Impact

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Homecoming King Owen Phariss and friend Bailey Knowlton at Free State High School Homecoming, 2010. See story below.

A Dream Come True

by Ashley Voran and Susan B. Palmer

Dreams do come true. At least for Owen Phariss, a senior from Free State High School located in Lawrence, Kansas. In October of 2010, Owen was crowned Homecoming King, with a little help from his friends. A previous school practice had prevented students with disabilities from being included on the ballot, unbeknown to most students and administrators at the school. After uncovering this practice, four of Owen's friends took it upon themselves to reverse it. They immediately began obtaining the signatures of others on a petition during the day, and after school approached the administration to ask to have the practice changed. Owen was thrilled at the nomination and showed much gratitude toward his friends after attaining the role as "king" of Free State High School: "I felt proud of my friends. I felt excited, special. All because of my friends." "When he won, it just made my heart feel whole. He deserved it more than anything," says senior Bailey Knowlton, a long-time friend of Owen's. Not only was Owen awarded king, but for the first time in Free State High School's history, a tie for queen resulted in two Homecoming queens matching up with Owen as king. "The whole stadium came alive that night. I was overwhelmed and delighted," recalls Owen's mother, Nancy Holmes.

None of this would have been possible without the assistance of four of Owen's friends who followed the motto, "When you don't agree with the way things are, challenge it." Owen's friends Bailey Knowlton, Audrey Hughes, Aly Frydman, and Connor Caldwell took the initiative to change the status quo. The school administration was

[Voran & Palmer, continued on page 38]

From the Editors

Social well-being is essential to overall health and quality of life for all children, youth, and adults. However, children and youth with disabilities are often at higher risk for experiencing lower levels of social, and related emotional, well-being than their peers without disabilities. They are among those more likely to be bullied and harassed, have a small number of friends, participate in few extracurricular activities, and generally be connected to few people outside their families. This means that the adults in their lives need to be proactive in supporting and strengthening the social well-being of these young people.

This Impact issue brings together a collection of practical and insightful articles related to supporting the social well-being of children and youth with intellectual, developmental and other disabilities in the settings where they live their lives: schools, youth programs, neighborhoods, communities, homes. Its primary focus is on what adults can do to create and sustain environments that contribute to social well-being, rather than social harm, for these young people as well as their peers without disabilities. It includes personal stories of young people, their families and friends; practical strategies for school and community settings; research summaries and profiles of successful programs; and resources for use by educators, families, youth leaders, and others who desire to support the social growth and well-being of all our young people.

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Social and Emotional Well-Being of Children and Youth with Disabilities: A Brief Overview

by Jo Montie and Brian Abery

Simply put, "social and emotional well-being" is a balanced, healthy way of interacting with others *and* the ability to appropriately respond to our own emotions. It is a core aspect of a person's development. Our capacities and needs to connect with others (social), and to know and manage our inner feelings and experiences (emotional), are central features of our quality of life.

All children, youth, and adults require care and attention to these areas of development. However, children and youth with disabilities are at higher risk for experiencing lower levels of social-emotional well-being than their peers without disabilities. They are more likely to be bullied and harassed, have a limited number of friends, and engage in fewer extracurricular activities than their peers. Combine these tendencies with a school environment in which the child's "failures" rather than gifts and capacities are often the focus, and where all too often help doesn't get to children until there is a crisis, and one has the potential for high levels of social and emotional distress. While children with disabilities are at "higher risk" socially and emotionally, we do not suggest that this always occurs. Many children and youth with disabilities experience very positive outcomes in this area. Families and the larger community, however, need to be proactive in attending to the social-emotional needs and experiences of this group and in considering ways to expand advocacy and support on their behalf.

A growing number of communities are taking action to insure the social and emotional well-being of children and youth with special needs.

Current Positive Trends

There are a growing number of communities taking action to insure the social and emotional well-being of children and youth with special needs. Three positive trends in this area are highlighted below:

- **Greater Access to Inclusive Experiences.** Today, children and youth with disabilities, overall, have greater access to the same educational, recreational, and other environments as their peers without disabilities compared to even 5 years ago (Institute of Education Sciences, 2010; Law et al., 2006). The more they are included, the greater their options for social relationships and expanded circles of friends. And increased inclusion is also associated with higher expectations for learning and social interaction. When supported to successfully respond to these higher expectations, children and youth with disabilities have the potential to experience increased social-emotional well-being.
- **Positive Outlook Related to People with Disabilities**. As a result of increased opportunities for inclusion, community attitudes toward disability are changing in a positive way. People with disabilities are seen more often in our daily lives in the media, and more often depicted in a genuine, positive manner. Individuals with disabilities are now more likely to be valued for their abilities and contributions, not just noticed for their needs. When all members of society are exposed to positive images of persons with disabilities, and start to view the experience of having a disability as an important part of the diversity among humans, the social relationships of children and youth with disabilities and their presence in the community are supported.
- **Expanded Self-Advocacy.** The growth of youth-led self-advocacy efforts (youth taking control of their lives and creating change) both reflects and impacts social-emotional well-being. At a school level, students are becoming stronger self-advocates, and there is growing support for students becoming a stronger presence in their IEP planning (Hawbaker, 2007). In addition, around the country young people with disabilities are joining together for self-advocacy activities in communities. Supporting opportunities for children and youth to identify and name their own feelings, likes and dislikes; to communicate their personal stories and experiences; and to make real choices in their daily lives from an early age sets the stage for greater quality of life, self-esteem, and self-determination, which can lead to greater personal empowerment in the social area of life (Abery, Mithaus, Wehmeyer, & Stancliffe, 2003).

These trends are in the right direction. However, there's an ongoing need for widespread implementation of strategies that create the systems change needed to expand and support them, and reach all young people with disabilities.

Future Prevention Efforts

The old adage, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" applies well to addressing the social-emotional needs of children and youth with disabilities. A more coordinated, sustained focus on prevention practices in schools, youth organizations, homes, and other community settings is needed to build on the progress that's already been attained. Four of those practices are as follows:

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- **Teach Social and Emotional Competencies**. Becoming more prevention-oriented in our schools and youth organizations includes supporting the development of social-emotional competencies that contribute to learning (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011), as well as creating systems that encourage student engagement, safety, and a positive climate. There are many organizations and materials available to help educators and program leaders teach social-emotional competencies and create positive social climates for youth with disabilities. They include the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL); the Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention for Young Children; the OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports; Operation Respect; and Educators for Social Responsibility. These and other organizations are contributing to a growing body of strategies that can be useful to educators, youth organization staff, and families to proactively support social-emotional well-being.
- **Create Multidisciplinary Supports**. The unmet social-emotional needs of many children and youth go unnoticed for years. The student who sits quietly in the classroom, youth group, or at home often is not viewed as in need of support even when experiencing emotional distress. Additional support, training, and resources directed toward helping young people and families get help sooner are necessary. This is not an effort that can be successfully carried out by schools or youth organizations alone, but must be a joint undertaking with health care systems, social services, and community supports. Attention must be paid not only to building connections across these organizations, but between children and youth, their families, and support networks.
- **Advocate for Necessary Resources.** We need more resources and training in schools and youth organizations directed toward social-emotional well-being. There is a need to train "front-line providers," those who first see and connect with children and youth (U.S. Public Health Service, 2000). In most school districts, social workers, counselors, and psychologists provide services to multiple schools, spending no more than one day a week within any physical setting. As a result, they rarely have the opportunity to develop relationships with students or spend time in classrooms until after a child has begun to display signs of distress. Instead, resources need to target ways to effectively create a sense of belonging and valuing relationships in schools, youth organizations, and community settings, and be available for teaching and prevention, not only in crisis. The Institute of Medicine's 2009 report on mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders among young people indicates that a focus on social and emotional skills is foundational for both preventing and treating such disorders.
- **Link People and Environments.** Because children and youth with disabilities typically do not have the opportunity for as many, or as varied, social relationships as their peers without disabilities, they often lack the resources or "social capital" to protect themselves from poor social-emotional outcomes. Such experiences should not be viewed in isolation or attempts made to address them individually; rather, they need to be viewed as interconnected and addressed holistically. The unavailability of inclusive extracurricular activities in a community, for example, can mean youth with disabilities have fewer opportunities to meet individuals with common interests. A lack of contexts within which to develop friendships, in turn, increases the likelihood that a student will experience the negative outcomes that come with social isolation. Conversely, by widening social networks, linking environments, and actively nurturing a sense of belonging and stable relationships, we create conditions that support positive social-emotional well-being. By increasing the variety of inclusive school and community activities, we also expand role models for constructive coping, increase access to social support outside of the family, and enhance meaning in our lives.

Conclusion

To insure the social-emotional well-being of children and youth with disabilities, and reduce their risk of negative outcomes, we must continue to develop initiatives that link people, environments, and prevention practices. Efforts must be based on respect for others and an appreciation of diversity, engage high-risk youth, create social networks and capacities, and bring together those with and without disabilities in a way that gives each individual an opportunity to use his or her gifts and capacities. Working together, families, professionals, and children and youth themselves can create the context for healthy social-emotional development.

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MyaGrace is Going to Dance: A Third Grader's Journey in Social Growth

by Vera Stroup-Rentier

Something wonderful happened today. MyaGrace Rentier is going to dance. It seems pretty normal on the surface because many 10-year-old girls love to dance. MyaGrace is no exception. Prior to today, her opportunities to dance with others have been with others who have special needs or at home dancing with our *Just Dance* Wii games. Today, MyaGrace has been asked to join the Dance Exhibition team at our local dance studio. She is thrilled beyond words because she has wanted to dance

with her brothers for several months. Finally, I asked the teacher what she thought about her being part of the class, and the teacher's answer was, "Of course." Our family is ecstatic because this teacher honored the wishes of a girl who has been described as "intellectually disabled," "autistic-like," "motor impaired," and "hyperactive." To us, her family, MyaGrace is a sweet girl who is going to dance with her brothers and several others students in an "inclusive" dance class at a local dance studio.

Including MyaGrace hasn't always been as easy as the example above, but it certainly has gotten easier in the last few years as we have really sought to emphasize her social-emotional skills, both at home and school, so she could be more successful in the activities she selected. Our initial emphasis came during her second year of kindergarten when difficulties she had at school were not the same ones we were experiencing with any consistency at home. She was enrolled in a school that did not typically include children with needs as significant as hers, and her school team thought maybe she would be more successful at another school in the district that had more experience with students with a variety of disabilities. We, however, wanted MyaGrace to go to school with her brothers as they are all very close in age. We stayed firm about our desire to have her educated in her neighborhood school and told the school we wanted to make her participation in their school successful together. At school, she was hitting, yelling, and running in the hall every opportunity she had. Although she sometimes exhibited these behaviors at home, at school the behaviors were happening 20-30 times more often, especially when she was left alone with a paraprofessional.

During kindergarten, MyaGrace acquired a Behavior Plan in her Individualized Education Program (IEP) that detailed each inappropriate behavior she exhibited, and 1) the ways to prevent it, 2) the ways to address it when it did occur, and 3) the ways to diminish so it would not occur again in the same time period. It was an exhaustive list that took lots of time to work in partnership to document. Once we collaborated in this way, MyaGrace realized everyone knew what the expectations for her were, so we were 75 percent of the way to working on her challenging behaviors.

Initially, our efforts at school began by using social stories to let MyaGrace know the expectations for her behaviors, whatever the setting. Secondly, we began to think about how to most successfully transition her from activity to activity and setting to setting. Transitions were quite difficult, and while she enjoyed being "social," this aspect of her personality usually led to more disruptive behavior because she didn't understand appropriate social cues and contexts. Thirdly, when MyaGrace was demonstrating appropriate behavior, we would reward it using natural supports that already existed at school and home. At school, she got another period of music (her favorite class) if she had a good week (determined by less than three negative behaviors each day), and at home she got a mini manicure from mom (another favorite activity).

An important part of making sure all of the above supports were implemented for MyaGrace each year at school was to ensure she always had a social-emotional focus on her IEP. In our experience, we have found some special education teachers are more comfortable with this construct than others. For MyaGrace it is vital, so it has been important for our family to know what resources are available to help support her growth in this area so we can share strategies between home and school. Each year, we talk about specific ways to address her social-emotional development. Also, we talk about short-term objectives representing 3 months rather

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than year-long goals, and her progress is reported on her report card (another motivator for her, which we acknowledge at home and school). Prior to this, most of the time her report card came home with most columns saying “N/A” since she could not meet the existing standards. Now, progress is measured in a way we can all view. Inherent in addressing MyaGrace’s goals are the objectives specific to what we want to see in the activities she chooses such as dance, piano lessons, and cheerleading. Specifically, we have asked team members to come to her practices or we have videotaped practices so they could see specific examples of MyaGrace using strategies we discussed. We have been able to film other strategies so all team members benefit from our efforts to support MyaGrace’s social-emotional skills. Communication with both her regular education and special education teachers has been important. And equally important, for us, has been letting MyaGrace know we are talking to them on a regular basis about simple things like her passing a “reading” test, to bigger things like how hard she is working on her presentation about Clara Barton.

Focus on supporting MyaGrace’s social-emotional skills didn’t happen by chance as there were “big stakes” to making sure she was socially successful at school, including staying in the same school as her brothers and getting to participate in the activities she really enjoys like dancing and music. Although we started in kindergarten, we still work every day on her social-emotional skills to help her be as successful as possible. Today, in third grade, she goes into her classroom each morning and empties her backpack, puts away her things, gets out her morning work, quietly goes to her seat, and begins her seat work. She may say “Hi” to a few of her friends along the way, but she is able to do this without getting completely off track. In kindergarten, she had a paraprofessional with her from the time she got off the bus until she got back on the bus to come home. Now, a paraprofessional helps her with the subjects that are most challenging like math, reading, and spelling, but rarely does anyone have to “help” because of her behavior. It took a team effort to get us where MyaGrace is today and we are truly glad “we are all in this together.”

Vera Stroup-Rentier and her family live in Topeka, Kansas.

Advocating for Children’s Social-Emotional Well-Being in Educational Settings: Tips for Families

Any child who is not doing well in the social-emotional area of their life will be less likely to do well in their academic performance and overall participation in the school environment. Especially for those who experience barriers to social inclusion at school – which includes many students with disabilities – attention to social-emotional well-being is an important part of supporting success in school and beyond. There are many ways that a family can advocate for the social-emotional well-being of a child with disabilities within educational settings. Below are a few:

- *If a child has social-emotional needs that must be addressed in order to support academic learning and participation in the school community, it’s important to address these in the child’s Individualized Education Program (IEP). If families are asked to, or wish to, provide ideas for social-emotional outcomes for IEPs, there are some excellent examples at http://www.specialed.us/autism/05/g_o.htm, a Web page from the Wisconsin Cooperative Educational Service Agency #7. Although the site tags the objectives and outcomes as applying to children with autism, the list is a helpful model for use with many other children, as well.*
- *In IEPs, families may want to ask for inclusion of short-term objectives (such as objectives for a single quarter) related to yearly goals for social-emotional development. And they may want to ask that progress on these objectives be reported on the child’s report cards throughout the year. These steps help ensure everyone stays on track and that strategies for supporting social-emotional well-being can be modified as needed.*
- *In looking at a child’s social skills and behaviors, it’s often helpful to compare his or her school and home behaviors to see if these are consistent or different. Families and school personnel should meet to discuss differences in home/school behaviors, especially when problems are present in school but not at home, and try to understand the reasons for the differences and how to address them.*
- *An important dimension of social-emotional well-being is how a child is viewed and treated by others. A child might experience bullying or exclusion by other students. Children with disabilities may not have enough opportunities to interact with non-disabled peers. Issues related to broader school policies or practices may set-up barriers to inclusion, so families should discuss these with officials at the specific school or with school district supervisory personnel. Among the resources that can support such conversations are PACER Center’s dispute resolution resources for families (see http://www.pacer.org/disputeresolution) and the extensive resources from Operation Respect (http://www.operationrespect.org).*

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Where Does Social-Emotional Well-Being Fit into the School Curriculum?

by Lynn Stansberry Brusnahan and Shelley Neilsen Gatti

For the past decade schools have been faced with increasing pressure to enhance student academic achievement. Thus, schools can become focused primarily on preparing students for tests, and hesitant to attend to other areas of student development, including social and emotional development. However, it is possible to attend to both academics and social-emotional learning (SEL) for students with and without disabilities. In fact, such attention can improve academic performance and the overall school learning environment.

A strong connection exists between SEL, school behavior, and academic performance. Researchers have found that positive social behavior in the school setting is linked to, and predictive of, positive academic achievement (Haynes, Ben-Avie, & Ensign, 2003; Malecki & Elliott, 2002; Welsh, Park, Widaman, & O'Neil, 2001). In a meta-analysis of school-based programs to promote social and emotional development, researchers found an 11% gain in academic performance in programs that measured SEL and academic effects (Durlak, Weissbert, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). Even a number of the national K-12 standards for various academic disciplines recognize development of specific social skills as necessary for successful participation in education and employment beyond K-12 schooling (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010).

