six years old and his squeals could be heard as we approached the resource room. A couple of doors along the hallway closed softly in response to the noise. Joni walked in and went directly to John, passing the two adults in the room. At first I could only see the top of his head over the standing dividers that surrounded him in the corner of the room. His squeals grew a little louder and consistent as Joni spoke to him in a warm familiar voice. . . .

After 10 minutes getting John focused on playing with some puzzles, Joni's questions "How is Johnny doing today? Anything I need to know about?" were met with an uncomfortable silence and exchanged glances between the educational assistant and the resource room teacher. It turned out that they thought the picture communication board Joni designed was too difficult to use consistently, partly because John was in the kindergarten classroom for some of the day where there was no board. Joni stressed the importance of the board and began modeling how to use it with John.

After a bit Joni took John outside to play, though the other kindergartners would not have recess for at least an hour. It turned out, however, that according to Joni, John "rarely" played with the other kids during recess anyway. In fact, John's inclusion was dictated by the various adults responsible for coordinating schedules between the resource room and kindergarten classroom. The teachers didn't always know when Joni would arrive, requiring them to switch gears unexpectedly. As a consequence John often had stretches of "down time" when whatever was going on didn't seem to "fit", but no one was available to figure out what else to do.

When we arrived back in the resource room, the tutor assigned to John was not there and the resource room teacher made no move to assume responsibility for him. Joni decided to join the kindergarten classroom, but we arrived to find an empty room. Joni remembered that it was music time and his classmates must be in the music room.

> *[I am] not a direct service person, but I am in the classroom almost every day. I see almost every child every day. . . .If the tutor is having a specific problem around something, I may take the child and work with the child myself to get a sense of what the issue is or I will do some modeling for the teachers. . . .I am the chairperson of the child's IEP, so it gives me some nice hands-on time to work with the child.*

Sonia: A "Teacher of Teachers"

Once she received her Master's degree and initial special educator teaching license, Sonia worked for three years as a roaming special educator. She wrote IEPs, provided individual and small group instruction for a wide variety of students across several schools, each of whom was included some of the time in general education classrooms and schedules. She assessed students, designed curriculum, and monitored their progress. She also tried to help them develop friends and support networks as often as she could. Like Joni, she felt uneasy that she couldn't be available enough for any one student to really provide everything s/he needed. She also worried about what was happening for her students when she was not around, but had few really good ways to find out.

After roaming for two years, Sonia took a new job as an inclusion specialist for an intermediate district that provided specialized services for a number of districts in the area. Her new job still kept her moving, but doing different tasks. Joni was responsible for seventeen schools in two districts. Together with two other specialists in her office, she developed and taught inservices for the general and special educators in their assigned schools. She also

coordinated the special education team at each school, guiding them through the process of creating IEPs, lesson plans, and behavior plans for all the students with disabilities.

She was often called upon to manage what seemed to be the ever present crises and was lauded as very clever at putting out such fires. In fact, when we visited, we found her talking on the phone, but she signaled to wait and then cupped her hand over the mouthpiece and whispered, "The biggest issue is behavior. It's not anything else. It is the very biggest issue with teachers that I deal with."

Sonia liked the change in role. She was more and more convinced that her knowledge and skills were best used to help other teachers acquire them for their own use instead of having her try to get to every student. During our visit Sonia was scheduled to meet at a middle school about a child who was presenting some behavior issues. In fact, as we arrived, the case manager greeted us with her desperation: "I'm so glad you're here. We're going nuts and I don't think we could hold on one more week the way things are going. We're in trouble."

During the meeting with two educational assistants, the case manager and the resource teacher, Sonia emphasized again the importance of safe-space and charting and meeting regularly. "I hate to say 'I told you so,' but you guys have a crisis that just didn't have to happen. You needed to have regular team meetings about Sadie and it sounds like you haven't met since I was here more than a month ago." As we left for a quick lunch, Sonia vented,

> *I just can't believe this team! They don't need me to do this stuff. I shouldn't have to come out here when things fall apart. They wouldn't have fallen apart if they had just kept meeting and talking to each other. I swear, I feel sometimes like I'm case-managing adults!*