Though there is mounting evidence of the importance of SEL for the success of students in school and beyond, teaching these critical skills may be viewed by many educators as additional duties instead of integral and necessary for learning. So what is the solution to this tension between recognition of the importance of attending to the social and emotional development of students with and without disabilities, and the need to maintain the highest possible levels of student academic achievement? One approach is to integrate SEL into the daily curriculum and routines.

Embedding SEL in Academics

New Jersey, Iowa, Wisconsin, New York, and South Carolina are among the states where SEL competencies are already reflected in their educational standards (Kress, Norris, Schoenholz, Elias, & Seigle, 2004). Social-emotional learning can be embedded in general academic curricula such as language arts, physical education, science, social studies, fine arts, and health. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2005) has developed five areas of competencies for SEL: Self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationships skills, and responsible decision-making. Table 1 identifies and defines each, and provides examples of how teachers can integrate SEL into the required academic standards by creating grade-level goals based on the competency areas. Additionally, Table 1 illustrates ways to embed SEL supports at the school, classroom, and individual levels without taking time away from academics.

Enhancing Learning Environments

Another effective and efficient way to integrate SEL into the school day is by establishing psychologically safe and caring learning environments through universal school-wide systems and well-managed classrooms. Growing evidence supports the use of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) to address the social-emotional and behavioral issues that impede student's learning by promoting a learning environment that is positive, safe, and productive (Scott, Park, Sawain-Bradway, & Landers, 2007). Implemented school wide, PBIS provides a three-tiered prevention system to proactively teach and acknowledge pro-social behaviors and prevent or reduce challenging behaviors. This system provides universal intervention for the entire school and more explicit, small group instruction for students who need a more targeted level of support. In addition, PBIS includes intensive support for students requiring individualized intervention. Through this tiered model, schools can create positive environments so all children feel safe and can learn (OSEP, 2010).

Another way to enhance the learning environment and SEL is by teaching classroom expectations and routines in order to establish a positive, consistent, and predictable environment that conveys safety and care, and builds healthy relationships. When classroom procedures are explicitly taught, on-task behavior and engagement increases, which allows more time to be dedicated to learning. There are a variety of routines required to manage a classroom effectively, such as entering and exiting, keeping students engaged in learning activities while others are working with the teacher, and planning transition times. Educators sometimes assume all students know how to carry out these everyday routines when, in fact, these skills need to be taught just like academic skills in a sequenced, active, focused, and explicit manner (CASEL, 2005). By teaching these expectations and routines, educators are preventing predictable problems and increasing the opportunities for students to engage in appropriate behaviors and receive positive feedback. Over time, there is a shift from these behaviors being predominantly controlled by external factors such as positive feedback, to internalized factors such as caring and concern for others, making good decisions, and taking responsibility for one's behaviors (Bear & Watkins, 2006).

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Conclusion

Because social and emotional factors play such an important role in student mental health, behavior, and academic performance, schools must attend to this aspect of the educational process for the benefit of all students, including those with exceptionalities. Engaging the whole student promotes positive growth that leads to academic achievement and well-being. When SEL is in equal partnership with academic learning, educators *can* fit it all in and will graduate students who are better prepared for real success in society.

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Table 1: How to Integrate SEL Support: School-wide, Classroom, and Individual

Competency	Description		Examples of Supports		
		Grade Level Goal Examples	School Wide	Classroom	Individual
Self-awareness	Recognizing feelings, values, strengths and limitations.	Elementary: Recognize and label emotions such as happiness and sadness. Middle: Identify triggers for stress reactions. High: Develop an understanding of how emotions affect others.	Adopt and implement specific SEL curricula to guide instruction. Adopt a school-wide values program focused on character education.	Elementary: Language arts. Teach students to identify feelings using characters in books such as *Have You Filled a Bucket Today?*	Teach individual students to recognize a range of emotions on a rating scale, such as *The Incredible 5-Point Scale* (see http://www.5pointscale.com).
Self-management	Regulating emotions and behaviors to handle stress, control impulses, and persevere.	Elementary: Describe steps of setting goals. Middle: Make plans to achieve goals. High: Identify resources and obstacles in achieving goals.	Reinforce SEL skills at lunch, at the playground and other informal settings.	Middle: Science. Teach students to set and achieve goals to complete a science fair project.	Teach individual students to use a self-monitoring system to regulate behaviors, such as *How Does My Engine Run Analogy* from the Alert Program (see http://www.alertprogram.com).
Social awareness	Demonstrating understanding and empathy.	Elementary: Identify cues about how others feel. Middle: Predict others' feelings and perspectives. High: Empathize with others.	Engage students in service learning projects and civic activities, including school-wide drives to collect donations for causes such as disaster relief.	High: Social Studies. Teach students about empathy in the context of the Civil Rights movement by using resources such as the film *The Children's March* from http://www.teachingtolerance.org.	Teach individual students perspective-taking skills through strategies such as Social Stories (see http://www.thegraycenter.org).
Relationship skills	Forming healthy relationships, cooperating with others, resisting inappropriate social pressure, and handling conflict.	Elementary: Make and keep friends. Middle: Demonstrate cooperation and teamwork. High: Form relationships with peers, teachers, and family members.	Promote and celebrate partnerships of family-school-community through activities such as picnics, open houses, dinners.	Elementary: Physical Education. Teach students to cooperate during team games and activities. Middle: Take the class through a team-building outdoor education course.	Teach individual students a conflict management system and steps to problem solving.
Responsible decision-making	Making safe and ethical decisions, and respecting others.	Elementary: Respect peers and others. Middle: Resist peer pressure. High: Analyze impact of decisions on future.	Integrate SEL methods into extra-curricular activities. Define what respect looks like in different school settings and post it visually.	Middle and High: Language Arts. Teach about derogatory words by using resources such as the film *Offense Taken* (see http://rtc.umn.edu/rtcmedia/offensetaken).	Teach individual students about good choices using resources such as a social behavior map (see http://www.socialthinking.com).

Adapted from CASEL, 2005; Kress et al.,2004; Zins et al., 2003.

Five Ways Adults Can Support the Social Success of Students with Social Learning Challenges

by Brenda Smith Myles

The importance of building and maintaining social relationships and friendships cannot be underestimated – they are an essential part of everyday life. Research is slowly becoming available indicating that all learners may benefit from possessing strong social skills. For example, one recent study of 10th graders found that "noncognitive" factors including social skills, work habits, and involvement in extracurricular activities during high school were at least as important as cognitive abilities (as measured by achievement test scores) in predicting their success in the worlds of work and education 10 years after high school (Lleras, 2008). Intentional and systematic support from adults for building and maintaining social relationships and friendships can be critical to all young people, and especially those with social learning challenges. Many learners with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), emotional/behavioral exceptionalities, and other disabilities can benefit from adults attending to their social knowledge and skills development, and from opportunities to practice social relationships.

Five Practical Strategies

There are at least eight areas in which learners need skills for social success (see Table 1). This article describes five practical strategies that can be embedded into a learner's day in a timely, efficient, and meaningful manner to support development of these and other social skills. Although developed specifically to meet the needs of those with social learning challenges, the strategies can also be used to benefit all learners. The five strategies are as follows:

- **Prepare for social events through priming.** Providing learners with information about situations and events prior to their occurrence can help create social success. Known as *priming*, this intervention is designed to (a) familiarize the learner with the materials or events; (b) introduce predictability into the information or activity, thereby reducing stress and anxiety; and (c) increase learner success. Priming can occur by presenting a learner with a written schedule of events, a social narrative, a photograph, or a brief verbal overview (Wilde, Koegel, & Koegel, 1992).
- **Teach assumed or expected knowledge using the hidden curriculum.** Teaching assumed or expected knowledge to learners with social learning challenges may be as important, if not more so, than teaching them academics. The hidden curriculum is composed of the so-called "common sense" that helps people function in their daily lives. It helps learners fit in with others and aids them in avoiding being taken advantage of. One strategy is to use a one-a-day approach to introduce and teach one social common sense item daily (see Myles, Trautman, & Schelvan, 2004).
- **Teach social problem-solving.** Problem-solving skills are often not inherent in individuals with social learning challenges and require direct instruction and support. One strategy is to teach and support learners to be social detectives by using Jessum's (2011) "Worksheet for Solving Social Mysteries" in *Diary of a Social Detective,* an engaging story that guides youth in understanding social mysteries and solving social challenges.
- **Teach self-advocacy and self-awareness.** It is essential that individuals with social learning challenges understand and advocate for themselves. One way in which some learners can be more successful in social situations is to use tools such as *The Sensory Scan*™ (Paradiz, 2009) to understand sensory aspects of an environment and advocate for what they need to function well socially within it.

Table 1: Partial List of Skills for Social Success

Skills	*Brief Description*
Nonverbal communication	Understanding gestures, facial expressions, voice tone, proximity, and so forth.
Theory of mind	Understanding the perspective, beliefs, intents, desires, and other mental states of self and others.
Attribution	Determining cause of events and the impact that individuals can have on these events.
Self-regulation	Matching emotions to events, recognizing emotions in self, controlling impulses, and changing levels of emotions.
Relationship skills	Developing deep functional relationships using skills that include needs negotiation, toleration of differences, sensitivity to others; the desire to be around people more than wanting to engage in a specific activity with them.
Hidden curriculum	Understanding and applying rules and mores that are typically not taught yet are assumed and expected.
Technical skills	Applying skills such as making eye contact, staying on topic, greeting others, maintaining conversations.
Self-advocacy	Having the skills to ensure a dignified existence in all environments, including effectively communicating wants, needs, desires, rights, and so forth.

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- **Teach self-regulation**. To help individuals with social learning challenges become aware of, and control, their own problematic reactions to everyday events a resource such as the *Incredible 5-Point Scale* (Buron & Curtis, 2003) can be helpful. Using the scale, the learner rates his or her emotions, or a condition or situation, in order to provide information to the teacher, manage their own thinking process, and/or implement an alternative behavior. Learners can use the scale to rate their own voice volume, rate frustration or anger levels, monitor their perseveration on events or topics, and so forth.

Summary

Individuals with social learning challenges have complex needs. We also know that they have incredible potential. We must carefully analyze their needs, capacities, and interests, and teach the complex skills that will help them succeed in life. This will help to ensure that they will be ready for education, relationships, employment, and eventually, independent living to the greatest extent possible.

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To Serve and Protect: A Dad's Reflections

"Can I hold my daughter, please?" My wife, Margie, had delivered our daughter, Chloe, on May 16th, 2003, and I knew there was something not right in the doctor's look and voice. Chloe aspirated during her entry into the world, and as they cleared her lungs I was relieved to hear a loud cry. Three years into my career as a police officer I had delivered a baby on a sidewalk, and I knew how important it was to hear that crying sound. The doctor approached us and stated in a very sterile voice that our daughter had "characteristics of Down syndrome." I did not know much about this diagnosis, but I said to the masked physician, "Can I hold my daughter, please?" to which he responded, "Yes, do you want to hold her?" I detected surprise in his voice , but Chloe looked right into my eyes and I instantly fell in love with her.

If Chloe had been born in 1963 (my birth year) she would have been labeled uneducable, probably placed in an institution, and would have had a shortened life of exclusion. Thanks to the strong foundation provided by Early Intervention and Early Childhood Education, along with a focus on ABILITIES, today Chloe is thriving and excelling in her community, school, church, and family.

When we brought Chloe home from the hospital after her birth we immediately began focusing on what supports and services she would need to have a great start. An awesome team of Early Intervention therapists, along with my wife Margie and son Nolan, who was 4 at the time, worked tirelessly and passionately to make sure Chloe had the best possible foundation for life. Margie and Nolan even taught Chloe to read at age 3, and now at age 7 she reads at the level of her peers. I was so amazed by the abilities of this little girl and the effectiveness of Early Intervention that I left my 20-year law enforcement career and went to school to receive my Masters in Early Intervention. I now work full-time as the Director of Community/Family Outreach for Early Intervention Specialists, and I chair the Pennsylvania Governor's Advisory Board for Early Intervention.

Early on as a family we made sure Chloe was included in everything we did and could meet as many people as possible. Her exposure to a multitude of community outings and family events greatly increased her social and communication skills, and she is now very comfortable in any type of venue. Chloe participated in a playgroup at 18 months, and attended her neighborhood preschool at age 3. The results were amazing, and when Chloe started kindergarten at her neighborhood school the principal called and said she was the most prepared student for kindergarten transition.

Chloe has planted more positive seeds in 7 years than most people do in a lifetime, and she never ceases to amaze everyone with whom she comes into contact. She has been in magazines, books, newspapers, and online articles. She appeared in a press conference with Governor Rendell, read to newly-elected Governor Corbett, and warmed-up

with Andy LaRoche and the Pittsburgh Pirates. She was recognized on the floor of the State Senate after they declared World Down Syndrome Day because of Chloe's advocacy efforts for all children. She has been featured in an episode of the national TV series, "Facing Life Head On", which is nominated for a regional Emmy Award. I started a blog (http://chloesmessage.blogspot.com) so people could see the ABILITIES of children with Down syndrome and new parents could get excited about the future when they receive a precious gift like Chloe.

People ask me what it is like to change careers so radically, and I respond that I really have not changed my work focus at all. My mission is the same as during my days as a police officer: "To serve and protect."

Contributed by Kurt Kondrich, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He may be reached at kkondrich@eiskids.com.

Supporting Friendship Development For Students with Low-Incidence Disabilities

by Amy T. Parker

Miranda is a beautiful 8-year-old brunette who happens to be deafblind. She attends her neighborhood school, where she spends part of her day in an inclusive classroom and part of it receiving one-on-one tutoring. While she's in the general education classroom, an interpreter works with her using tactile sign language to help her access the environment. Although Miranda is using her cane to travel more independently, she still relies on the interpreter to guide her most of the time. Jane is a classmate who is fascinated with Miranda's form of communication and watches her from across the room. Although Jane would like to talk to Miranda, she feels unsure of how to approach her. Because of scheduling challenges, there is limited time for Miranda to socialize and the teacher is challenged to prepare students for upcoming statewide testing. Miranda is the first deafblind student to be served by this district, and though the educational team is striving to meet her needs, she spends most of her day working with adults, leaving little time to socialize with peers and build friendships.

Fostering friendships between students with disabilities and typical peers may be one of the most rewarding roles for teachers and family members to play in encouraging student development.

"Miranda" and "Jane" are both composites of real students and real friendship challenges that are taking place around the country. While this particular story is based on multiple students' experiences, it serves to illustrate some of the realities that individual students with low-incidence disabilities must navigate in being socially included.

Fostering friendships between students with disabilities and typical peers may be one of the most rewarding roles for teachers and family members to play in encouraging student development, achievement, and quality of life. In particular, students with low-incidence disabilities face specific challenges forming positive relationships with peers because of disability-specific hurdles in mobility, or in accessing communication as well as environmental information. At the same time, barriers may exist in schools that serve as obstacles to students in forming friendships.

First, let's define what is meant by the term "low-incidence." In a practical sense, it has been used to designate students who have disability diagnoses that are not prevalent. Such categories have included students with hearing impairments, visual impairments, deafblindness, traumatic brain injury (TBI), orthopedic impairments, multiple disabilities, complex health needs, and those with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). Within this grouping, there is great diversity of functioning, abilities, and needs. Parents and family members, particularly in rural environments, may struggle to find local services and disability-specific support groups. Fortunately, there are ways that teams can meaningfully support students as well as promote school cultures that support diverse types of friendships. The following seven suggestions are a start:

- **Teach communication skills directly to students and include peers.** One of the biggest challenges for most students with low-incidence disabilities can be having reliable communication skills and forms. Students with TBI, ASD, or multiple disabilities may not communicate in traditional ways. Also, students may use augmentative forms of communication such as pictures, voice-output devices or sign language. Strengthening a student's communication ability and facility is one of the greatest gifts a team can provide. In order to build communication with peers, it is necessary for peers to understand that communication can happen in diverse ways, using multiple forms. Teachers and parents can empower would-be friends by showing them how to communicate with a student directly in a relaxed and even playful way. As students tend to love the use of technology, pictures, or sign language, developing these skills with a friend by playing a game or engaging in a preferred activity can put both students at ease, as well as build bridges through a shared system of communication.
- **Teach mobility strategies and supports to peers.** If a student uses a wheelchair, needs a human guide or uses another mobility device, work with peers to understand how an individual travels. If appropriate, adults can help students learn to safely guide an individual with visual impairments or push someone's wheelchair. A student with a disability may prefer a peer's support to an adult's. These decisions should be made with qualified professionals involved, such as physical therapists or certified orientation and mobility specialists.
- **Teach friendship skills in low-risk settings.** For some students from low-incidence disability groups, social skills are not learned incidentally but are acquired through direct practice and coaching. At the same time, students with limited social skills

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can unwittingly jeopardize potential friendships by putting other students off with stereotypical behavior. It is important to provide students with a "safe place" to practice friendship skills with support. By working with the school counselor or other therapists, a student can have the chance to engage in role-playing or structured activities for practicing skills, which can increase the likelihood of social acceptance.