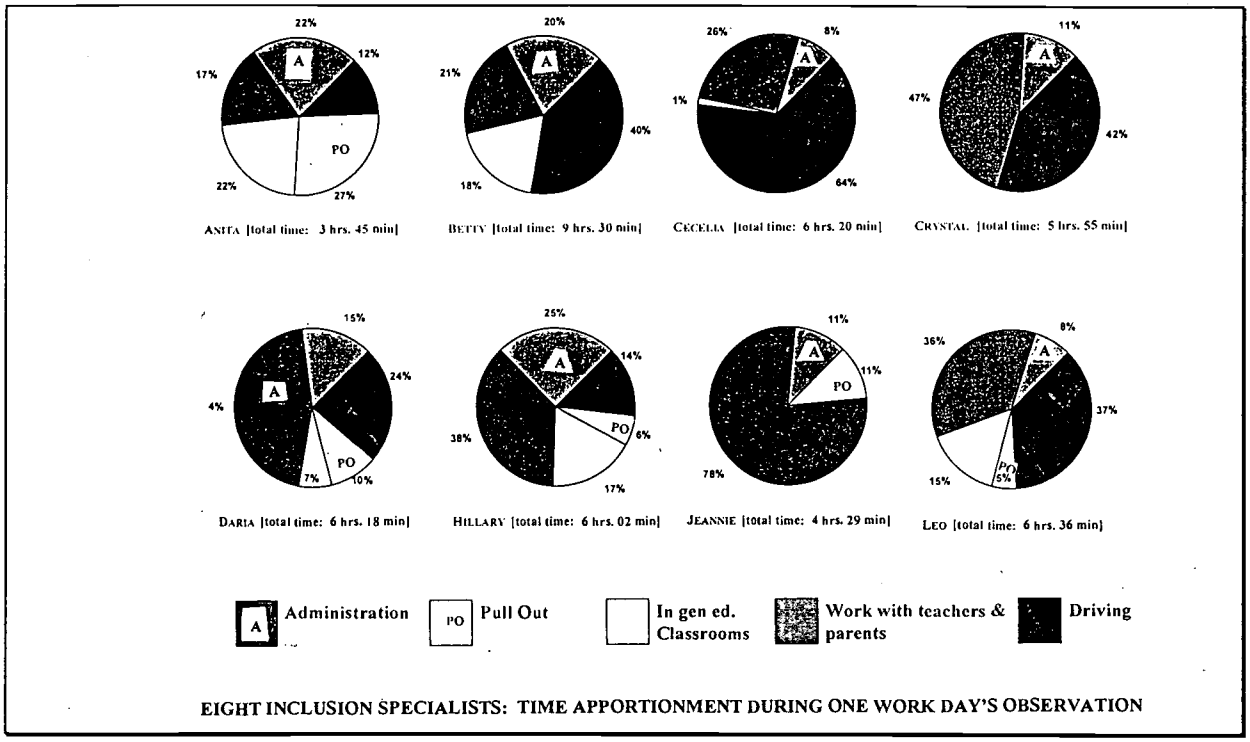
Sonia worried that "putting out fires" consumed too much of her time and really was a symptom of deeper issues. Besides, she was not always confident that her solutions were really going to last because she often didn't have quite enough time to investigate what caused the crisis in the first place: "The problem is that in most instances, I don't know the students or the situation and often my ideas are a quick fix. Yes, I do fix it quickly and then it falls apart in two weeks."

On the other hand, there would always be some kind of crisis to manage, but there might come a time – perhaps even before she is ready to retire – when the teachers in her two districts pretty much know what she knows and don't need her inservices and advice. Still, she consoled herself,

> *Teachers are alone, so it is nice to have an educational specialist come in and talk to them. So I will sit with them and I will get them to talking and I will listen real well. You have to be a good listener and be able to draw that out of people and then help guide them.*

These three roles capture the various experiences inclusion specialists have as they try to meet their new responsibilities. We found them to be remarkably consistent across the people we formally interviewed, as well as other inclusion specialists we have encountered in other situations. Our shadowing data also captured this range and balance of task patterns. One teacher spent a little over 40% of the time we shadowed pulling students out to teach as compared to 8% of his time teaching or observing in general education classrooms and 13% talking with teachers or parents. In contrast, another specialist spent no time pulling students out and nearly 40% of her time in classrooms and talking with teachers. Perhaps the biggest range of difference involved paperwork, with one specialist spending 64% of her time at desk work compared to another who only spent 9%. The patterns reflect the three roles rather well. "Teachers with

empty classrooms" are most likely to spend larger proportions of time pulling students out or aside and relatively less time doing paperwork or teaching and observing in general education classrooms. In contrast "teachers of teachers" are most likely to spend the bulk of their time talking with teachers and relatively less time teaching at all. Compare the relative proportions of time spent in these various tasks among the eight teachers we shadowed (See Figure 2).



EIGHT INCLUSION SPECIALISTS: TIME APPORTIONMENT DURING ONE WORK DAY'S OBSERVATION

The Predictable Failure of the Inclusion Specialist Role

All of the inclusion specialists that participated in our research, that we have met at conferences, that attend our university classes, and that we work with in schools are able professionals. Indeed, many are praised within their schools and districts as among the best, most energetic, and most forward thinking teachers. Nevertheless almost all experience some of the same worries and dissatisfactions that the teachers who are Ben, Joni, and Sonia shared with us. Yet, it seems to us that these teachers' frustrations are all too predictable, though we admit to the advantage of not only hindsight, but data. We have identified three issues special educators are

facing in their effort to adapt to this new form of practice that we offer here as summary of the reality teachers face.

Logistical Dilemmas

As teachers leave their separate classrooms to ply their skills in other teachers' classrooms, the logistical problems of decentralized practice become real and challenging. Some must travel between several schools, but even those who only travel within a single building face the management challenge of scheduling time with each of *their* students within the constraints of other teachers' constantly changing and rarely predictable schedules. At best, these traveling teachers are able to deliver effective teaching some of the time. At worst, their students may learn less while suffering inadvertent, but increased, visibility as being different by virtue of the special attention and the unresolved question of teacher ownership. It is this very kind of visibility that can risk the fragile social connections the students might otherwise make with their peers, which Lori agonized about, and which generated the challenge to work with **all** students instead of just the labeled students.

Furthermore, while "not enough time" is the ubiquitous slogan of all teachers, for these peripatetic teachers without, or with empty, classrooms, the slogan takes on the reality of simple fact: not being able to directly teach their dispersed students to their professional satisfaction. Neither can they effectively serve as "curriculum collaborators" and "team teachers" when their students' teachers may be members of many different teams, each demanding a share of the available time. When asked, both general and special educators consistently identify ***time*** as a critical barrier to accomplishing inclusion, as well as many other school reforms (e.g., Werts, Wolery, Snyder, & Caldwell, 1996).

We believe that the barrier of time is at least as much about barriers to using time well as about actual minutes in a day. One example involves the different approaches to planning

curriculum and teaching understood by general and special educators. Within special education we rely upon detailed annual planning that is supposed to guide not only teachers' expectations for a labeled student's learning, but to guide day to day teaching. Yet *planning* from any teacher's point of view is really just an effort to gain some amount of comfortableness with the usual chaos of classrooms. Plans impose some order and direction, but are rarely expected to unfold exactly as prepared. Teaching plans are meant to be changed; the plan just gives teachers enough structure to change things for the better more often than for the worse. All too often, however, the long term prescriptive nature of the IEP either leads teachers to forget the essential unpredictability of teaching, or the functionality of the IEP for informing day to day teaching decisions is lost entirely. Too many IEPs, crafted after many hours of devotion by special educators, languish in file cabinets until the annual process gears up again 9-10 months later.

General educators, for their part, tend to plan for longer periods of time in broader strokes, leaving the detailed lesson planning to right before, and even during, their teaching. General educators also tend to start their planning from the broader view of the whole class rather than any one child's learning perspective and then later tailor expectations, tasks, and accomplishments for individual students. That is, special educators tend to plan from the "bottom up" – the student to the class – while general educators plan from the "top down" – the class to the student.

Given these essential differences in planning, it's not surprising that IEPs, even for students "included" in general education classrooms, tend to be divorced from the general education curriculum, emphasizing incremental progress in skills that primarily address overcoming or improving deficits. General educators, quite reasonably, see such plans as daunting, wondering, "How do I do this and teach the rest of the class?" When general and special educators have such fundamental differences in what their planning needs to accomplish,

even what might seem a rich amount of planning time can still be woefully inadequate. Not surprisingly, we think, teachers drift from working together to dividing the task: special educators plan for labeled students, and general educators plan for non-labeled students. In such situations there is rarely enough time to surface all the underlying assumptions and unravel the logic of each separate plan so that they might be knit together into a single coherent learning experience for the class.

Personal Loss

Special educators, like most educators, enter their profession to teach children and youth. They enjoy being around children. They are challenged by the search for ways to help children learn. They are rewarded by the resulting growth, however small or great, each student achieves. However, many inclusion specialists find themselves asked to shift their focus from teaching children and youth to teaching teachers and teaching assistants. All the job descriptions and much of the descriptive literature for this role emphasize this teaching-of-adults function, sometimes in quite informal ways (modeling, collaborating), sometimes quite formal (consulting, offering inservices).

To be sure, there are some unique and important compensations in teaching grown-ups, but many inclusion specialists struggle to find the same satisfactions in these more indirect efforts to influence and enable other educators to teach their previous students. Some worry about the logic of using personnel who were prepared to *teach* children to supervise teacher assistants who possess no such preparation. Others feel devalued and discouraged by having "team" teaching devolve to being the general educator's teacher assistant (Davis & Ferguson, 1992). One such pair of teachers (Keller & Cravedi-Cheng, 1995) describe this process well:

> *. . . we both assumed from the beginning that I [Nancy] would be responsible for delivering the content and Lia would assist me in this endeavor. This rather*

conventional assumption --- teacher and teacher assistant --- provided the basis for dividing our labor. . . . In other words, I identified the content to be covered, set objectives, and did the majority of lesson planning, teaching and evaluating Lia verbally and physically prompted students to focus on the instruction, checked their understanding, and limited off-task behavior. (p. 83)

Whether or not the special educator finds new challenge in working with adults – whether as a teacher, or an assistant, the loss of teaching *children* can be a most personal one.

It seems to us both understandable and predictable that some inclusion specialists retreat from this part of the role shift, like our Ben and Joni examples, and find ways to pursue the very activity that brought them to the field. The "ownership" issue may be at least as much about special educators' unwillingness to part with an important facet of their professional identity as about general educators' willingness to accept the responsibility of teaching students with disabilities. Brenda and Gail, two of the general educators we talked to, reveal their perspective on "ownership" this way:

I'm not really up on the process of the IEP. I refer them to the specialist and the resource room. I sit in on it, but I'm not really in charge. I just talk about how Christian is doing in the classroom and the adjustment and all that --- how he is, and how he compares with the other kids. [Brenda]

The first week, I thought, "Oh, my gosh! What am I going to do? My class is falling apart." I kind of let the special ed. Person take over and work with this child. So I didn't feel in control. I had to take back ownership of the child. . . . The special ed. Person is the case manager of the IEP, but it is my responsibility overall.