- **Connect students with disabilities through summer camps or weekends.** Students with rarer disabilities have fewer opportunities to meet other students that share their type of disability experience. Studies have shown that having the chance to meet individuals with similar access needs can build a sense of identity and self-esteem (Miner, 1997). Having a stronger sense of confidence as an individual can help build friendships.

Often social and communication skills that are taught through authentic relationships with peers do more to increase quality of life and belonging than what may be offered through structured adult teaching sessions alone.

- **Allow time for friendship development.** With the demands of the school curriculum, it is important to schedule time to develop friends. If a student has less access to the environment or takes longer to communicate, giving needed access through after-school friendship clubs or lunch groups provides individuals needed time for richer social interactions.
- **Help students with disabilities to assume valued roles in school.** Culture is highly driven by imagery, dress, and social values; each community promotes specific styles of clothes or social roles (Wolfensberger, 1992). Educators and parents can help students with disabilities by studying the school's subtle and more obvious cultural values. Assisting students by working with peers to select styles that are flattering as well as valued can go a long way in helping students with disabilities be more accepted. Helping a student with an interest in sports, theater, or leadership take on these valued roles can promote students with disabilities as respected members of the community.
- **Implement a culture of friendship diversity.** Just as savvy schools have become more accepting of ethnic and linguistic diversity, disability can be promoted by school staff as another type of diversity. Posters of successful adults with disabilities, such as musicians, athletes, political figures, and scientists can be shared in public ways that help all students recognize people with disabilities as members of society. Inviting regional or national speakers with disabilities to celebrate diversity is another means of building this accepting culture. Finally, highlighting the strengths of diversity through theater, poetry, song, and other art forms can be a means of transforming schools into places where many types of friendship can thrive.

Of the many things that can be done to engender genuine friendships, making peer relationships a priority in the educational program may be the most critical. Often social and communication skills that are taught through authentic relationships with peers do more to increase the student's quality of life and sense of belonging than what may be offered through structured adult teaching sessions alone.

In the opening scenario of this article, a possible next step would be for Miranda's team to use a collaborative process to create some goals for integrating an iPad with several sign language applications into classroom activities. The classroom teacher could use activities like peer-interviewing as a part of literacy instruction for the entire class. Miranda, with the support of her inclusion teacher and interpreter, could design interview questions for learning about her peers. Jane could be allowed to use an iPad to search for relevant sign language responses as a part of her writing assignments and to practice them with Miranda directly. Later, Miranda's general education teacher could design social studies lessons that feature the life of Helen Keller. Miranda, with support, would then have an opportunity to teach the entire class some sign language and show them how she's learning to use her cane to travel. Miranda's mom could work with the team to develop play dates with Jane, integrating opportunities to share activities as well as technology to build direct communication.

Through team support, creativity, and technology, a natural spark of friendship between Miranda and Jane could be encouraged. For both girls, the gifts of friendship would make school and life much more meaningful.

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Creating Social Capital: One Family's Experience

by Diane Halpin

Human beings are social beings. Families, friends, and communities are social structures. Most of us are hardwired to seek and maintain social contact. Indeed, extreme punishment is often meted out in the form of social isolation such as solitary confinement, "shunning" or banishment. Autism is a disability characterized by a significant degree of impairment in social interactions. While there are many therapies available to help children with autism overcome deficits in language, behavior, and sensory processing, the amelioration of social deficits remains elusive. Like many of the challenges faced by parents of children with disabilities, creating social capital for our children is another of those extra challenges that we undertake to support them.

Different, Not Deficient

I have sat across "the desk of despair." It is a desk where an expert sits on one side pointing out deficits, and where you sit on the other, trying desperately to process what the expert is telling you. It is often in the car, well on the way home, when the appropriate responses become clear. What many experts fail to see is that "differences" are only perceived to be "deficits" by those who don't understand them. Yes, my daughter, whose disability is on the autism spectrum, does not relate to others like most children. However, I know beyond the shadow of all doubt that friends and social contacts are important to her. There are programs to support social interaction, some of them very good, but the day in and day out establishment of social capital falls largely to parents.

The Early Years

The first few years after the diagnosis of autism were a fog of therapies and driving between them. In a typical week, Jenna would have two sessions of speech therapy, one session of occupational therapy, three mornings of special education preschool, and 35 hours of in-home behavior therapy. We tried all of the therapies because we wanted our daughter to learn to communicate and have a chance to go to school. Most of all, we wanted Jenna to have friends. In a flash, 3 years had passed and we were on the threshold to kindergarten. We were terrified. Would she stay with the class? Would she follow directions? Would the other kids like her? Would she be nice to them? What was the use of all that learning to talk if there would be no one to talk *to*?

Here we made a major decision: Our daughter was to be fully included. Our logic was something like this: If you want to learn to play tennis, do you take lessons from your neighbor who plays at your level, or do you go to a professional who knows the game thoroughly? We wanted the experts, and there could be no other substitutes than real kindergartners. Our next strategy was not only full inclusion, but full immersion.

Autism, by its nature, is fundamentally a social disorder. There was a stark comparison between the way my neurologically typical daughter made friends and the way that Jenna seemed oblivious to them. At the same time, when Jenna did have friends around, it was obvious that she enjoyed them. We realized that in order for Jenna to make social connections we were going to have to take the lead. Thus, we hosted any event that we could and invited every child in the class. Living in the Midwest had a cultural payoff: When you invite someone's child to your party, it is incumbent on that child's parents to invite yours to theirs. Thus one party generated around 20 to 25 invitations to other social gatherings. If I were to offer one piece of advice for parents of children with disabilities, it would be to take the initiative and invite children to your home first. Volunteering at school also allowed

us to get to know the other children in the class first-hand and facilitate social interactions.

For many of us, our social groups are people who have similar interests to our own. So, we undertook a full exploration of what talents my daughter had that she could eventually leverage into a social circle of like-minded individuals. We explored ice skating, dance lessons, Girl Scouts, soccer, gymnastics, piano, adapted horseback riding, softball, basketball, karate, acting, and the flute. Many of these activities were sponsored through the community, but we paid for a number of them on our own and were fortunate to have the means to do so. Community participation often and early also exposed Jenna to many children that she would see in different contexts. When we were at a playground or park, there were usually one or two children that we had met during our community activities.

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Elementary and Middle School

In the mega mentality of our home school district, the neighborhood schools only lasted from first to fourth grade. After that, all of the fifth and sixth graders in the entire growing suburb were amassed into one large building for 2 years, and then matriculated to the dreaded seventh and eighth grade middle school. How could I possibly keep up on the "friends" network in such an environment? Further, the proposed model of special education in our public school pulled children out of the classroom or wedged an adult between the child and her peers. Neither model seemed to be the right social fit for Jenna. I didn't want Jenna to be a visitor to the class; I wanted her to be a full citizen.

We opted for a small, private school with two classes of 25 kids in each grade from kindergarten through eighth grade. We also elected to retain her in kindergarten for another year. Every year, the same kids, the same parents. By the third grade I knew every parent in her class on a first name basis and they knew Jenna.

We were very lucky that her school started much later in the day than the local public school. Our district worked with us to provide Jenna with special services, such as speech, occupational therapy, and adaptive physical education before her regular school day. In that way, she wasn't pulled out of class and yet still could receive some very valuable and excellent quality services from her public school.

In third grade we were blessed with a miracle, this one with red hair, freckles, and boundless enthusiasm. Her name was Corey and she was Jenna's self-appointed best friend. Corey ensured that Jenna was dragged (or "included") wherever Corey went, and Corey went everywhere (including to the Renaissance Festival, where the picture above was taken). The day Corey's parents withdrew her from Jenna's school, I openly wept. While the children at her school have always been and are kind and welcoming to Jenna, nothing in the world can replace a best friend.

Jenna is now a teenager. For some reason I had thought that disability meant a free pass out of the foibles of adolescence. Not so. The teenage years have come on in textbook fashion with raging hormones, bad skin, and a rather surly attitude from time to time. Keeping up a social network at this age is much more challenging. At a time in life when geeky is perceived to be contagious, Jenna continues to be invited and included. Here I would be remiss if I didn't mention that her classmates have been nothing short of phenomenal. Last week Jenna sang a duet with a teacher in the school talent show. At the end of the show, each and every eighth grader gave her a standing ovation. How often do you get the chance to comment on the kindness and acceptance of 13-year-olds?

What's Next?

High school looms on the horizon. This tight-knit group will go in many directions, with three private high schools and three public high schools all serving as possibilities. Jenna will go to a public high school. Transition services outweigh any other benefits that could be reaped from a private high school. Again, we are looking for a way to facilitate a social group for her. I'm thinking that Marching Band will offer that opportunity. Four years with the same kids, the perennial need for booster support, and the chance to host the band parties will again afford me some inroads to create opportunities for positive social interactions and set the stage for meaningful relationships. Those flute lessons are going to really pay off.

It's been a great run from kindergarten through eighth grade. We find ourselves again on the threshold of another transition; this time to high school, and while still terrified, we are ever proactive and ever hopeful.

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Social Inclusion Resources

The following resources from around the country provide ideas about ways to support social participation and inclusion for young people with disabilities:

- ***Exceptional Family TV (http://www.exceptionalfamilytv.com).*** *This Web resource offers weekly video episodes, created for families of children with disabilities, about experiences that families face on a daily basis. It also offers blogs and forums through which families can connect with other families who may be having similar experiences. Among topics discussed are social-emotional growth and needs of young people.*
- ***Paths to Inclusion: A Resource Guide for Fully Including Youth of ALL Abilities in Community Life (http://www.meaf.org/docs/PathsToInclusion.pdf).*** *For youth with disabilities, opportunities to be part of extracurricular activities may be few or available only in segregated settings. This free online publication is designed as a guide to expanding those opportunities by helping youth program leaders and volunteers learn how to make organizations fully accessible to all young people. It's published by Mistubishi Electric America Foundation.*
- ***The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu).*** *This Web site offers resources and tools for families to use to help their young children with disabilities develop social and emotional skills needed for school. It includes training kits to prepare children for school, parent training modules, practical strategies, and videos. It's based at Vanderbilt University in Tennessee.*
- ***The National Center on Accessibility (http://www.ncaonline.org).*** *Based at Indiana University, this center promotes access and inclusion for people with disabilities in parks, recreation, and tourism. On the Web site are extensive resources for use in making playgrounds, other facilities, and programs accessible to all.*

Social-Emotional Well-Being of Students with Disabilities: The Importance of Student Support Staff

by Linda Taylor and Howard Adelman

Among the wide range of personnel and programs that provide support to K-12 students with disabilities in our schools are student support staff. Known by a variety of titles – school psychologists, counselors, nurses, social workers, therapeutic recreation specialists, dropout prevention specialists, and others – they are key to the success of students with disabilities. When planning and implementing IEPs, student support staff partner with teachers, students, and students' families to increase the academic, social, and emotional functioning and well-being of students with disabilities. Such personnel can also play an important role in improving the school climate and enabling *all* students to have an equal opportunity for belonging and success.

As Congress considers the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, there are calls for an expanded role for student support staff and a fundamental transformation of how student and learning supports are conceived (Adelman & Taylor, 2006a, 2006b, 2010; Skalski, 2011). The transformation would ensure that student support staff continue to provide a degree of targeted direct assistance and support to specific students, while expanding their participation and role in bringing about reform and improvement of schools and our educational system. This would include their involvement in carrying out an increasingly wide array of activities to promote academic achievement and healthy development for all students, address barriers to learning and teaching for all students, and re-engage disconnected students. New directions emphasize more attention to accomplishing desired outcomes through flexible and expanded roles and functions, and staff teaming together to develop a comprehensive system of student and learning supports for schools throughout a district. And the call is for redeploying existing school resources and reaching out to community resources with the aim of strategically weaving them into the school's agenda in ways that fill critical gaps and enhance a caring environment (for more about initiatives to transform the role of student supports, see http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu).

Increasing the Role of Support Staff in Creating a Caring School Climate

Lessons learned from efforts to improve schools underscore that high quality teaching, enhanced instruction aligned with assessment, collaborative staff development, and home involvement are necessary, but insufficient. Moreover, provision of specialized and clinically-oriented services are only one facet of any effort to develop a comprehensive system of student and learning supports. The unfortunate fact is that services alone cannot address the range of factors that cause poor academic performance, dropouts, gang violence, teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, racial conflict, and so forth, and they are too limited a response for the many students manifesting learning, behavior, and emotional problems.

The reality is that direct services for the discrete problems of a small number of students are only a small part of what a school and district need from student support staff. From a school improvement perspective, support staff must help develop a full continuum of student/learning supports that can effectively counter behavior problems, close the achievement gap, reduce dropouts (students and teachers), and promote personal and social well-being for the many. And they must do so in ways that create a caring school climate (Cohen & Geier, 2010).

In a caring school climate, learners care about learning; teachers care about teaching; and students, their families, and school staff all care about, and are engaged with, each other in support of a positive learning environment. Caring is maintained on an ongoing basis through use of a range of instructional strategies to support student growth and success, as well other types of strategies to sustain a caring and supportive environment in which staff can do their best work and families can be active participants in their child's education (Center for Mental Health in Schools, n.d.; School Mental Health Project, 1998). In addition:

> A caring school culture pays special attention to those who have difficulty making friends. Some students need just a bit of support to overcome the problem (e.g., a few suggestions, a couple of special opportunities). Some, however, need more help. They may be very shy, lacking in social skills, or may even act in negative ways that lead to their rejection. Whatever the reason, it is clear they need help if they and the school are to reap the benefits produced when individuals feel positively connected to each other (School Mental Health Project, 1998, p. 1).

Analyses of practice and research suggest that a proactive agenda for developing positive school and classroom climates requires careful attention to the following (Adelman & Taylor, 2010; Cohen & Geier, 2010):

- Enhancing the quality of life at school and especially in the classroom for students and staff (e.g., welcoming and social support mechanisms for students, families, and staff).
- Pursuing a curriculum that promotes not only academic, but also social-emotional learning (e.g., fostering

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intrinsic motivation for learning through personalized programs, enhanced options, and meaningful participation in decision making).

- Enabling teachers and other staff to be effective with a wide range of students (e.g., addressing barriers to learning and teaching, re-engaging disconnected students).

As will be clear in the next section, student support personnel are essential to accomplishing such a broad agenda.

Challenges and Opportunities

Each day there is another story in the news about how the troubled economy is hurting education. As has always been the case when education budgets tighten,

> ***Support staff must help develop a full continuum of student/ learning supports that can effectively counter behavior problems, close the achievement gap, reduce dropouts and promote personal and social well-being for the many.***

the tendency is to trim student support efforts more severely than other budget items. This reflects the long-standing *marginalization* in policy and practice of efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching. Laying-off support staff increases the caseload for those still in place. It also has increased a policy trend to "contract out" to community providers for specific support services. And, it has exacerbated the counterproductive competition for sparse resources.

Given dwindling budgets, the necessity is to meet *high priority* intervention needs in new and more cost-effective ways. At the same time, the long-term aim must remain to move toward a comprehensive system to provide student and learning supports. Indeed, available evidence suggests that a caring school climate depends on the creation of a comprehensive system of supports that embraces not only students with disabilities, but all students, to ensure equity of opportunity and enhance the well-being of all involved (Adelman & Taylor, 2010; Cohen & Geier, 2010). Thus, at this critical juncture in the history of public education, schools must adopt and keep the following set of support staff roles and functions in balance (Adelman & Taylor, 2010):

- Planning, implementing, and evaluating *direct interventions* for students and families. For students this includes programs and services that equitably address barriers to learning, re-engage disconnected students, and promote healthy development (e.g., developmental and motivational assessments, including response-to-intervention strategies; regular and specialized assistance in and outside the classroom; universal and targeted group interventions; safe and caring school interventions; academic and personal counseling; support for transitions). For families this includes providing information, referrals, and support for referral follow-through; instruction; counseling; and home involvement.
- Planning, implementing, and evaluating ways to enhance *systems within schools.* This includes *coordination and integration of programs/services/ systems*, establishing mechanisms for collaborating with colleagues to ensure activities are carried out in the most equitable and cost-effective manner consistent with legal and ethical standards for practice (examples of mechanisms include case-oriented and resource-oriented teams; consultation, coaching, and mentoring mechanisms; triage, referral, and care monitoring systems; crisis teams). It also includes *development of a comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated system of student and learning supports*. For example, collaborating to improve existing interventions and develop ways to fill gaps related to needed prevention programs, early-after-onset interventions, and assistance for students with severe and/or chronic problems; and incorporating an understanding of legal and ethical standards for practice.
- Planning, implementing, and evaluating ways to enhance *school-community linkages and partnerships*. This includes establishing *mechanisms* for collaborating with community entities to coordinate, integrate, and weave together school and community resources and systems to enhance both current activity and development of a comprehensive approach for systemically and equitably addressing barriers to learning and promoting healthy development.

With a view to ensuring an appropriate balance, school planners must recognize underlying commonalities among a variety of school concerns and intervention strategies and foster increased interest in cross-disciplinary training and interprofessional education. And, given the pressing need for learning supports to ensure all students have an equal opportunity to succeed at school, it is time for everyone to recognize that current cutbacks are so unbalanced that essential efforts to address factors that interfere with learning at school will be subverted. While all cuts are harmful, the extreme cuts related to student and learning supports will undermine the hope of ensuring equity of opportunity. The focus in balancing budget cuts and redeploying resources should be on ensuring there is a critical mass of school resources allocated for student and learning supports to enable schools to redeploy, and then outreach to leverage and braid with a wide range of community resources.

[Adelman & Taylor, continued on page 39]

Therapeutic Recreation in Schools: Supporting Children's Social and Emotional Well-Being

by Linda Heyne and Lynn Anderson

Sarah, age 6, watches a group of children on the playground and is unsure how to play the game or join the group. Tracey, age 10, sits alone during lunch, while her classmates sitting nearby make plans to go swimming after school. Conrad, age 17, wants to get in shape but isn't sure where to go to work out, how to get there, or with whom to go. These situations illustrate just a few of the challenges that students with disabilities and their families face that can be addressed through therapeutic recreation services.

Most people agree that having time to recreate and use one's free time in meaningful ways is essential to a healthy, well-balanced life. Indeed, some people believe that satisfaction with one's leisure participation is essential to one's overall satisfaction with life. Recreation has been recognized as an important curricular area for students with disabilities for over two decades. And school and community recreation personnel have acknowledged that recreation skills, similar to academic and other life skills, require systematic instruction or they will not be learned (Schleien, Meyer, Heyne, & Biel Brandt, 1995; Heyne & Anderson, 2004; Bullock, Morris, Mahon, & Jones, 1992).

Therapeutic recreation is a related educational service in public schools, and any child who receives special education services is entitled to it.

Despite growing awareness of the importance of recreation instruction for students with disabilities, few school staff and parents are familiar with the discipline of therapeutic recreation. Nor are they aware that therapeutic recreation is a related educational service in public schools, and any child who receives special education services is entitled to it. Consequently, few students receive leisure education at school, and many social and emotional needs go unmet.

What is Therapeutic Recreation?

Therapeutic recreation is the purposeful and careful facilitation of quality leisure experiences and the development of personal and environmental strengths, which lead to greater well-being for people who, due to illness, disability, or other life circumstances, need individualized assistance to achieve their goals and dreams (Anderson & Heyne, 2011). Therapeutic recreation specialists work in a variety of community, clinical, and residential settings and support people of all ages and abilities in meeting their goals and aspirations related to leisure and wellness.

A unique aspect of therapeutic recreation is that freely chosen, motivating recreation activities are used to support the participant in meeting his or her goals. Further, therapeutic recreation focuses on the whole person across all the dimensions of human well-being: social, emotional, cognitive, physical, and spiritual.

Recreation as a Related Service

Therapeutic recreation has been authorized as a related educational service ever since the Education for All Handicapped Children Act was passed in 1975. With every reauthorization of the subsequent Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), recreation has been reaffirmed as a related service. One of the primary purposes of therapeutic recreation in schools is to help students learn to use their leisure time constructively and in ways that improve their overall quality of life. Section §300.34(c)(11) of IDEA identifies four specific aspects of recreation as a related service: (1) assessment of leisure function, (2) therapeutic recreation services, (3) recreation programs in schools and community agencies, and (4) leisure education (National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, 2010). Those can be described as follows:

- *Assessment of leisure function.* A comprehensive assessment of the student's leisure skills, attitudes, interests, and abilities is conducted to assess functional strengths. The assessment could also address current recreation patterns, social skills, facilitators and barriers to recreation participation, and the ability to participate in a variety of activities. Assessment provides the basis for developing Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals, and planning for subsequent instruction.
- *Therapeutic recreation services.* Recreation programs are designed to enhance the student's leisure functioning, along with every dimension of well-being. This process involves an individualized assessment (described above), development of goals and objectives, identification of needed accommodations, program implementation, and documentation and evaluation of the student's progress. Depending on the student's interests, he or she may participate in activities such as games, hobbies, music, art, drama, nature activities, scouts, and sports, to name a few.
- *Recreation programs in schools and community agencies*. IDEA supports the involvement of students with disabilities in recreation during school and outside of school hours.

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Therapeutic recreation specialists help schools collaborate with after-school programs, community parks and recreation, youth development programs, and summer camps to accomplish IEP goals during extra-curricular activities. These partnerships strengthen school-community linkages, engage assistance from community-based therapeutic recreation specialists and programs, and support transition-age students as they learn to use community recreation resources on their own.

- *Leisure education.* Therapeutic recreation specialists teach students skills, knowledge, and attitudes related to meaningful leisure involvement. Students gain awareness of their recreation participation, learn appropriate social behaviors, become familiar with leisure resources, and identify leisure barriers and facilitators. They may also learn to be more mindful, to savor their recreation activities more, and to use their strengths to the fullest during their leisure experiences. Therapeutic recreation specialists also train parents and educators about how educational outcomes can be enhanced through recreation.

How Do Children Benefit from Therapeutic Recreation?

Learning to interact with others in recreation activities can lead to numerous social and emotional benefits for students with disabilities, including:

- Enhanced self-esteem and self-confidence through successful participation.
- Improved communication, social interaction, and friendship skills, as well as more appropriate social behavior through modeling from peers.
- Increased sense of autonomy, independence, self-direction, and the ability to make choices related to recreation participation.
- Increased participation in regular physical activity that is intrinsically motivated.
- Expanded repertoire of leisure skills, with the potential for lifelong participation across a variety of settings.
- Strengthened feelings of belonging and acceptance in school and community settings.

Social and emotional gains through recreation can also help lay the groundwork for improved learning in academics and functional life skills. As children with disabilities feel better about themselves and feel more connected with their classmates through recreation, they become more receptive to learning in other important life areas.

Conclusion

This article opened with three situations that represent challenges that students with disabilities often face related to recreation and socialization. Sarah was unsure how to join a playground group, Tracey wanted to be included in her classmates' after-school plans, and Conrad hoped to improve his physical fitness but wasn't sure how to go about it. In all three cases, a therapeutic recreation specialist would conduct a comprehensive assessment of the student's recreation interests, abilities, and strengths to develop relevant IEP goals and objectives. The assessment process would involve consultation with family members and appropriate education personnel. For instance, the therapeutic recreation specialist could consult with a speech therapist to support Sarah and Tracey's communication and social skill development. Conrad's transition team leader could provide input on teaching Conrad to use the facilities at a gym and to take public transportation there. Families could identify potential recreation partners from the neighborhood who might share similar interests with their children. Therapeutic recreation services might also teach all three students appropriate social skills during recreation such as greeting others, starting a conversation, cooperating, listening to others, or being a friend. Playground supervisors and lunchroom staff could help facilitate interactions among students. A buddy system or "lunch bunches" could be established to provide companionship during lunchtime and snack periods. The therapeutic recreation specialist could also explore recreation options in the community. Sarah could join 4-H, and Tracey could become a Girl Scout. Conrad could learn to take the bus to the YMCA with a friend from the neighborhood. All three students could connect with parks and recreation programs, nature centers, camps, faith communities, and other public programs and facilities to explore their recreation offerings.

Therapeutic recreation specialists are often the ones to connect-the-dots to facilitate home-school-community linkages. With careful planning and collaboration, many lifelong skills can be nurtured through recreation.

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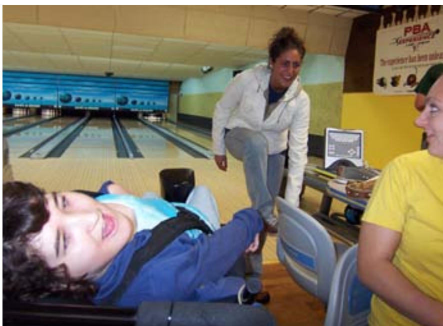
"Mom and Dad... I Sure Could Use More of This!"

by Rob and Sheila Foote

When Jennifer was born, we were double novices: new to parenting, and new to the world of dealing with a child with special needs. There was a lot of learning before us, especially in the realm of nurturing a child with acute cerebral palsy.

Despite her profound physical and intellectual impairments, Jennifer was a robust little girl full of life, and given great big social butterfly wings. She loved to be out and about, she loved people, road trips, and games. These desires emerged slowly at first, but were catalyzed when she reached preschool age.

When she began attending the Western Pennsylvania School for Blind



Children in Pittsburgh, her extremely gifted and patient teacher endured about 6 months of screaming from Jennifer due to serious esophagitis, yet successfully directed her into more participatory games and activities until Jen acclimated. Jen then fully anticipated and expected such wonderful learning experiences. Her "Pilgrim" class crossed the Atlantic in the hallway on the *Mayflower,* with a log-shaped foam roll under the "deck" to simulate rocking on the ocean, and a blow dryer and some sprayed water to season the sailors. In the middle of that hapless crew was our young beaming daughter, communicating emphatically with her smile, "Mom and Dad, I sure could use more of this!" We picked up on this cue, and from then on Jen's world involved much more outdoor activity. Recreation included simple things like taking walks, and more extreme activities like riding on a jet ski or "tubing" behind the boat with dad.

When we moved to New York, she was able to attend the special education program at a local school in Ithaca, and remained there from ages 10 to 21. The school was not quite as resource rich as her Pittsburgh school had been (we especially missed the therapy pool). But her teachers and staff were creative in their programming, cared for the children, and tried hard to make up for some of the shortcomings of the physical plant. Jen loved putting on musicals, trips to the bowling alley and the local swimming pool, and of course the proverbial shopping mall excursion. Her school was a rich social environment, and she looked forward to the engagement with great zeal every day. She even participated in an epic class trip back to her hometown of Pittsburgh.

At home, a weekly or biweekly trip to church was always a moment of joy for Jen. And any event out into the community was truly "special." Despite the great effort that was required to prepare for each outing or road trip, Jennifer loved to go. Her sibs would be crashed in the backseat, but she was wide-eyed and checking out the landscape at every turn. Trips to her grandparents' cottage included a special treat of fishing; Jen always seem to catch something when no one else could (I think she had a secret contract with the bluegills). But these trips also included far too many sojourns to the radiology department when she lost her jejunal feeding tube (indeed, there is always some risk to getting out of the house).

Transition to adulthood was a shock to Jen's social orientation. Two separate interventions made a big difference. First, her excellent medical service coordinator suggested a program set-up through the New York Medicaid waiver called "self-determination." This enabled us to set-up a program which freed enough resources to provide a day worker to take Jennifer

out into the community with her dedicated nurse, along with some additional perks like massage therapy. But it was a therapeutic recreation class at Ithaca College that really came to the rescue for Jen. Young women in the class – students who were Jen's peers chronologically – would take her out into the community to football games, basketball games, bowling, putt putt golf, the local animal shelter, the park, scrapbooking, a bistro, and yes, the more than occasional shopping trip (as the photos here show). These outings kept Jen looking forward to each new day. For her it was the social relationships with these students who welcomed her into their circle that probably trumped the activities themselves.

For Jen, the presence of a few key people willing to take a risk on a new, and often challenging, relationship made all the difference. Sadly, it was in the middle of a semester when that therapeutic recreation class was in session that Jennifer suddenly died. But she died a spiritually, socially, and emotionally rich young woman.

Rob and Sheila Foote live in Ithaca, New York.

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Making Friends: Thoughts From Young Adults with Disabilities

Young adults who are part of the Rockers 'N' Rollers group at the Memphis Center for Independent Living were recently asked to share their thoughts about social relationships. This article lists the five questions they were asked and the responses of five members of that group. The members were Tia (age 17), Mario (age 26), Davina (age 31), Nick (age 28), and Angelica (age 20). The information was gathered by Pamela Momon of the center, which is in Memphis, Tennessee.

For you, what have been the best places to get to know people your age and make friends?

- At school. – Tia
- Church. – Angelica
- Don't know. I don't have many to any true friends I can trust. – Nick
- At my school and at Memphis Center for Independent Living. – Davina
- I have gained the most from places like Memphis Center for Independent Living, the Raymond Skinner Center [a recreation program for people with disabilities], and the Mid-South Arc. They all have youth programs that help me find and make friends. – Mario

When you meet someone that you think could become a friend, what kinds of things do you do to help that friendship start? How do you keep it going over time?

- Be friendly, honest. – Nick
- Talking to them during social get-togethers and by telephone. – Davina
- I introduce myself and talk with them about everyday things; I maintain a friendship by being helpful. I find that there is an exchange of help that benefits my friendships. – Mario
- By being friendly. – Tia
- Be a good friend. – Angelica

As you've grown up, have you had any particular challenges to meeting and making friends at different times in your life? How have you responded to those challenges?

- When I was in school I had a difficult time trying to balance doing my own work and helping others with their work. I found myself helping others before myself. Since I have finished school I can finally focus on just me and the needs I have to become more independent. – Mario
- No, I have not had any problems. – Davina
- The biggest challenge I've had has been since I received a traumatic brain injury on June 5, 2000. Since that I lost all of my friends. All my old friends were still there afterwards, but they were there to use me or to abuse what I had access to. – Nick
- No. – Angelica, Tia

If a young person with disabilities wants to have more opportunities to meet people their own age and make friends, what things do you think they could do to help make that happen?

- Go to their Independent Living Center. – Davina
- I would tell a young person with disabilities to get out into their community and break out of being shy; just introduce yourself and let things happen on their own. – Mario
- Join groups, start young, get involved with things. Join Scouts: Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts. – Nick
- After-school activities. – Angelica
- Keep trying and one day the opportunities will happen. – Tia

What things do you think schools, youth organizations, and families could do to support young people with disabilities to have healthy and satisfying social lives?

- Try to see that person's point of view. – Tia
- Be more supportive and try to put themselves in their shoes. – Angelica
- To have different social events. – Davina
- Provide things out in the local community; this would cut down on health issues in my opinion. – Mario

"I would tell a young person with disabilities to get out into their community and break out of being shy; just introduce yourself and let things happen on their own."

The Rockers 'N' Rollers group instills ideas of choice, change, and inclusion, and assists young adults in community living with a sense of pride, self-motivation, and confidence. It is geared toward self-empowerment through workshops on topics such as housing, employment, and independent living skills, and also focuses on building leadership skills that will empower and strengthen future advocates. For more information visit http://www.mcil.org/mcil/our/youth.htm or contact the center at 901/726-6404.

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Bullying Among Children and Youth with Disabilities and Special Needs

What is bullying?

Bullying is aggressive behavior that is intentional and that involves an imbalance of power or strength. Often, it is repeated over time. Bullying can take many forms, such as hitting, kicking, or shoving (physical bullying); teasing or name-calling (verbal bullying); intimidation through gestures or social exclusion (nonverbal bullying or emotional bullying); and sending insulting messages by text messaging or e-mail (cyberbullying).

What is known about bullying among children with disabilities and special needs?

There is a small but growing amount of research literature on bullying among children with disabilities and special needs. This research indicates that these children may be at particular risk of being bullied by their peers. For example, research tells us that:

- Although little research has been conducted on the relation between learning disabilities (LD) and bullying, available information indicates that children with LD are at greater risk of being teased and physically bullied (Martlew & Hodson, 1991; Mishna, 2003; Nabuzoka & Smith, 1993; Thompson, Whitney, & Smith, 1994).
- Children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) are more likely than other children to be bullied. They also are somewhat more likely than others to bully their peers (Unnever & Cornell, 2003).
- Children with medical conditions that affect their appearance (e.g., cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, and spina bifida) are more likely to be victimized by peers. Frequently, these children report being called names related to their disability (Dawkins, 1996).
- Obesity also may place children at higher risk of being bullied. In a study of children aged 11–16, researchers found that overweight and obese girls (aged 11–16) and boys (aged 11–12) were more likely than normal-weight peers to be teased or to be made fun of and to experience relational bullying (e.g., to be socially excluded). Overweight and obese girls were also more likely to be physically bullied (Janssen, Craig, Boyce, & Pickett, 2004).
- Children with hemiplegia (paralysis of one side of their body) are more likely than other children their age to be victimized by peers, to be rated as less popular than their peers, and to have fewer friends than other children (Yude, Goodman, & McConachie, 1998).
- Children who have diabetes and who are dependent on insulin may be especially vulnerable to peer bullying (Storch et al., 2004).
- Children who stutter may be more likely than their peers to be bullied. In one study, 83 percent of adults who had problems with stammering as children said that they had been teased or bullied; 71 percent of those who had been bullied said it happened at least once a week (Hugh-Jones & Smith, 1999).

How does bullying affect children?