. . . I believe that if I don't have ownership or if I'm not invested in what the goals are for her, that I'm not going to carry it out. I mean, if it came kind of from a top down

> *approach, then I'm like likely to follow through with that. But if it's a mutual investment in this child, or a mutual decision, I am much more invested in being consistent and carrying that through. [Gail]*

Not only does Gail reveal some of the tensions that from her point of view might be created when both teachers want to teach children, she also uses language like "top down" and "follow through" that illustrate some of the artifacts of a third issue.

Ironies of Expertise

Special educators become itinerant specialists or support teachers based in part on the assumption that they have a special expertise to share with "general" educators who now have been charged with teaching *their* students. This assumption is grounded in a long history of preparing teachers to work not so much with children or youth, but with specific kinds of children. As Seymour Sarason (1990) sees it,

> *School personnel are graduates of our colleges and universities. It is there that they learn there are at least two types of human beings and if you choose to work with one of them you render yourself legally and conceptually incompetent to work with others (p. 258).*

We would add to this observation that our content- and category-driven licensing tradition has led to even greater fractionation than "two types of human beings". Many special educators fail to realize that the "attitudinal problems" they decry in their general education colleagues, is a natural, appropriate, and indeed, *professional* response to being asked to teach a child you have not been officially licensed to teach.

Our parallel systems of general and special education are a direct product of the belief shared among all educational personnel, families of school children and school children themselves after awhile, that:

- students are responsible for their own learning;
- when students don't learn, there is something wrong with them;
- and it is the responsibility of schools to determine what is wrong with as much precision as possible so that students can be directed to the teachers, classrooms, curricula, and teaching practices that match their learning profiles (Ferguson, 1995).

As special education gradually funneled more and more students away from the general education classroom, general educators *literally* became less able to accommodate student differences. At the same time, separated from the culture and activity of general education classrooms, special educators became less and less familiar with general education curriculum, developments in instructional strategies, learning theories, and innovative assessment practices. After several generations of creating a system of public education where information as well as people are carefully separated, we now ask inclusion specialists to teach in settings they don't understand relying on practices that may not be appropriate.

To be sure, special educators sometimes possess quite specific expertise in special instructional technologies, certain forms of assessment, educational law, physical modifications and adaptations, and information about how to manage a variety of other relatively rare events and issues. Unfortunately, when such specialized information is decontextualized, interpolating it for general education content, assessment, and curriculum development is nearly impossible.

The Case for Mixed-Ability Groups of Teachers

Before we describe what we believe to be some promising directions for thinking about professional roles, we offer one more story drawn from our work with teachers and schools that captures both the constraints of the past and the possibilities of the future.

A Story to Point[1]

While "leasing space" to special education students and teachers is how many general educators' approach to inclusion begins, it often shifts at some point to an appreciation of the relative unimportance of the student's differences and a growing confidence that they can construct effective learning experiences even for quite different students. This realization happens for different teachers in different ways, and not at all for others. Molly's experience with Heidi is one instructive example.

At South Valley, most of the teachers, understood inclusion to be about a relocation of special education services. At the beginning of the year third grade teacher Molly Cole negotiated with the new inclusion specialist, Rachel, about the introduction of a student with significant disabilities into her classroom.

> *I'm happy to have Heidi in my room for the socialization. . .but I can't promise you that she's going to be able to read at the end of the year. . . . I feel like, "You guys are the special ed people. It's your job and if you decide that she's really not learning what she needs to be learning this year, then I trust that you're going to come in here and take her out and teach her, but it's fine with me if she's in here."*

Heidi joined the class accompanied by the support of a full time, one-on-one, educational assistant (EA).

Molly's Discovery

Asta, a general educator from Iceland pursuing a master's degree in special education, was doing practicum in Molly's class to learn more about including students with significant disabilities in general education. Asta turned out to be an important contributor to Molly's discovery. In her first days in the classroom, Asta worried about the support provided to Heidi by the educational assistant (EA):

> *The assistant was sitting next to Heidi, even supporting her arms and hands and telling her what to do . . . and trying to get her to look like all the other kids. In the very beginning I felt that this didn't look right. It looked so different from what all the other kids were getting. [I thought] Heidi was getting frustrated. . .She didn't do the things she was supposed to do. She was hitting the assistant. When I was watching, I thought to myself, "She doesn't want all this support. She wants to do it by herself. She has a strong will."*

Asta kept these feelings to herself for awhile, but eventually, "I just jumped in and said, 'I think she doesn't want this support'" during a discussion with Rachel and the EA. Asta's challenge created some tense times for the next few weeks. Rachel and the EA worried that things weren't working out well for Heidi, and decided that they would pull her back to Room 10 [the previous self-contained special education classroom]. When informed of Rachel's decision, Asta and Molly realized that they had been thinking along the same lines. Molly remembers:

> *My style of working with [Heidi] was not as demanding, not as forceful – a little bit more letting her guide and show me what she could do. The EA was guiding her, not giving her much power. I think Asta can work beautifully with her because her teaching naturally follows [the child]. But if you think of her as this little special ed child that you have to*

[1] This story is condensed from a longer account that first appeared in Ferguson & Meyer, 1996. (BES chapter; in Berres, et al book.

control and boss and tell her what to do and keep her on task, she's going to get real stubborn and you're not going to get much out of her.