Bullying can have serious consequences. Children and youth who are bullied are more likely than other children to:

- Be depressed, lonely, anxious;
- Have low self-esteem;
- Experience headaches, stomachaches, fatigue, poor appetites;
- Be absent from school and dislike school; and
- Think about suicide.

Can bullying of my child be illegal?

Yes. Bullying behavior may cross the line to become "disability harassment," which is illegal under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. According to the U.S. Department of Education, disability harassment is "intimidation or abusive behavior toward a student based on disability that creates a hostile environment by interfering with or denying a student's participation in or receipt of benefits, services, or opportunities in the institution's program" (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). This behavior can take different forms including verbal harassment, physical threats, or threatening written statements. When a school finds out that harassment may have occurred, staff must investigate the incident(s) promptly and respond appropriately.

Disability harassment can occur in any location that is connected with school: in classrooms, in the cafeteria, in hallways, on the playground or athletic fields, or on a school bus. It also can occur during school-sponsored events (Education Law Center, 2002).

What can I do if I think my child is being bullied or is the victim of disability harassment?

- Be supportive of your child and encourage him or her to describe who was involved and how and where the bullying or harassment happened. Be sure to tell your child that it is not his or her fault and that nobody deserves to be bullied or harassed. Do not encourage your child to fight back. This may make the problem much worse.
- Usually children are able to identify when they are being bullied by peers. Sometimes, however, children with disabilities do not realize they are being targeted. (They may, for example, believe that they have a new friend,

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when in fact, this "friend" is making fun of them.) Ask your child specific questions about his or her friendships and be alert to possible signs of bullying – even if your child doesn't label the behaviors as bullying.

- Talk with your child's teacher immediately to see whether he or she can help to resolve the problem quickly.
- If the bullying or harassment is severe, or if the teacher doesn't fix the problem quickly, contact the principal and put your concerns in writing. Explain what happened in detail and ask for a prompt response. Keep a written record of all conversations and communications with the school.
- Ask the school district to convene a meeting of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team or the Section 504 team, a group convened to ensure that the school district is meeting the needs of its students with disabilities. This meeting will allow you to explain what has been happening and will let the team review your child's IEP or 504 plan and make sure that the school is taking steps to stop the harassment. If your child needs counseling or other supportive services because of the harassment, discuss this with the team.
- As the U.S. Department of Education (2000) recognizes, "creating a supportive school climate is the most important step in preventing harassment." Work with the school to help establish a system-wide bullying prevention program that includes support systems for bullied children.
- Sometimes children and youth who are bullied also bully others. Explore whether your child may also be bullying other younger, weaker students at school. If so, his or her IEP may need to be modified to include help to change the aggressive behavior.
- Be persistent. Talk regularly with your child and with school staff to see whether the behavior has stopped.

What if the bullying or harassment does not stop?

If your school district does not take reasonable, appropriate steps to end the bullying or harassment of your child, the district may be violating federal, state, and local laws. For more information about your legal rights, you may want to contact:

- The U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights. Phone: (800) 421-3481; or Web: http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/index.html
- The U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs. Phone: (202) 245-7468; or Web: http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep/index.html

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Reprinted from "Bullying Among Children and Youth with Disabilities and Special Needs," published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). This and other materials are available online at www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov.

Additional Bullying Prevention Resources

The following resources may be useful in educating people about, and developing strategies to address, bullying of students with disabilities:

- ***National Bullying Prevention Center (http://www.pacer.org/bullying)**. This center unites, engages, and educates communities nationwide to address bullying through creative, relevant, and interactive resources. Operated by PACER Center, it includes the **Kids Against Bullying Web site** (http://www.pacerkidsagainstbullying.org) where elementary students with and without disabilities learn about bullying prevention, engage in activities, and are inspired to take action; and the **Teens Against Bullying Web Site** (www.teensagainstbullying.org), where middle and high school students with and without disabilities find ways to address bullying, take action, and be heard.*
- ***Walk a Mile in Their Shoes: Bullying and the Child with Special Needs (http://www.abilitypath.org).** This report and guide from AbilityPath.org educates parents about bullying of children with special needs, empowers parents and educators to take action against bullying, and assists policymakers and other professionals to keep the issue of bullying and children with special needs at the forefront in public discussions of bullying.*

Student Social-Emotional Well-Being: The Role of Administrators and State Education Agencies

by Sandra Berndt and Eva Kubinski

Research has shown that when schools appropriately and effectively attend to the social and emotional needs of K-12 students with disabilities, life outcomes for these students improve in areas such as school completion, successful social relationships and better employment outcomes (OECD 2007; Rea, McLaughlin & Walther-Thomas, 2002). For this reason, it is critical that special and general education teachers, as well as school support personnel, be equipped and encouraged to foster the development of social-emotional skills and understanding on the part of students with disabilities. It is also essential that these professionals help create and sustain educational environments in which students with disabilities have opportunities to practice social skills and be socially included with their peers. However, they cannot carry out this task without the direction and support of school and district administrators, as well as state education departments. This article will address what administrators and state agencies can do to help special and general education teachers, and school support personnel, to knowledgeably and confidently address the social and emotional needs of students with disabilities, and sustain school environments that support social well-being.

Staff Training and Development

While most educators have an intuitive understanding of the social-emotional development of the average student, they often do not receive sufficient training at the pre-service and in-service levels on how to support the social-emotional well-being of students with disabilities. Therefore it is imperative that school and district administrators, and state education departments, help build educator comfort and competence in working with students with many types of disabilities, attending to both the academic and social-emotional areas of life. This is particularly important for general education personnel given that participation by students with disabilities in regular education classrooms and school social activities is a vital part of their social-emotional well-being.

To develop their competence and confidence in addressing the social-emotional needs of students with disabilities, special and general educators require administrative support for needed training and related activities, as well as time for collaboration to plan instruction that attends to student social-emotional skills and understanding. It is essential that this professional development around social skills and emotional development include training on how to effectively set-up cooperative learning opportunities and manage cooperative groups. Training is also needed on how to help students develop and evaluate goal-setting around social skills and opportunities.

To incorporate opportunities for social-emotional development into the school day without short-changing academic instruction, teachers can infuse social-emotional content into academic tasks. For example, students can be asked to interpret the feelings and emotional responses of historical figures; discuss why a character acted the way they did based on the events in a story; or identify parallels between their lives and the lesson subject. Especially for students with disabilities, these activities allow for a greater richness in understanding, as well as increased relevance of the lessons they are learning. Teachers need training and practice in the differentiation of instruction, including how to determine the specific learning and social-emotional needs of their students. Administrators can support their teachers by helping them get the needed training in how to differentiate instruction, as well as helping provide teacher mentors and the opportunity to collaborate and observe the needed skills being modeled. Administrators should also provide supportive and constructive feedback to teachers about the effectiveness of their instruction in the areas of student social-emotional development.

At the state level, State Education Agencies (SEA) can work with teacher pre-service training programs to help incorporate concepts related to social-emotional development of students with disabilities. Pre-service training can include how to differentiate instruction, as well as how to provide inclusive instruction, for both special and general education teachers. Pre-service teachers should also have internships in inclusive classrooms with teachers who have a proven track record providing effective social-emotional instruction for all their students. The instructors for these pre-service training programs can be brought together by the SEA to help provide coordinated planning and program development, sharing effective and research-based strategies that they teach to their pre-service educators. The SEA can also ensure that discretionary grant funding is available to provide in-service training on the topic.

Another role for SEAs is to encourage effective partnerships between community and school groups to promote positive social instruction and activities. By bringing together other groups, such as mental health service providers, coordinators of local after-school programs, and parent information centers, effective social-emotional instruction can continue outside of school in community activities and programs. One example is the Families and Schools Together (FAST) program that brings together parents, community mental health and prevention programs, and

Retrieved from the Web site of the Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota (http://ici.umn.edu/products/impact/241). Citation: Palmer, S., Heyne, L., Montie, J., Abery, B., & Gaylord, V. (Eds.). (Spring/Summer 2011). *Impact: Feature Issue on Supporting the Social Well-Being of Children and Youth with Disabilities, 24*(1). [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, Institute on Community Integration].

other community resources to help parents address issues in their children's lives, including their social-emotional development (for more see http://familiesandschools.org). SEAs could also provide funding and support for bringing together these groups to form professional learning communities around the issue of social-emotional development and effective practices.

Many states have established guidelines around social-emotional development and instruction. In Wisconsin, for example, the Department of Public Instruction has developed guidelines for successful schools that include *Standards of the Heart,* which are intended to foster positive character traits in students (see http://dpi.wi.gov/cssch/csssoh1.html). This information is provided to school districts through an annual conference, regional training opportunities, a Web resource page, and Webinars.

Lastly, SEAs can work with both universities and other research entities to ensure that best practice and research-based materials are made available to teachers and districts, and to ensure they have the most up-to-date resources.

Attention to School Climate

In addition to providing support for teachers and other school personnel to develop their skills and competency in addressing social-emotional needs of students with disabilities, administrators should examine the expectations that the school as a whole communicates for students with disabilities, making sure that their schools and districts have consistent and positive expectations for all their students. These expectations should be built on the clear and unequivocal message that all students are valued and valuable, and deserving of a positive educational experience. Administrators can be the leaders in promoting a climate of respect, tolerance, and celebration of differences. One way to act on these expectations is to implement effective and research-based Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) programs that include high behavioral and social expectations for all students. As mentioned previously, Wisconsin has developed *Standards of the Heart,* which provide a framework for developing a supportive, positive, and inclusive environment. School administrators can use these or similar standards to examine board policies, district practices, and their own procedures to ensure that students feel safe, welcomed, and accepted in their schools. Administrators can also include activities such as:

- Lunch with the principal – once a month the principal could pick a group of students with whom to have lunch and solicit the students' ideas on how to improve the school climate.
- Support the development of diversity clubs at the high school level
- Model accepting and healthy social-emotional behavior in how they deal with problems and conflict in the school setting.

State Education Agencies can also play an important role in the promotion of positive and supportive school climates in all their state's public schools. In addition to the dissemination of effective research-based practices, they have opportunities in their supervision and monitoring responsibilities to include questions around school climates. For example, since school climate is a factor in student engagement, which impacts the likelihood of students staying in school and successfully obtaining a regular diploma, any monitoring around graduation and dropout problems can include the examination of how a school's climate is impacting students' school completion.

Conclusion

As students with disabilities continue to be included in greater numbers in general education settings, and as the emphasis is increased on providing them meaningful access to academic content, it is essential not to omit opportunities to enhance and improve their social and emotional development. With effective instruction and guidance, teachers will see:

- Improved classroom behavior.
- Greater student engagement with school and schoolwork.
- Greater acceptance of students with disabilities by peers.
- Interpersonal skills that transfer from school to world of work.

Academic instruction is important for all students. However, we cannot leave students with disabilities to venture into the world without providing them with essential social and emotional skills, and the essential experience of being socially included and valued with their peers during their school years.

Note: The views expressed in this article are those of the authors. The content does not necessarily represent the policy of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, and endorsement by the department should not be assumed.

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Inclusive Classrooms: Achieving Success for All Students

by Kathleen G. Winterman

First grade teacher, Mrs. Sheridan, announces, "Let's start meeting." The children quickly gather in the front of the classroom, on the rug where their morning meeting is held. She says, "Let's start with a song." Mrs. Sheridan stands in front of the children, who instantly form a circle, standing shoulder to shoulder, around the perimeter of the rug. A familiar song begins to play on the CD player. Eric is to the right of Matthew, and Rachel is to his left. The children follow Mrs. Sheridan's lead as together they perform the motions for the song. They dance along and laugh as the song progresses. Matthew, however, jumps up and down and makes noises in-between motions, a behavior that is off-task and self-distracting. Rachel helps him regain his focus by demonstrating the motions that Mrs. Sheridan showed them earlier, standing in front of Matthew just as Mrs. Sheridan had done in front of the class. She also taps him on the shoulder to redirect him when he turns away from the group. The song ends. Rachel puts her arm around Matthew's waist in friendship as they wait for the next song to begin. The song begins and Matthew and the other children begin to make the song's motions.

This classroom scene illustrates what has been learned from numerous studies: Simply placing children such as Matthew who have disabilities into the school's mainstream is not sufficient in bringing about their integration and social inclusion. Federal mandates (IDEA, 2004) require that public schools serve all children. Often students with special needs can be physically included with their peers, but their limited social skills hamper their true inclusion. Mere placement of students with disabilities within a general education classroom does not necessarily promote the growth and development of their social skills. For children with disabilities to be successful members of their classroom community, a carefully planned intervention strategy that considers the educational and social-emotional needs of all members must be incorporated, ideally starting prior to the inclusion of students with disabilities that affect their social inclusion. Using the example of Matthew's experience, this article suggests one such intervention strategy that can support social inclusion: the Responsive Classroom® approach.

Figure 1. Guiding Principles of the Responsive Classroom® Approach

- The social curriculum is as important as the academic curriculum.
- How children learn is as important as what they learn; process and content go hand in hand.
- The greatest cognitive growth occurs through social interaction.
- There is a set of social skills that children need to learn and practice to be successful academically and socially: cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control.
- Knowing the children we teach – individually, culturally, and developmentally – is as important as knowing the content we teach.
- Knowing the families of the children we teach and inviting their participation is essential to children's education.
- How the adults at school work together is as important as individual competence: lasting change begins with the adult community.

Source: Northeast Foundation for Children, Inc. (2011).

Supporting Social Inclusion for Students with Disabilities

One of the key factors in Matthew's successful inclusion in his first grade classroom is the school's implementation of the Responsive Classroom® approach. Because of this approach, his classroom provides a trusting, caring environment in which all children learn social and academic skills; all educational professionals and parents collaborate; and peer partners support Matthew's participation in group activities and specific projects. The Responsive Classroom® instructional approach integrates the teaching of academic and social skills as an aspect of everyday classroom life. Teachers and students work together to establish a trusting, caring environment as they build a social community through routine events. While this curricular model was not specifically designed to support students with special needs, if we see children with disabilities as children first, we can use this approach to build an emotionally secure school community in which they will risk showing us their world, and be more likely to experience social inclusion and school success.

One tenet of the Responsive Classroom® is that the social curriculum is as important as the academic curriculum (see Figure 1). As teachers embrace this learning philosophy, they typically use the following 10 classroom practices (Northeast Foundation for Children, Inc., 2011):

- Morning Meeting
- Rule Creation
- Interactive Modeling
- Positive Teacher Language
- Logical Consequences
- Guided Discovery
- Academic Choice
- Classroom Organization
- Working with Families
- Collaborative Problem Solving

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Although many of these practices are used by Mrs. Sheridan, Matthew's favorite is the Morning Meeting. The Responsive Classroom® model utilizes daily routine events to help further students' social interaction and growth. Morning Meeting is comprised of a time for greeting, during which all children welcome each other; sharing, in which children discuss events in their lives; group activities, in which all participate; and a more teacher-directed aspect of news and announcements. This time allows all children to hear clearly what is expected of them, participate with all their peers in the group, and internalize the expectation that all students participate equally as members of the classroom community (Winterman, 2003; Northeast Foundation for Children, 2011). It is a time to build unity and friendships as well as specific skills training (Winterman & Sapona, 2002). Once students enter the classroom door, they are beginning to learn. Those first few moments set the tone for learning and accentuate what is valued in the environment. By joining together as a cohesive group, students are empowered and everyone's contributions are valued. Students learn to take risks that help them grow socially when they feel their thoughts will be respected, and Morning Meeting helps to create a climate of trust and respect (Kriete, 1999).

In Mrs. Sheridan's classroom, it is during Morning Meeting that she establishes expectations and teaches the students how to model appropriate behaviors to each other. This modeling is then repeated in actions such as Rachel's demonstration of the song's motions to Matthew to help him stay focused and in sync with his classmates. Although peers are rarely considered as a foundation of support for students with disabilities in the public schools, effective interventions require adults to look beyond the child's own world to see how they fit in their peer culture and school community. Within the Responsive Classroom® framework, a primary goal for educational team members supporting students with special needs is to work together to create an optimal climate for the children to learn social concepts that enhance their attainment of social skills. And in Matthew's experience with Rachel we see that partnership in action. The Responsive Classroom® philosophy states that every child can contribute care for others in many ways – by listening, responding with relevance and attention, by showing concern for feelings and viewpoints, and by developing a capacity for empathy (Charney, 1991). Creating community means giving children the power to care. Rachel is confident in expressing her caring for Matthew as she helps him to participate in the song in the same way as his classmates, and he benefits by further developing his social awareness and skills, and participating as a valued group member.

The Impact of Responsive Classrooms® for All Children

The social curriculum and predictability established in a Responsive Classroom® affords students the context for effective social partnerships. All classroom members learn together how to become part of a social community that welcomes all. This approach provides both adult-mediated and peer-mediated strategies to assist in the social inclusion of students. Responsive Classroom® activities get everyone participating and help them internalize the expectation that all students are valued members of the classroom community.

In a study of Mrs. Sheridan's first grade classroom (Winterman, 2003), 19 out of 20 students within the class who were interviewed could provide examples of how their teacher made everyone feel included. Mrs. Sheridan stated in her interview, "...all students benefitted from the social experiences of the Morning Meeting. Social behaviors were taught and modeled for all...The humor, songs, and positive statements created a 'campfire' atmosphere where they could be successful. Everyone received the same amount of respect at our Morning Meeting. Everyone was treated fairly – not equally. All the students got what they needed to be successful."

Conclusion

When exploring best practices for teaching and learning, it's important that educators consider models that place social, emotional and academic development on equal footing and do so by making use of social learning programs such as the Responsive Classroom®. While much attention has been given to the teaching of reading and mathematics, most educators have had far less exposure to strategies directed at creating a classroom community where children learn to celebrate their own unique contribution to the learning environment. Simply implementing major behavioral approaches to deal with children with special needs fails to examine the underlying need of all children to be recognized as a contributing member of their peer group. As educators we need to maximize the benefit of the natural motivation peers provide. Successful inclusive classrooms should set forth a vision where all children are not only welcomed, but challenged and supported to be their best.

Note: The names Mrs. Sheridan, Matthew, Rachel and Eric are pseudonyms.

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School-Wide Positive Behavioral Support: Promoting Social-Emotional Well-Being of All

by Amy McCart and Nikki Wolf

In an elementary school in our nation's Capital, children gather each morning in the cafeteria for a review of behavioral expectations in the form of a chant. "We believe in being safe, being friends, and WE WILL LEARN! Yes, WE WILL LEARN!" They repeat this chant several times. As they line-up to head to classes for the morning, teachers remind or re-teach students how each aspect of this chant translates into actions and choices on the part of the students.

In all these instances, School-wide Positive Behavioral Support is being used to address the social-emotional and behavioral areas of students' lives, while improving the school climate and learning.

In a rural community 30 miles from the Texas border, a small middle school focuses on a group of 6th grade boys who seem to not be responding to the school's behavioral expectation that students will be prepared for class. The educators come together and decide, after looking at data, that a more specific group intervention is needed. The boys are then given a morning checklist of needed items for class (i.e., pencil, notebook, agenda). They are to check-off that they have the items prior to class starting. If at least 90% of the boxes on the checklist are marked at the end of each day, the boys get to attend their seminar study group together. As the educators review the data, they learn the boys are improving in their readiness. In the past, several office discipline referrals would have been given for repeated offenses. Instead the students do not have to miss out on instruction time and are now ready for class.

Table 1: Five Core Strategies of SW-PBS

- **Focus on preventing the development and occurrence of problem behavior**, which is more effective, cost-efficient, and productive than responding after problem behavior patterns have become ingrained.
- **Teach appropriate social behavior and skills.** Because children come to school from many different backgrounds, schools must define the core social expectations (e.g., be respectful, be responsible, be safe), and overtly teach the behaviors and skills associated with these expectations. When all students in the school are taught the same social skills, a social culture is established where students not only have personal knowledge about social expectations, they know that everyone in the school knows those same social expectations.
- **Acknowledge appropriate behavior.** Students should receive regular recognition for appropriate behavior at rates that exceed rates of recognition for rule violations and problem behaviors. Negative consequences alone will not change problem behavior. Instead of ignoring problem behavior, a continuum of consequences (e.g., correction, warning, office discipline referral) for problem behavior should be maintained and used to prevent escalation and allow instruction to continue in class.
- **Gather and use data about student behavior to guide behavior support decisions.** Data on what problem behaviors are being observed and how often, where and what time of the day they are occurring, and who is engaging in these problem behaviors enable schools to develop the most effective, efficient, and relevant school-wide behavior support plan.
- **Invest in the systems that support adults in their implementation of effective practices** (e.g., teams, policies, funding, administrative support, data structures).

Source: Horner, Sugai, & Vincent (2005), p. 4.

In a New Orleans high school, a 16-year-old girl repeatedly skips school. This concerns her teachers, counselor and building administrator. After contacting the family, the school's behavior support team learns that the student's mother is also very concerned. Her mother is worried because her daughter (who has developmental disabilities) is hanging out before school with friends from the community center who also frequently skip school. The family, community center director, and school team come together to complete a functional behavioral assessment and develop a positive behavior support plan to strengthen her social engagement at school. With input from the daughter, the team is able to begin to address her need for time with peers. The team agrees to meet in 2 weeks to see how the plan is working.

These three stories are composites illustrating ways in which School-wide Positive Behavioral Support (SW-PBS) is being used nationwide to address the social, emotional, and behavioral areas of students' lives, while improving the school climate and learning. This proactive approach enhances the capacity of schools, families, and communities to design effective environments that promote the social-emotional well-being of all children, as well as academic success.

SW-PBS Implementation Features

The essence of SW-PBS is as follows:

> School-wide positive behavior support (SW-PBS) is an approach that begins with a school-wide prevention effort, and then adds intensive individualized support for those students with more extreme needs (Horner, Sugai, & Vincent, 2005, p. 4).

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Table 2: SW-PBS Continuum of Prevention

- **Tier 1 or Primary Prevention.** The goal is to create a positive school culture in which pro-social student behaviors are taught and reinforced, and all adults respond to the occurrence of problem behavior in a consistent manner. In SW-PBS, Tier 1 strategies are designed using evidence-based practices. All faculty members work together to improve academic and behavioral outcomes for all students.
- **Tier 2 or Secondary Prevention.** This is intended to support students who have learning, behavior, or life histories that put them at risk of engaging in more serious problem behavior.
- **Tier 3 or Tertiary Prevention.** At this level strategies are used to support the smaller number of students whose needs are more individualized than strategies implemented at Tier 1 or Tier 2.

Source: Based on Kansas Institute for Positive Behavior Support (2009), p. 1.

It is built around five core strategies: Focusing on prevention, teaching appropriate social behavior and skills, acknowledging appropriate behavior, gathering and using data about student behavior, and investing in the systems that support adults in their implementation of effective practices (Horner, Sugai, & Vincent, 2005; see Table 1 for details).

SW-PBS utilizes three tiers of prevention strategies that occur along a continuum of needs and intensity of responses (see Table 2). Implementation at Tier 1 results in consistent use of academic and behavioral content matched to a larger number of students (80-90%) while minimizing the number needing additional supports at Tier 2 and Tier 3. For implementation at Tier 1, educators would do the following: (a) define three to five school-wide behavioral expectations; (b) teach, model and practice those behavioral expectations daily in the school setting; (c) acknowledge students with daily recognition through a whole school motivation system for following the expectations; (d) plan and execute re-teaching of expectations; (e) have clear classroom procedures for minor problem behaviors; (f) offer effective and consistent discipline referral for major problem behaviors; and (g) track all student behavior through systematic screening and progress monitoring.

Tier 2 implementation offers the use of academic and behavioral strategies intended for smaller groups of students (10-12%), minimizing the number who may need more intensive support at Tier 3. Effective implementation results in as many students as possible returning to Tier 1. Educators would do the following for implementation of Tier 2: (a) provide additional teaching around core social needs based on screening and progress monitoring data; (b) differentiated instruction of behavioral expectations in a targeted fashion to specific students with specific needs; (c) increased involvement with peer support such as mentors, peer tutoring, and peer networks; (d) a system for students to manage their own behavior with the support of their educators (i.e., self-management, check-in/check-out and parent communication); and (e) consistent monitoring of responsiveness to interventions with purposeful data.

Implementation at Tier 3 offers the most intense level of support for a smaller number of students (5-7% of school population) and results in strategic and durable implementation of academic and behavioral programming. As is the goal with effective multi-tiered support, effective implementation results in as many students as possible returning to Tier 2 or 1. Within Tier 3, educators meet the needs of any remaining students who have not had their behavioral and academic needs met at Tier 1 or 2. Educators offering support at Tier 3: (a) develop individualized behavioral support plans based on data and functional behavioral assessment, (b) provide intensive individualized instruction with extra teaching resources as needed, (c) offer frequent and ongoing acknowledgment of desired behavior, (d) have a clear process to ensure sustainable implementation of the behavior support plan, and lastly (e) carry on frequent and specific collection of data on intervention effectiveness.

Resources About SW-PBS

By using SW-PBS to teach and reinforce social and other skills, and embed prevention and intervention into natural daily routines, educators are able to improve social-emotional well-being of students with and without disabilities, prevent and reduce problem behaviors, enhance learning, and facilitate a positive school climate. To learn more about implementing SW-PBS, the following resources can be consulted:

- Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (http://www.pbis.org). The Web site of the Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, established by the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education, offers a wealth of information for school personnel interested in implementing SW-PBS.
- Kansas Institute on Positive Behavior-Support (http://www.kipbs.org). The KIPBS Online Library has information on topics including school-wide and statewide PBS, and family supports.
- Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention for Young Children (http://challengingbehavior.org). Information on this site includes facts everyone should know about how to prevent problem behavior and what to do when it occurs.

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Preparing for Adult Life: Important Social Skills for High School Students

by Christine D. Bremer, Sharon Mulé, and John G. Smith

When they reach adulthood, youth with disabilities need to be able to communicate with others, establish and maintain relationships, and participate in a variety of work, community, and home settings. Supporting youth in developing social skills can help them in the short-term to have more satisfying friendships, more positive family relationships, and better success in school. In the long-term it can equip them for success in work and community life. In fact, in the context of work and community life, appropriate social behavior may be even more important than academic or job skills in determining whether one is perceived as a competent individual (Black & Langone, 1997). For example, a study investigating the ability of adults with mild intellectual disabilities to appropriately engage in workplace "small talk" found that those who demonstrated competence in social skills were generally perceived more positively than those who lacked such skills, regardless of task skill level (Holmes & Fillary, 2000). The idea that competence in using social skills can lead to positive perceptions of persons with disabilities in the workplace can be extended to other community settings such as postsecondary education, neighborhoods, and faith communities.

The Role of Transition Teams

For transition-age youth with disabilities, the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team plays an important role in identifying needs in the area of social skills development and creating goals to help prepare youth for work and community life. The IEP team, in which the student is a key participant, has the responsibility to address social skills development if this is one of the student's needs. Students with disabilities may be motivated to improve their social skills in order to better relate to peers, have dating relationships, advocate for their own needs and wishes, and successfully engage in community activities of all kinds, including employment. A jumping-off point in building new skills or addressing deficits can be discussion with the student of his or her interests, goals, existing social strengths, and social network. This can lead to identifying the social skills needed by the student to achieve his or her personal goals during and after high school. Based on this discussion, the student, parent/guardian(s), and school staff will have a roadmap for selecting skills to work on, and can develop goals for the IEP. Goals written into the IEP should include strengthening existing social skills as well as developing new ones. In addressing secondary and postsecondary education, employment, and community living in the IEP, the team should take care to look at social skills needed by the student to succeed in each of these life areas. It is also important to spell out how to determine whether each goal has been met.

The National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability (NCWD, 2011) identifies the following skills as necessary soft skills for job success: communication skills, interpersonal skills, decision making skills, and lifelong learning skills. Within these areas are specific skills, which may be developed through individual or group skills training. These include active listening, cooperating with others, problem solving, planning, and using technology. All of these skills may be identified on an individual student's transition IEP through social skill goals.

Transition is the time to ensure that students understand their disabilities and the impact that a disability may have on social skill development as well as everyday life. To that end, the transition IEP should include goals for self-advocacy, including the student's ability to explain his or her disability, appropriately express his/her needs and wants, and advocate for any necessary accommodations. The transition IEP should also take into account the need for students to attend to their own safety in social settings as they begin to navigate more adult situations. Safety becomes more of an issue for all teens as they begin to attend activities without adult supervision and deal with issues involving dating, being a driver or passenger in a car, and situations where alcohol or illegal drugs are readily available. Students with disabilities may face particular challenges in such settings; helping them learn to respond appropriately is a joint responsibility of parents and schools.

Classroom Support of Social Skills

During the transition years, the social skills listed in Table 1 are suggested as essential to a young adult's success in the adult world. One way that classroom teachers can help students with (and without) disabilities practice these skills is by providing structured small group learning opportunities such as cooperative learning, in which students build on each others' skills to improve their understanding of the subject while helping other group members learn as well. The goal is for all the group members to achieve (Johnson & Johnson, 1999).

In addition, dozens of programs have been developed specifically to teach social and emotional skills and knowledge in schools and other settings. Information on selecting and implementing social and emotional learning programs is available from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) (http://casel.org). Their Web site also includes information about creating a school climate that supports the development and practice of social and emotional skills.

Retrieved from the Web site of the Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota (http://ici.umn.edu/products/impact/241). Citation: Palmer, S., Heyne, L., Montie, J., Abery, B., & Gaylord, V. (Eds.). (Spring/Summer 2011). *Impact: Feature Issue on Supporting the Social Well-Being of Children and Youth with Disabilities, 24*(1). [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, Institute on Community Integration].

Table 1: Social Skills Needed by Transition-Age Students

General Social Skills for School, Family, and Community

- Greet and approach people in ways appropriate to the setting.
- Focus attention on the person speaking, using eye contact and non-verbal body cues.
- Check your own understanding of conversations and the understanding of others.
- Recognize and express feelings appropriately.
- Support dialog by building on other comments.
- Keep conversation and comments to an appropriate length.
- Match voice volume to setting.
- Keep self-disclosure appropriate to the setting.
- Be able to identify risky social situations and have strategies for staying safe.

Additional Skills for the Work Environment

- Understand job requirements and know how to request work-related accommodations.
- Be on time.
- Stay on task and complete your work.
- Know how to give and respond to instructions.
- Be open to redirection.
- Be able to give directions and offer criticism without demeaning others.
- Respond to supervisors and coworkers with courtesy.
- Be able to respond appropriately to criticism.
- Manage conflict by using problem solving and, when necessary, requesting assistance.
- Work as a team, understanding your own and others' roles in the group.
- Demonstrate a positive attitude about the job and other employees.
- Demonstrate acceptance of other people/cultures.

Creating a Positive School Climate

Social skills will be most consistently employed in settings where people appreciate each others' individuality and contributions. The goal of establishing a positive school climate is to ensure that all students know they are valued and respected members of a community of learners. The following tips (Curtis, 2003) can help teachers and administrators set the stage for a positive school climate, and thus for social learning:

- Learn and use students' names and know something about each one. This can be difficult in secondary schools; using name tags or assigned seating at the start of the term can help.
- Use homeroom time to build a sense of community and provide opportunities for conversation among students.
- Provide unstructured time (e.g., a lunch period that is not too rushed) when students can practice social skills with peers and receive feedback.
- Encourage journal writing to improve self-awareness.
- Provide opportunities for students to participate in inclusive extracurricular activities that do not require tryouts or auditions, and provide accommodations as needed.
- Offer ways for students to give feedback regarding their experience at school, and show them that their input is taken seriously.
- Make a point of connecting informally, on a daily basis if needed, with individual students who are having difficulties. This establishes a relationship that helps the student feel noticed and cared for, and will be helpful if the student's situation requires a more formal intervention at another time.

To be effective and worthwhile, social skills training must result in skills that (a) are socially relevant in the individual's life, (b) are used in a variety of situations, and (c) are maintained over time (Hansen, Nangle, & Meyer, 1998). Such skills will be most consistently employed in a setting that is supportive and respectful of each person's individuality.

Conclusion

The transition IEP can be a powerful framework for identifying activities and services that will help the student learn and practice skills for the adult world and learn new ways to connect to their community. Through activities such as exploring postsecondary employment and training, job shadowing, joining community groups, and practicing independent living skills, youth can have many opportunities for social skills development. Creative and thoughtful IEP teams will identify these opportunities and provide a plan that designates related activities to support the student's goals. In addition, a positive school climate supports social learning by providing an environment in which all students are valued and respected.

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Finding a Sense of Belonging Through Disability Culture and Pride

by Nick Wilkie

As I sit down to discuss disability culture and pride, it is important to say that we all make very personal choices about what we identify with. We may see ourselves as part of a particular group of friends, or as belonging to a club or organization, or as part of a certain neighborhood or family or religious community. We might enjoy activities that our friends enjoy and identify with that group of people and that activity. But out of all the positive things we identify with, for youth with disabilities their diagnosis typically is not one of them.

Youth with disabilities need to redefine what their diagnosis means to them and one way they can do that is through experiencing disability culture and disability pride.

In the next few paragraphs I will address this concern and the premise that taking pride in yourself and your disability can contribute to a better outlook and understanding of disability and disability culture. Further, by participating within the disability community with other people with disabilities and disability organizations, young people can be a part of the collective community, contributing to and belonging to something larger than themselves.