After several discussions, Rachel agreed to postpone implementing her decision to remove Heidi from the classroom and let Molly and Asta design a different support plan that used the EA less and permitted Heidi more flexibility. Together the teachers watched Heidi begin to work and learn. She began to "look so different! Happier!" "She was writing, working, sharing her journal with the other kids." Heidi learned all the objectives on her IEP and more. She learned to write more than her name, to not just copy letters and numbers, but write them in dates and little sentences. Molly was "blown away a lot of the time" about how well Heidi learned.

Asta realized that her years of experience as an elementary school teacher served her better with Heidi than she had expected, and better even than some of the special education she had learned in her B.Ed. program. By sharing their thinking and experience, Asta and Molly learned together that:

Heidi is not different. She's just like the other kids. We have to find out for each one what it is they need. Some of them are really easy and it takes you just a day to find out, [but] some of them are really tough. [Asta]

If I hadn't had Asta in the room I would not be nearly as far as I am. She and I have the same sense about how to deal with children and to have somebody else in the room that you can bounce ideas around with has just been really wonderful. I don't think I would have been brave enough to do some of the things that I've done if I hadn't had somebody I respected to [confirm] what I was thinking and seeing. A lot of the other teachers in the building are wanting and getting more support – more EAs or Rachel in the room – helping

out with the children or working one-on-one with that particular child. The other teachers have found that to be very helpful, but in my classroom it was detrimental. Heidi wanted me to be her teacher and it was annoying to Heidi to have somebody else bossing her around. It was annoying to me to have someone else talking in the room when [the class was] trying to listen to me and to have the two of them fighting over whether or not she was going to do what she wanted to do. It was very frustrating for the EA because she felt like she wasn't getting any respect. [But] I didn't really know how to say to her "I'm the teacher here. I want you to do it the way I'm doing it." [Molly]

In this example, Molly started to see some of the special education practices – now so much more visible in so many more classrooms – as somehow keeping children dependent, teaching them to wait for adult directions – and often not even hers – rather than taking responsibility for some of their own learning. Furthermore, her reciprocal sense of the "ownership" issue was especially compromised when a large IEP meeting for Heidi was canceled simply because Rachel was ill. Molly, with frustration, commented "I could – and should – have written that IEP. She's in my class and I'm her teacher this year!."

For Rachel's part, the whole enterprise was a new one –for her and for her school. She had had to have separate negotiations on behalf of each of her other 11 students, and she couldn't expect that Molly's willingness to take over as Heidi's teacher would be the general response from other classroom teachers. Having known minutely what her students were working on in years past, Rachel now understandably felt some discomfort when any one of her parents wanted to know what their student was "working on this week." Furthermore, neither she or the district were completely comfortable relinquishing the accountability for the IEP planning and documentation processes.

Expanding the notion of "all"

So if inclusion specialists are not the answer, what actually *is* the question? So far we've tried to establish that the role of inclusion specialist is likely not the best solution for "figuring out what to do with the special education grown-ups" as we try to restructure schools to include all students. Our long history of practice in preparing educators, organizing schooling, and assessing student achievement has led to a situation where special educators know too little about general education to operate comfortably within its instructional, curricular, and assessment contexts. Similarly, although there is some important information general educators may not know, they do typically know some of the most critical aspects of how to individually tailor learning for any learner. Unfortunately, our history of parallel initial preparation and service delivery systems results in too many educators believing they not only cannot, but should not, teach students with labeled disabilities. As special education administrators agonize over legal requirements for maintenance of effort and the provision of specially designed instruction, more and more parents and teachers are realizing that all students deserve a schooling experience that provides them with the kind of "specially designed instruction" that supports their learning, regardless of their particular mix of learning styles, ability, needs, intelligences, or preferences.

The question, it seems to us, is much larger than inclusion, special educators, or students with disabilities. It is about what schooling should be and could accomplish. As Eliot Eisner has put it, the question is "What really counts in schools?" (Eisner, 1991). Answering Eisner's question in the day to day life of schooling involves consideration of much more than students with disabilities and special educators.

Unfortunately, and certainly unintentionally, much of the professional and popular literature about inclusion has focused attention on *all students,* which is fast becoming special education advocacy code for trying to ensure the rights of still *excluded* learners. Yet for the

values embedded in the notion of inclusion to ever be obtained in our schools, we must not be misdirected to focus just on all *students*. Rather, we must enlarge our perspective to *all* teachers, *all* curricular reforms, *all* teaching reforms, *all* educational support personnel, *all* policies, *all* strategies for student assessment, and so on.

The "solution" of changing special educators into inclusion specialists emerged from assumptions about student learning and teacher capacity. The limits of this strategy will only be overcome by enlarging the discussion to examine assumptions about learning and teacher capacity that undergird our schooling practices so that we might shift our focus from those that perpetuate the labeling and separation of students, teachers, and curriculum to those that might enable *all* teachers to creatively blend their various abilities to the benefit of *all* students' learning (Asuto, Clark, Read, McGree & deKoven, 1994 ; Skrtic, 1995;). While this is by no means a small task, we believe it to be both possible and necessary. Other chapters in this book have offered analyses that lead to this same conclusion in one way or another. Our contribution is to argue for redirecting our collective efforts in three areas that we think will contribute to not only achieving "mixed-ability groups of teachers" but reinvented schools as well. In this last section we will make our case for shifting attention: (1) from a reliance on individual practice to a reliance on group practice, (2) from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning, and (3) from special educators' efforts to "reform" general education to more fundamental collective efforts to restructure education.

From Individual to Group Practice

Molly's story nicely illustrates how our current system has created teachers with different knowledge and information and how that information is differently legitimated. Molly *knew* some important things about Heidi as a learner, but her status as a *general* educator made her knowledge automatically suspect and illegitimate in the face of the *official* knowledge

possessed by Rachel and her assistants because their own labels matched Heidi's. Even though Molly and Asta spent more time observing and interacting with Heidi, their presumed proper role and responsibility was to accept and implement Rachel's expertise as the system's approved specialist in teaching and learning for students labeled like Heidi.

We are challenging these assumptions about legitimate knowledge and the role of specialists because teachers like Molly, Asta, and Rachel as well as Ben, Joni, and Sonia, teach us not only that the assumptions do not hold up in practice, but more importantly, they easily get in the way of effective learning for students, like they did for Heidi. The nearly hundred year history of sorting and separating both students and teachers has resulted in very little common ground. Rachel and Molly know a few of the same things about schools, teaching, and learning, but most of the knowledge and skills they rely upon to fulfill their professional responsibilities seem so unique – even mysterious – that sometimes we think special and general educators must feel like they are barely in the same profession. Legitimating one teacher's knowledge over another is an artifact of our history that is just as insupportable as creating the separations in the first place. It seems clear to us that rethinking our approach to inclusion as but one dimension of a broader general education restructuring must have as one of its goals to increase the common ground of knowledge and skills between general and special educators.

Having said that, let us hasten to add that we are not arguing for all educators to become some kind of generalist presumed to possess *all* the skills and information to serve the learning of *all* students. On the contrary, we believe such a person a persistent myth that too many cling to despite the wealth of information available that it is simply impossible for one individual to master the range of information and skills required to achieve even reasonably effective learning for all possible students. Instead of the individual practice of one teacher assigned to, and pretty much solely responsible for, a classroom of 20-30 or more very diverse learners, or a content area

with 150-250 equally diverse students, we believe that only *groups* of teachers collectively responsible for *groups* of learners can meet the demands of teaching today's student diversity in ways that overcome the limits of past practice without losing its benefits.

These groups of teachers can bring to the task both a common store of knowledge and skills, but also *different* areas of specialty. Only groups of teachers are likely together to possess the wide range of information and skills really needed to work with today's student diversities. In order to achieve a shift from individual to group teaching practice, we must build upon the current collaboration initiatives among educational professionals in two ways. If collaboration means anything at all, surely it means that two or more people create an outcome for a student that no one of them could have created alone. Group practice creates just such an ongoing, dynamic context, helping educators with varying abilities to contribute to the kind of synergy necessary for effective collaboration.

Replace restrictive assignments with shared assignments.

Current teacher licensure practices tend to be restrictive, limiting the students an educator can teach to specific categories. Of course, some of these categories are broader than others, ranging from specific disabilities ("LD" or "MR" certifications) to "levels" of students ("mild", "severe") to disability types and particular ages (secondary severe, or elementary LD). One key feature of mixed-ability group teaching practice, particularly as we await changes in certification requirements to reflect the restructuring of schools, is that teachers share working with all children and youth as part of a team, regardless of their formal preparation or the labels on their certification. We think this step critical because it is one of the most efficient ways for teachers more narrowly educated to "cross-pollinate", quickly increasing the size of their common ground. More importantly, shared assignments create the contexts in which genuine collaboration can occur.

When Molly and Asta shared their perceptions and concerns – not just once in a brief exchange or meeting, but in the little captured moments of their ongoing shared experience – they created with each other the capacity to challenge Rachel's official knowledge and then support each other to work through the consequences of that challenge. To her credit, Rachel was able to hear the possibilities in what Asta and Molly shared and courageous enough to permit the challenge to her official expertise, at least on an experimental basis.

We have encountered a number of schools pursuing group practice through shared assignments. A common first step among special educators is to assign various special education support staff within a building – resource room teacher, speech/language specialist, Title I teacher, previous self-contained classroom teacher – to a smaller number of classrooms where they can be responsible for students with all the labels they had each separately served across a much larger number of classrooms. While the previous resource room teacher may feel unprepared to assist the student with significant multiple disabilities, learning how to gather that information from colleagues with different specialties is a "step on the way" to more complete group practice with general educators.

Other schools we know are beginning to create group practice work groups that include some number of general educators as well as one or more special educators and other certified or classified support staff. Just this year South Valley Elementary School, with which we have a long standing collaborative relationship, reorganized into three smaller "vertical" communities. Each includes classroom teachers from kindergarten to grade 5 as well as a special educator and a number of classroom assistants previously assigned either to special education or Title 1. These new groups are just beginning to construct the kinds of working relationships that will support their various efforts to change their teaching practices, improve literacy, experiment with multiple intelligences theory, and develop better students assessment systems for what they

actually teach, but already there are new roles for the special educators members of the workgroups.