As a Transition Specialist at the Metropolitan Center for Independent Living (MCIL), I asked some of my colleagues, as well as youth consumers, their thoughts on getting connected with disability culture and disability pride through participation in organizations like MCIL. I wanted their thoughts about how it can contribute to social belonging in the community for youth and young adults with disabilities. One of the questions I asked was, "If you could paint a picture of social belonging for youth with disabilities, what would that look like?" My MCIL colleague, Amanda Bennett, shared the following thoughts:

> I still see a lot of social segregation. In high school, I was friends with lots of students in the special education program. Every day their teachers would have them sit together at the back table, and this table earned a nasty label. There are many programs that try to combat this by pairing people with and without disabilities together. It still doesn't seem quite right because the individual with a disability is often talked down upon or the person is involved just for community service hours. In my experience, I have noticed when I interact with people without disabilities I usually have to be the one to make the first move. So my picture depicts a time people will be educated enough to realize we all have something valuable to share with one another and people won't hesitate to find out what that is.

Amanda also talked about the first time she experienced or felt disability pride:

> [It was] when I started interning here in August 2010! I read about the independent living [IL] movement in my graduate program, but it didn't really sink-in until I was around people who were passionate about the IL philosophy. Growing up, I did everything in my power to make my disability less obvious. I used to see my disability as a roadblock to achieving my goals. MCIL staff have taught me my disability is an asset to this organization because it allows me to relate to and more effectively assist consumers.

Corbett Laubignat, MCIL's Peer Mentoring Coordinator, phrased this in a way I particularly like: "Your disability is like a superpower when your experiences help others." Well, then, here I come to save the day!!

The foundation of Centers for Independent Living (CILs) is the pride that people with disabilities have. We want to see consumers do everything they wish to do. As long as individuals (youth especially) have goals and seek to find their voice, CILs with be there to assist them. We seek to be a vital part of the community and have since our inception in Berkeley, California, in 1972. Amanda explains more when she writes, "I think CILs have a huge impact on disability pride and culture. They foster the growth of disability pride by emphasizing that discrimination is rooted in the environment and society as a whole, rather than a deficit in individuals." Another of my colleagues, Ann Roscoe, the Independent Living Manager at MCIL, notes that CILs contribute to pride and disability culture by providing time and space for people with disabilities to participate in social and educational activities.

It is within environments like ours where pride can be grown and harnessed. Youth, specifically, can discover community here. Many of our classes can be applied to self-discovery. It is not about what individuals "can't do." It's about what they can do with the appropriate mind-set and the right accommodations if they are needed. Through this, success and independence can be achieved. If young people embrace these ideas they can change their feelings about themselves, and in doing so, possibly overcome the stigma that they impose on themselves.

For many high school students and other young adults, learning to address

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their challenges is one of the largest things that they accomplish while involved with us. One student told me, "I have learned to be more comfortable with my challenges [while attending classes] at MCIL." For some, the only time they address these issues related to disability is when they come in to see us. By learning in this environment they can disclose and discuss their challenges with staff and peers. This allows them to contrast/compare their experiences with others. Difficult as it can be, this approach assists individuals come to terms with their situation and takes them away from the avenues of denial. Sometimes denial can be self-imposed and other times it is brought on by families and support staff that do not truly understand the young person's diagnosis.

Youth with disabilities need to feel included and part of something. They also need to continue to advocate for themselves and their community. And they need to redefine what their diagnosis means to them and help shape that true meaning for other people. And one way they can do that is through experiencing the disability culture and disability pride – as well as the social connections – that are found in Centers for Independent Living. As our MCIL director David Hancox has observed:

> As described by Ed Roberts, considered the father of the independent living movement, IL is about how people with disabilities think of themselves. He asserted that a positive self-awareness about one's disability can make you very powerful. Being proud of one's uniqueness, one's personal qualities – no matter what they may be – is extremely liberating, and that can be very powerful. And, being able to identify oneself as part of a larger group such as the disability culture – which is a rich, vibrant and complex culture – can reinforce that sense of pride and belonging.

When asked what a picture of social belonging for youth with disabilities would look like, Ann Roscoe summarized, "Really integrated, people from various ethnic backgrounds and people with all kinds of abilities." And CILs are one place where youth with disabilities can help create that picture of social belonging for themselves and share it with others as part of disability culture and pride.

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Disability Pride, Culture, and History Resources for Youth

The following resources may be useful in supporting disability pride and culture, and in raising awareness among youth.

• ***I Am Norm Initiative.(http://www.iamnorm.org).*** *This national initiative, created by young people with and without disabilities, promotes the acceptance, respect, and full inclusion of youth with disabilities in schools and communities. Through the campaign, they hope to raise awareness about inclusion, provide opportunities for youth to share their ideas about inclusion, and promote inclusive practices in schools and communities.*

• ***Stereotypes of People with Disabilities (http://www.youtube.com).*** *This video was created by the Disabled Young People's Collective in North Carolina and features young people talking about disability stereotypes and disability history facts, and concludes with the Self-Advocacy Rap. Listed under "Disability History Education Video."*

• ***Why They Gotta Do Me Like That? (The Empowered Fe Fes Take On Bullying).*** *Produced in a workshop with the junior group of the Empowered Fe Fes, a project of Access Living in Chicago, this film features 13 young women with disabilities exploring school-based bullying by interviewing people on why bullying happens and how they respond, and then acting out common experiences with new solutions. The Empowered Fe Fes demand viewers consider bullying as a serious issue of discrimination, and work together to both understand the stop the problem. It's available through http://www.beyondmedia.org/.*

• ***The Silver Scorpion (http://www.scribd.com/doc/54721700/Silver-Scorpion).*** *This new comic book superhero was developed by American and Syrian youth disability advocates. "The Silver Scorpion" tells the story of an Arabic teenager, Bashir Bari, who loses his legs in a tragic accident. Consumed with anger and grief, Bashir retreats into a world of isolation, resentful of the pitiful looks and whispers of strangers. Through a series of events he is unwittingly chosen as the new guardian of an ancient power that has remained hidden for centuries. With new abilities allowing him to manipulate the metal around him, Bashir must rise above his personal grief and use this newfound gift to protect the world, while learning firsthand to embrace the values of tolerance and cooperation to achieve great heights. Published by Liquid Comics and the Open Hands Initiative, a digital edition of Silver Scorpion is available for free on the home page of Scribd.com where it can be read online and through iPad devices, as well as shared through Facebook and Twitter. For more background on how the Silver Scorpion came to be, visit http://www.openhandsinitiative.org/.*

Using Recreation to Support the Social Well-Being of Children and Youth

by Ann Hoffer, Mary McKeown, and Linda Heyne

One of the primary reasons people participate in recreational activities is to socialize with others, which can result in tremendous benefits for overall well-being. Through recreation, people discover who they are as individuals and who they are as members of a group. They learn the give-and-take of relationships, appropriate manners and customs, and the skills necessary to make and keep friends. People also discover what gives them joy, passion, and meaning in life. Through recreation, people have new experiences, engage more fully in living, and develop healthy lifestyles.

Recreation is important for all ages, but it is especially crucial during children's formative years. Socialization opportunities through recreation are needed to support their social-emotional maturity into healthy adulthood. Recreation, like any life skill, requires intentional instruction and support.

This article presents profiles of two inclusive recreation programs in St. Paul, Minnesota, that provide carefully planned recreation opportunities that support the social-emotional well-being of children and youth with and without disabilities. The first story describes how the Jewish Community Center (JCC) of the Greater St. Paul Area includes preschoolers through adults with disabilities in all of their offerings. With over 25 years of experience in inclusive recreation programming, the JCC provides a long-standing model for successful inclusive recreation. The second story reflects a grassroots response to the need for recreation and socialization opportunities for teens and young adults with disabilities. The member-driven Highland Friendship Club (HFC) offers a variety of formal and informal recreation activities that connect and enrich the lives of young people with and without disabilities.

JCC Inclusion and Accessibility Services

What started out as an innovative idea in 1984 – fully inclusive programming – has now become the standard at the JCC. Every day you see people of all abilities participating in its many recreational, educational, and cultural programs.

The JCC was inspired by the desire for inclusive programming expressed by a group of parents of children with disabilities over 25 years ago. Twelve children and youth with disabilities were included in the JCC's regular programs and classrooms in its first year. Today, the JCC serves over 100 children, teens, and adults with disabilities throughout its programs. The JCC's philosophy of inclusion is that each individual with a disability deserves an equal opportunity to participate in programs as fully and independently as possible.

The JCC's Inclusion and Accessibility Services (IAS) department provides a supportive and proactive approach to inclusion. The IAS director works closely with families and individuals throughout the inclusion process, which includes an initial intake assessment and interview to develop an individualized plan based on the participant's abilities, needs, and interests. Inclusion facilitators are trained on inclusion techniques to support individuals who need one-to-one attention to actively participate.

There are many opportunities for inclusion at the JCC. Some of the more popular programs are the preschool and after-school programs, swim lessons, theater productions, basketball leagues, and summer day camps. A positive result of inclusion is increased participation in social and recreational programs by the participants with disabilities. As each young person gains confidence and builds skills through successful participation, he or she is likely to become involved in other JCC programs. Further, some participants take on leadership roles such as summer day camp counselor (see photo below of Drew Danisch, at right, assistant day camp counselor, with camp program director Rafi Forbush).

Children and youth with disabilities have benefited from inclusive recreation programming in many ways that support their social and emotional well-being. Some of the benefits include positive socialization with peers, improved communication skills, the development of friendships, increased leisure skills, appropriate behavior development, enhanced self-esteem and self-confidence,

increased autonomy, and a feeling of community and acceptance for all. Just as important are the lessons learned by the participants without disabilities. In a recent survey sent to all camp families, parents were asked if they thought children without disabilities benefit from the inclusion of peers with disabilities. It was no surprise that 100% of the respondents said "yes." The benefits they saw included learning about individual differences and how to interact with someone with a disability, and forming friendships with people of all abilities.

Through the years the JCC has learned many key lessons that have helped support successful inclusion:

- Complete support from staff, agency leaders, and the community is essential. All must accept a focused vision and philosophy towards inclusion.

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- Sufficient funding is crucial for hiring skilled staff and providing individualized support and accommodations.
- Staff need to be appropriately trained in what inclusion is and how to achieve it. They must feel confident in their abilities to support those with disabilities.
- Each individual's *abilities*, and what he or she *can* do, should always be emphasized.
- Through collaborations with outside groups and agencies, partnerships can be created that allow for more programs and socialization opportunities.

Most importantly, the JCC has learned that *everyone* benefits from inclusion. With the right supports and attitudes, JCC staff believe inclusion is possible anywhere!

Highland Friendship Club

Teenagers and young adults vote "with their feet" when deciding whether or not to attend social and recreational activities. They don't sign-up for activities that don't sound like fun, are full of people older than them, or take place outside their community. This is true of young people with and without disabilities. For that reason, in 2002 the HFC was founded by two St. Paul parents frustrated with the lack of social and recreational opportunities for their teenage sons with disabilities. Volunteer parents developed a monthly Friday night and Saturday afternoon activity schedule for 10 teenagers, which they could attend without assistance from a parent. Today 220 club members participate in 475 HFC-sponsored activities each year.

The teens and young adults who are HFC members are part of the program committee that develops the list of activities offered. The activities give members a chance to connect with their peers in a low-key, well-supervised environment that also offers a typical teenage "hanging out with peers" vibe. The one requirement for all HFC activities is that they must be *fun*. Activities include art classes, yoga, swimming, choir, dances, bowling, movies, birthday bashes, and cooking meals together (as in the photo of Meghan Rigney and Tanya Hagen to the right). Paid staff coordinate activities, and 12-15 members attend each.

Teenage and young adult program volunteers without disabilities also participate in HFC activities. In 2004, HFC began a partnership with Cretin-Derham Hall (CDH) High School in St. Paul. Now, 50 CDH students organize and attend monthly activities with HFC members each school year. CDH students and other program volunteers live and work in the same community as most HFC members, so they often run into each other. Because they know each other from HFC activities, they can connect with each other like any other friend you meet at the grocery store or movie theatre. These everyday interactions reinforce the HFC member's connection to the community at large.

Friendships that begin and develop through HFC activities continue outside of scheduled activities. For example, 15-year-old Tanya started attending HFC activities in the summer of 2009. By the time her birthday rolled around in 2010, she had developed friendships with several HFC members and invited them to her birthday party. This summer, Tanya plans to start an informal "HFC Twins Fan Club" with fellow fans to meet and watch Minnesota Twins games together. HFC activities help set the stage for developing and sustaining friendships.

All HFC activities are held at various community sites, which provides yet another connection to the greater community for our members and their families. Community partners, including the JCC, CDH, a gallery, a church, and a bowling alley, provide the activity space for a reduced fee or for free. HFC families, board members, and volunteers have all been part of initiating and sustaining these valuable partnerships, and these partnerships are the main reason HFC has been able to increase its activity schedule each year and offer 15 or more activities each week.

Friendships, community, and fun activities are the three key components

to HFC's success. Creating an atmosphere in a community space where young people with disabilities enjoy recreational activities with others is a first step in helping them become fully integrated members of their community.

Conclusion

Central to both of these profiles is the idea that recreation participation needs to be freely chosen by individuals. A full range of activity options also needs to be available. And people need to have the appropriate supports and accommodations to enable them to participate fully and successfully. With these principles in mind, recreation environments offer ideal opportunities for connecting people with and without disabilities and for supporting the social and emotional well-being of children and youth with disabilities over time.

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Structuring Recreation and Youth Programs to Facilitate Social Inclusion

by Lynn Anderson and Linda Heyne

"See that man [sic] over there?" "Yes?" Well, I hate him." "But you don't even know him!" "That's why I hate him." – Gordon Allport, *On the Nature of Prejudice*

People do not automatically or even naturally get to know each other in a group situation unless it is structured to encourage the development of positive interactions. This is especially true if some of the group members are noticeably different than the majority, such as youth with disabilities in a social or recreational setting dominated by peers who do not have disabilities. Coupled with many people's fears of disability, the chances of really getting to know other young people and develop friendships becomes remote in a recreation or youth program setting such as that.

People do not automatically or even naturally get to know each other in a group situation unless it is structured to encourage the development of positive interactions.

In the 1950s, Gordon Allport developed the *contact hypothesis,* based on the theory of intergroup relations and social identity. The contact hypothesis provides guidance on how to facilitate positive interactions between group members that lead to improved relationships. The remainder of this article will discuss six principles for structuring group recreation activities (from classrooms to teams to camp groups) for young people based on the contact hypothesis. These principles can help group leaders and other staff set up situations that will foster positive group interaction, social inclusion, and friendship development. These principles will benefit all participants in the activity, not just youth with disabilities.

Provide Frequent and Consistent Opportunities to Get Acquainted

It is essential that group leaders structure recreation activities so participants can get to know each other. By planning activities to have high acquaintance potential, leaders ensure social interactions will occur. When some or all group members are new to the activity, frequent and consistent opportunities to get to know each other become even more important. Suggestions for structuring high acquaintance potential in activities include the following:

- Provide ice breaker activities (e.g., introductions, share favorites).
- Break into small groups; do activities in small groups.
- Arrange seating to promote social interaction.
- Use pairs or partners; have one partner introduce other partner to group.
- Mix up groups often.
- Wear name tags.

Maintain Equal Status

Leaders need to work carefully to structure the recreation activity and situation so each participant has equal status in the group, including the participant with a disability. Equal status reduces negative stereotypes, communicates respect, and is fair. Some ideas for how to structure activities to promote equal status are:

- Include everyone in the decision-making process.
- Mix up groups and responsibilities.
- Change the format in which information is given; provide alternative formats.
- Ask different group members to demonstrate.
- Assign roles in activities – everyone gets to try a role.
- Break down activities and skills to enable everyone to try.
- Accentuate the equal status of group members: no "special" volunteers, "special buddies," or "charity cases."

Set Mutual Goals

Goals are an important part of many youth programs, even if the goal is to just have fun. Group leaders have the power to shape how goals are formed, and can improve social interaction by structuring the recreation activity so participants perceive they all share a common goal. Some ideas for structuring mutual goals are:

- Accentuate teamwork to reinforce equal status.
- Clearly set mutual goals; set the tone for cooperation.
- Ask the group to set mutual goals.
- Verbalize and reinforce mutual goals.
- Allow everyone a chance to play; rotate positions.
- Instill a spirit of camaraderie.
- Give feedback to the whole group on progress toward goals.

Support Cooperation and Interdependence

Cooperation is a powerful force in creating relationships between people. Group leaders can structure the recreation activity to promote active cooperation and a feeling that each individual's successes depend on the successes of the other

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group members. There are many different types of interdependence (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 2008):

- *Positive goal interdependence:* Participants perceive they can achieve their goals if, and only if, all members of their group also obtain their goals.
- *Positive reward interdependence:* Each participant receives the same reward for completing the task. A joint reward is given for successful group work. Everyone is rewarded or no one is rewarded.
- *Positive resource interdependence:* Each participant has only a portion of the information, resources, or materials necessary to complete the task. The participants' resources must be combined in order for the group to reach its goal.
- *Positive task interdependence:* The actions of one participant must be completed if the next participant is to complete her or his part.
- *Positive role interdependence:* Each participant is assigned complementary and interconnected roles that specify responsibilities that are required to complete a joint task.
- *Positive identity interdependence:* The group establishes a mutual identity through a name, flag, motto, or other unifying symbol.