Two of the workgroups have already begun designing curriculum together. Since they are part of the discussion from the beginning, the special educators can help tailor the development of the various learning objectives, activities, and assessment tools to better incorporate the unique learning of labeled students. Being part of the design of general education curriculum from the beginning means that special educators no longer have to try to "fit" labeled students into a completed plan. It also creates opportunities for previous special educators to teach more aspects of the plan to all the students instead of being relegated as "helpers" for those that might be having trouble or need extra help or support. In one of the workgroups the commitment to *group* practice has allowed them to group all the students into smaller literacy groups, each members of the team taking responsibility for several, regardless of the official title or certification, each member of the team contributing support in their own areas of knowledge and interest to others so that students in all the groups experience the best teaching of the collective team.

Other buildings are reorganizing more around grade-level or block teams, where groups meet regularly to share curriculum planning, allocate resources, schedule activities, share teaching tasks (e.g. rotating the class through each of the three or four teachers when doing a unit, each teacher focusing on material according to his/her strengths and interests), and to problem solve issues on behalf of the now "mutually owned" students. In some schools, teams stay with their students, some for as many as 10 years (cf. The Danish school system) to achieve maximum benefits of long-term relationships among teachers, students and families.

Personnel preparation programs are reflecting a transition to group practice as well. More gradually, but increasingly, initial preparation programs are merging foundational general

and special education content and licensure outcomes. Some states are simultaneously shifting from restrictive, "stand alone" licensure categories to a greater emphasis on "add on" endorsements to initial, usually broader licenses. Innovative continuing professional development opportunities also encourage shared general and special educators to study collaboratively with pre-service students as they pursue continuing professional development and specialization (e.g., Baumgart & Ferguson, 1991; Ferguson, 1994; Goodlad, 1990). In this way the directions of ongoing professional development can be determined by the needs of a particular group or school to "round out" or increase some area of capacity, say in designing behavioral and emotional supports or extending their use of technology.

From a focus on teaching to a focus on learning

Historically we have cared most about what students *know*. Teachers must "cover" content, making sure that as many students as possible remember it all. We've assured ourselves that our schools are doing well through the scores students achieve on tests which measure their acquisition of this content – at least until the test is over. Much teacher work involved introducing new material, giving students various opportunities to practice remembering that content, and assuring all of us of their success by frequently testing memory and mastery in preparation for the official achievement assessments.

The confluence of demands upon schools as we move toward the largely unknown demands of the next century is gradually shifting educators' focus away from what gets taught to what gets learned, and used. Elementary and secondary teachers everywhere are beginning to experiment with new curricular and teaching approaches that emphasize students' mastery not just of facts and content, but also of essential thinking skills like problem-solving, analysis, collaboration, and experimentation. Rather than measuring what students have remembered about what we've taught, educators are as interested in how students can demonstrate that they

understands and can use whatever they've learned in school and in their various pursuits outside of school. Many promising curricular and instructional approaches are emerging in general education. Some teachers, for example, design learning unique to each student through the logic of multiple intelligences and learning styles. Learning is increasingly active, requiring students not just to listen, but to learn by doing. Teachers are turning to projects, exhibitions, portfolios, along with other kinds of curriculum-based information and measurement strategies, to learn what students have learned and can do with their learning (e.g., Darling-Hammond, Ancess, & Falk, 1995; Fogarty, 1995; Harmin, 1994; Valencia, Hiebert & Afflerbach, 1994).

The values and logic behind these approaches can be extremely powerful when extended to all kinds of diverse learners, including special education labeled students. Nevertheless, this is also an area of schooling where the "cross-pollination" between general and special educators has yet to occur very thoroughly. For example, special educators have used activity-based assessment, individually-tailored curriculum, and locally-referenced, community-based instruction for some time now. They created these approaches precisely because they were concerned to use time well for students who might find learning difficult, even slow. Directly teaching students in ways that emphasized how they used their learning not only saved valuable time, but for some students was the only way for them to really appreciate their need to learn. For their part, general educators working with innovation designs of curriculum and teaching stretch their application to only part of the diverse students in schools today. Special education students generally fall outside the pale of such innovation in the minds of most general educators (and special educators familiar with them) even when the ideas and techniques would actually enrich and enable the learning of students with disabilities.

A major stumbling block in the synthesis of approaches that have emerged from both general and special education has been the documentation and reporting of student learning, both

because standard grading and achievement measurement practices uncomfortably fit the new curriculum strategies, as well as because annually-written IEP goals and objectives rarely reflect or document what students actually learn in general education contexts. Like changes in curriculum, this shift in focus on student learning and accomplishments will also require restructured teacher planning, new assessment strategies, and less reliance on proscribed curricula. But achieving such changes requires working in two additional arenas.

Standards? Or Standardization?

There is great confusion among teachers about the role of *higher, national, standards* for learning and the incorporation of diverse learning agendas and accomplishments (Gagnon, 1995; McLaughlin, Shepard & O'Day, 1995; Oregon Department of Education Draft Performance Standards, 1996; United States Department of Education, Special Education Programs, 1996). Does "standard" mean standardization in the sense of every student accomplishing exactly the same thing to the same picture of mastery, performance or other measurement? If so, how can any standard accommodate diverse students – especially students with disabilities? If the call for higher national standards means that each child really excels – pushes themselves to do, know, understand just a little more than they thought they could – then how can we compare the achievement of high standards from one students to the next? Never mind, from one school, one district, one state to the next.