Among the ways to structure activities to support cooperation and interdependence are these:

- Assign duties or tasks, all of which are needed to successfully complete the activity.
- Have participants sit in a circle or around a table.
- Cultivate team spirit and group identity.
- Use team nicknames, t-shirts, or other group identifiers.
- Keep verbal communication clear.
- Use a cooperative structure, where each person completes a part of the whole task.

Provide Accurate Information About the Person with a Disability

Leaders in youth and recreation programs have a unique opportunity to help change attitudes and misperceptions about disability and ability by virtue of having diverse participants jointly succeeding in activities. Group leaders can structure the recreation activity so that all participants receive information about the participant with a disability that is accurate and that doesn't perpetuate stereotyped beliefs about the disability. Some tips for doing so are:

- At the initial session, explain the disability, or supports and accommodations the individual needs.
- Let the individual determine what should be shared with the group.
- Have the individual demonstrate how to use a communication device or piece of adaptive equipment.
- Create an environment of open communication.
- Do ice breakers that focus on similarities and differences.
- Assume a "can do" attitude.
- Draw attention to the participant with a disability when she or he is doing something very well.

Create Fair and Tolerant Norms

It is essential that group leaders structure the recreation activity so that the situation favors group equality and fairness. They can do this by creating and reinforcing egalitarian norms that promote fair and caring behavior and tolerance of diversity on the part of the leaders, participants, and spectators. Suggestions leaders can use to structure egalitarian norms include:

- Model positive, accepting behavior.
- Don't patronize or "over help."
- Rotate positions, roles, and tasks.
- Accent positive attributes and skills.
- Emphasize teamwork.
- Get diverse input from all group members.
- Reinforce rules and fairness.
- Equal out or balance skill levels among participants.

Conclusion

Relationships and friendships are critical for social and emotional well-being, and group leaders must not leave social interaction to chance (Anderson & Heyne, in press; Heyne, Schleien, & McAvoy, 1993). Since many people, whether they have a disability or not, develop and sustain relationships through their leisure, it is important to nurture that development during recreational activity. While the suggestions in this article do not necessarily guarantee close social ties will occur, they will help create environments where youth have opportunities to get to know each other, learn each other's strengths, and build lifelong friendships.

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Social Networking Sites: Consider the Benefits, Concerns for Your Teenager

by Julie Holmquist

Social networking sites have become an integral part of today's culture, especially for teens. Of the 65 percent of teens using sites such as Facebook and MySpace, 61 percent use them to send messages to their friends and 42 percent send messages to friends every day this way, according to a recent study by the Pew Internet & American Life Project (Lenhart, Madden, Smith, & Macgill, 2007). That's why it's important for parents to consider the special concerns and benefits involved for teens with disabilities using the sites, says Bridget Gilormini, coordinator of PACER's Simon Technology Center. "We need to understand the culture so we can educate our sons and daughters," she says.

Social Networking Benefits

While teen use of social networking sites poses certain safety concerns, it can also help teens with disabilities develop the skills they need to move toward independence and adult life, says Deborah Leuchovius, coordinator of PACER's Technical Assistance on Transition and the Rehabilitation Act (TATRA) Project. "One obvious benefit is that youth can expand their circle of friends and even communicate more often with extended family," Leuchovius says. "Understanding that you have a personal network of friends and family may someday help a young person use that network to find a job. Drawing on one's own personal networks is one of the most effective strategies for finding employment." Teens with disabilities may also benefit in the following ways:

- **Practicing social skills.** One teen with a disability created a Facebook page with the help of his sister, and within a week had a network of 30 Facebook friends (all classmates). "It was interesting that these same kids didn't approach him at school," Leuchovius says. "For whatever reason, it may be easier for teens to initially approach a student with a disability on a social networking site instead of face to face. Conversing with someone on the computer may feel less awkward for both parties. Hopefully, it will break the ice and lead to more comfortable face-to-face interactions." A recent study from the MacArthur Foundation (Ito, Horst, Bittanti, Boyd, Herr-Stephenson, et al. , 2008) shows that online activity can help teens learn important social skills and develop and extend friendships, while another study suggests that the structured environment is helpful for practicing those skills. "Social networking sites open up a big world of communication," Gilormini says. Instead of having to reply instantly during a direct conversation or on the phone, teens have time to think about a response. For teens who have difficulty speaking because of disabilities, online social networking can be liberating. "It removes the time barrier," Gilormini says. A teen who uses a speaking device to talk, for example, says he prefers communicating through Facebook because it is a quicker method for him.
- **Learning to use technology.** Becoming comfortable with social networking sites may also help teens adapt to a world that functions more and more with complex technologies. "Even entry-level jobs require that new workers have basic keyboard and computer skills. It's also common for colleges and other postsecondary institutions to use computer networks to communicate with students," Leuchovius says. "Using networking sites at a younger age may make the transition from high school to college easier."
- **Developing independence.** Adolescence is a time when teens typically learn to become independent from their parents, spend more time with peers, and form a personal identity. Moving toward independence can be difficult for teens if disabilities keep them dependent on their parents for longer periods of time. "Social networking sites can provide a way for teens with disabilities to make connections apart from their parents and gain autonomy," Leuchovius says. By joining an online group with a common interest through a social networking site, teens can build social supports and "hang out" with peers, even as they sit in their living room.
- **Expressing personality**. Talking on a social networking site may also bring a teen's personality to the forefront, while the focus on a disability lessens. "When teens communicate on Facebook or MySpace, the people they're talking to don't see the disability," Gilormini says. "All they see are the words."

Social Networking Concerns

While there are benefits of social networking sites for teens with disabilities, there are some risks that parents need to address with their teen, as well:

- **Bullying.** Some research has shown that youth with disabilities are at a greater risk of being bullied, and bullying can also occur on social networking sites. A "friend" accepted by your teen to a site might use the opportunity to send hateful messages. People can also create false identities as a way to harass someone.
- **Misuse of personal information and passwords.** Personal information or photos shared by a user can

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cause embarrassment, teasing, or pain for teens. Sharing information that is too personal, such as an online diary, could be used by teens who bully to ridicule others. Sharing passwords can also allow others to assume a teen's identity. "Once something is shared, the user loses control of how the information is used in the future," Gilormini says. Classmates of a teen in Canada, for example, posted a video on the Internet that he meant to keep private. He was so troubled after millions downloaded the 2-minute clip of him emulating a *Star Wars* light saber fight that he left the school and sought counseling.

In addition to these concerns, teens struggling "offline" with issues related to their disability may encounter difficulties online, too. A teen having trouble reading social cues, for example, may become troubled by misinterpreting an online message. While it's important to be aware of possible problems, parents should avoid focusing on rare or hypothetical dangers, according to a 2008 report from the Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University (Palfrey, Sacco, Boyd, DeBonis et al., 2008). The report focuses on use of social media. It advises parents to help their children understand and navigate the technologies, creating a safe context so their children will turn to them if there are problems. "Trust and open lines of communication are often the best tools for combating risks," the report states. Among the report's findings:

- Social networking sites are not the most common space for solicitation or exposure to problematic content.
- Youth are not equally at risk online. Those most at risk often engage in risky behaviors in other parts of their lives.
- Family dynamics and a youth's pyschosocial makeup are better predictors of risk than is use of specific technologies.

What Parents Can Do

In determining whether and how a particular teen should use social networking sites, parents need to think about several things. First, decide if social networking is right for your teen. Consider your teen's maturity, the nature of your teen's disability, and his or her personality while weighing the benefits and concerns. If you believe your teen is ready for social networking or already uses a site, create your own profile and learn how it works. Explore the site's features, read the fine print, ask the service provider about parental controls, and teach your teen about the options. Options include choosing privacy settings so "only friends" (not friends of friends) are allowed on your teen's site. Consider using the setting options that do not allow photos of your child to be shared or e-mailed. You can also:

- **Talk with your teen about:** What photos, if any, will be posted on the site; what will be posted on a profile; cyberbullying (learn about preventing bullying by visiting http://www.PACER.org/bullying/index.asp).
- **Tell your teen:** Accept "friends" only if you know them offline; use manners – don't send a message if you're angry; online content lasts forever; save your most personal thoughts for a paper diary; keep your password private.
- **Keep the computer in the family room**.
- **Consider monitoring your teen**. "One way to give your teen a sense of accountability is to require that you are a 'friend' and are allowed to go on the site," Gilormini says. Parents can also require that their teen share their username and password.

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Social Networking Sites and Youth with Disabilities: Resources

These resources may be useful to youth with disabilities and their parents as they explore online social networking:

• YO! Safety Tips (http://yodisabledproud.org/resources/safety-online.php). *These tips from Youth Organizing Disabled and Proud! help young people safely use the Internet, online videos, and mobile devices. The Web site includes resources from around the country.*

• Cyber Disclosure for Youth with Disabilities (http://ncwd-youth.info/cyber-disclosure). *Disclosing disability on social networking sites can make that information available to future employers, as well, through their Internet searches to learn more about job applicants. This document from the National Coalition on Workforce and Disability helps youth make informed choices about whether and how to disclose their disability online.*

• Internet Safety, Social Networking and Technology (http://www.autismspeaks.org/sites/default/files/documents/transition/internet.pdf). *A tips document for young people with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and their families that includes ways in which youth can use social networking sites safely and successfully. It's published by Autism Speaks Inc.*

• Is Your Child Being Bullied in Cyberspace? (http://www.pacer.org/publications/bullypdf/bp-13.pdf). *This fact sheet helps families understand and spot cyberbullying, and protect their children. It's published by PACER Center, Inc.*

[Voran & Palmer, continued from page 1]

very receptive to this change and started the process to amend the ballot.

Bailey uncovered the discriminatory practice when she went to nominate Owen for the Homecoming court ballot and, much to her dismay, saw that Owen's name was missing. "I just knew it wasn't right," she says. The Homecoming committee reformatted the Homecoming ballot to include the names of Owen and several other students with disabilities. "If we hadn't done this now, it might have never been changed," says Bailey. In many cases such as this, awareness of possible discrimination is what is necessary to make such a change. Bailey and friends provided this awareness and the results were extremely positive throughout the school and community.

Owen and his friends see this as one giant leap for social inclusion of students with disabilities.

Owen and Bailey are long-time friends who played together in their neighborhood during kindergarten. They were in some of the same classes throughout elementary, junior high, and senior high school. The Lawrence schools have included students with identified disabilities consistently over the years, though parental advocacy for inclusion supports and services has sometimes been needed. According to Owen's mother, Nancy, "The students have always been very supportive of individuals with disabilities and the teachers also do as much as they can to promote social skills for their students." Thus, it was strange to Bailey and her friends that when they got the Homecoming ballot, it did not contain Owen's name, and these students took action to change that.

When asked to comment on the practice of excluding students with disabilities from the ballot, Principal Ed West says that no one had questioned this practice that had been in place for some time until this group of students took action. Assistant Principal Lisa Boyd comments that they were not at all surprised by the overwhelming response from the students: "We have developed and continue to build wonderful relationships between regular education students and special needs students through our interpersonal service learning class," says Ms. Boyd. This semester-long course, "Interpersonal Skills Service Learning," is taught by general educator Andrew Nussbaum and special educator Darrel Andrew and team. It's designed to create sustainable relationships between students with and without disabilities as they work together to carry out a Community Impact Project. "It is about building positive relationships with each other to create a more compassionate community," says Mr. Nussbaum. Through participation in the course, students can gain the interpersonal skills that empower them to improve the community in which they live. Two times per month the class has Action and Awareness Seminars in which students work on skills ranging from problem solving and coping with adversity, to leadership and confidence – skills they demonstrated in this situation. Mr. Nussbaum believes that the students' initiative will have positive effects throughout Free State High School: "For me personally, it is not about whether Owen won king or not. In my perspective, he and his fellow peers have already won because they have learned about how they can make a lasting difference in each other's lives and the community in which they live."

Principal West also notes that this occasion caused the administration to discuss whether any other practices might be in place that perpetuate the same type of injustice. When asked if this sparked additional dialog with colleagues, he says, "We spent some time discussing the matter among all of the administrators across the district. The matter provided a good example of questioning everything and aligning our practices to match our guiding principles." He also adds, "To me, the process and the outcome is about much more than one individual winning a Homecoming contest. I believe this event can serve as a marker in terms of where we are as a school. It gives me great satisfaction to reflect on the role of the student body throughout this event, and I am proud of the progress we have made."

Life changed for Owen at Free State High School after the coronation in October. "The very next day all the kids were saying, 'You're the king.' Everybody knew Owen. Folks in the community recognized him and congratulated him," says Nancy. "After he won, people wanted to get to know him better," says Bailey. Owen says that as a result of being included in the school's social life in this way, "I have made even more friends. People are more accepting, at least kids from other schools who didn't know me. Everyone likes me." Owen and his friends see this accomplishment as one giant leap for social inclusion of students with disabilities.

Life for Owen has not always been easy. "From the day he was born I was advocating for Owen to be included with his general education peers. It was a struggle," says Nancy. Early in life he learned to sign and was essentially nonverbal until he was 4-years-old. During elementary school, he was included with his general education peers, but in upper elementary grades "behavior issues" started occurring, which presented more challenges. The constant "shadowing" of Owen by paraprofessionals during junior high school made things less than ideal for his social inclusion. Nancy believes he just needed to be accepted as his own person. As a senior in high school, Owen was included in as many general education activities as possible. "The teachers at Free State are very focused and have really wanted Owen to succeed," says Nancy.

As for the future, Owen aspires to be a chef and work in the restaurant industry. He graduated in May 2011 with his same-age peers, and this fall he will be attending Lawrence Public Schools C-Tran Services, a transition support service that is located off-campus. C-Tran is a person-centered, community-based support that consists of a group

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of young adults who need help transitioning to the community at-large. At C-Tran, students are encouraged to express interest in various "clubs" that are formed. They can set goals to learn to ride public transportation, do additional job sampling or be supported on a volunteer or paid employment position, and be involved in social activities of their choice within the community. A great deal of flexibility within the services meets the needs of participants, depending on the level of independence or supports needed to become more independent. Budgeting, purchasing food, cooking, and eating together on occasion are also things students learn at C-Tran.

As Owen walked across the stage in May, he ended his stay at Free State High School. But he will no doubt remember that October Homecoming game for the rest of his life. He says, "I want to be king forever." And his mother, Nancy, says, "It was the happiest day of my life."

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How does all this enhance the social-emotional well-being of students with disabilities? A school climate that incudes and comprehensively supports success for all provides the nurturing context and enhanced range of natural opportunities for social-emotional development and learning.

Concluding Comments

From our perspective, caring schools that support the participation, valuing, and success of students with and without disabilities are not something that can be created in the absence of comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching and promote healthy development. Currently, support staff mainly focus on developing good relationships with the relatively few students, families, and staff with whom they work directly. As such personnel expand their focus to enhance school improvement policy and practice, they are well positioned to help to create a caring schoolwide climate that is fundamental to social and emotional development, as well as academic success and future well-being, of students with and without disabilities.

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Institute Resources Supporting Social Well-Being

These resources from the Institute on Community Integration offer strategies for supporting social well-being of young people with disabilities:

- ***Together We Make a Difference: An Inclusive Service Learning Curriculum for Elementary Learners With and Without Disabilities.*** *This innovative curriculum uses research-based activities to guide instructors in helping children with and without disabilities become partners in planning and carrying out service learning projects, while teaching social and life skills to children of all abilities, meeting education standards in a variety of academic areas, and challenging stereotypes about young people with disabilities. It's published by the National Inclusion Project and the Institute on Community Integration. For curriculum preview pages and ordering information visit http://ici.umn.edu/products/curricula.html#isl or call 612/624-4512.*
- ***Impact: Feature Issue on Sexuality and People with Intellectual, Developmental and Other Disabilities.*** *This Impact issue discusses what it means to affirm and support a positive, healthy sexuality for youth and adults with disabilities. Its articles cover topics ranging from sexuality education in the home and school; to personal stories of dating, marriage and parenthood; to legal and ethical issues for staff and agencies providing services for people with disabilities. It is available online at http://ici.umn.edu/products/impact/232. In addition, a free print copy can be requested by calling 612/624-4512 or emailing icipub@umn.edu.*
- ***Impact: Feature Issue on Social Inclusion Through Recreation for Persons with Disabilities.*** *Recreation programs have a number of characteristics that make them ideal places for individuals with disabilities to experience social inclusion and friendship building. The articles in this issue describe those characteristics, strategies for making use of them to enhance the opportunities for meaningful and ongoing social connections between participants with and without disabilities, and barriers to recreation participation that must be addressed. It is available online at http://ici.umn.edu/products/impact/162. In addition, a free print copy can be requested by calling 612/624-4512 or emailing icipub@umn.edu.*

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