Our work with schools suggests that the entire standards discussion is confusing the requirements of program evaluation – *i.e. how well are our schools helping the students* ***collectively*** *to achieve our articulated standards of learning accomplishment?* -- with teacher, student, and parent needs for individual student evaluation – *how is Sarah accomplishing our articulated standards of learning accomplishment? And how does that make sense for her?* Within any group of students, learning accomplishment for some proportion of the group will not

necessarily look or be exactly the same as for others in the group. In fact, it would be very surprising if there weren't several different patterns of accomplishment in any group of students.

Finding a way to legitimate that some students in any group can accomplish a "standard" in different ways is at the heart of the standards dilemma. If "accomplishment" can mean different things for different students – certainly a logical outcome of the individually tailored curriculum and teaching practices being encouraged – then the various student accomplishments are difficult to "add up" in any straightforward way. Yet adding up accomplishments against a single defined standard is the essential requirement of program assessment. If everyone is achieving the standards in different ways, how can we know how well our schools are doing collectively?

We think this dilemma is possible to resolve if the requirements of program assessment are separated from the requirements of student assessment. Each student and their parents should receive individual feedback about how well the student is learning, how much growth they have accomplished during some period of time, and how their accomplishments compare to the national or community standard established for our students as a group. However, discretion must be possible in letting any individual student know how they compare to others. There is no safety in numbers when your own individual achievement is compared to others. Teachers and parents should have the discretion to filter the comparative message for individual students in ways that encourage rather than discourage, enable rather than disable, interest and effort. Without interest and effort, learning is shallowly compulsory and soon divorced from use and pursuit.

At the same time, all students' various accomplishments can be summarized in individually anonymous ways to answer the question of how any particular school is achieving whatever the relevant agreed-upon standard for the students collectively. In this way, the needs

of program assessment and comparison can be met, while leaving the revelations of any particular student's accomplishment in the hands of teachers and parents – surely the best suited to decide. Those students within any group who do not achieve to some collective benchmark might have very good reasons for not doing so while still achieving the more general standard of excellent achievement in the area of focus, whether a common curriculum goal, an essential skill, or a learning outcome that emphasizes integration and use of learning in novel ways and situations. Surely the interpretation of the meaning of accomplishment for individual students should rest with those most intimate with the student's learning. An accomplishment rate of 60-80 % of any group of students on any collective benchmark for a school might well mean that they are well and appropriately accomplishing the task for everyone, but 20-40% who are accomplishing the standard in unique ways (cite the 20/20 article). As in all good program assessment, the appropriateness of the collective data are best interpreted and used by those closest to the operation of the program. It is the teachers, staff and families that can best determine how the range of results reflects the students with whom they work or whether the collective results should encourage revision of curriculum and teaching practices.

From "Fixing" to Joining General Education

The very notion of an inclusion specialist is predicated upon the idea that general educators simply do not know how to teach students with disabilities and we special educators must teach them our special knowledge. We have argued here that the idea is both fundamentally flawed – many general educators *do* know a lot about teaching students who are different, even disabled, when given the chance. We've also suggested that the expectation that special educators would pass on their knowledge, thereby risking their future as educators, is equally flawed. Our proposal to think instead of "mixed ability groups of teachers", each with different specialties to contribute to the teaching of very diverse groups of students, is one way to integrate

the uniqueness of the previous separate "general" and "special" educators into a single, multi-talented teaching corps.

At the heart of our message and analysis in this chapter is that we special educators should stop trying to "fix" general education by trying to make them more like us. There is, of course, an understandable historical reason for thinking that general education needs to be "fixed" to better meet the challenge of students' disabilities and diversities. The field of special education is an artifact of the effort, beginning shortly after the advent of compulsory education, to sort "different" students of any kind into other environments where specially trained teachers might better meet their learning needs. Returning such students to the very environment that rejected them seems educationally irresponsible and foolhardy unless that receiving environment is changed in some quite substantial way.

Our experience, however, suggests that the long separation between the people and practices of general and special education has irrevocably altered both perspectives. General educators feel unable and ill-suited to teach students with disabilities. Special educators believe they know much about teaching students with disabilities, but really know little about the general education into which inclusion demands students and special educators must operate.

Too much of our rhetoric has been about changing general education. We are asserting here that special educators are ill-equipped to lead such an agenda. Instead, we encourage both special and general educators to assume the role of learners. Only when special educators know more about general education, especially the emerging reforms in general education that might easily accommodate the difference of disability, will it be possible for them to share their unique information and experience in ways that is accessible and understandable to general educators. In turn, general educators are more likely to hear and use information from colleagues that speak the same educational dialect of school improvement and student accomplishment.

We need schools that benefit from the experience of **both** general **and** special educators in the design and accomplishment of student learning. We think this book contributes to an effort to shift from our tendencies to frame issues and understanding as "either/or" to a new tendency to seek "both/and".

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