

## **A Good School Revisited: The Philosophy and Practice of Academic Support Methods at Hapnot Collegiate**

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### **Abstract**

*Academic success methods belong to the philosophy and practice of good schooling, and have been under continuous revision as the needs of society have changed. The revisions are also due to inefficient usage, dated information, and lack of results. Seven current academic success methods are inclusive schooling, differentiated instruction, individual education plans, educational assistants, academic motivation, resource and tutoring, and parental involvement in academics. These methods are under revision due to issues that have the potential to outweigh their benefits if not corrected. If used correctly, these seven methods can support students academically and prepare them to enter and meet the needs of society.*

The philosophies and practices used in school systems are in a constant state of change from year to year as they attempt to meet the needs of society while also meeting the needs of each child (Hierck, Coleman, & Webber, 2011). Philosophies and practices also change as new educational issues arise and are addressed in critical pedagogy (Whitaker, 2012). Many philosophies and practices comprise the foundations of what is considered to be a good school (Muhammad & Hollie, 2012). For example, the various methods of academic support are under constant revision due to challenges to their application within school systems (Hierck et al., 2011). As academic support methods are revised and refined, educational practice occurs more effectively at all levels within the school system.

Seven academic support methods are currently being used and challenged within Hapnot Collegiate in northern Manitoba: inclusive schooling, differentiated instruction, individual education plans, educational assistants, academic motivation, resource and tutoring, and parental involvement in academics. These academic support methods are applied and developed continuously as a part of the school philosophy and practice, because the community values them. Exposure to them supports student learning while also preparing students to meet the needs of society, thereby creating a good school.

### **Inclusive Schooling**

The first method of academic support that makes Hapnot Collegiate a good school is inclusive schooling. Within Canada and many other countries, inclusive schooling has become a common philosophy and practice in order to fix a dichotomy in teaching by providing non-segregated learning experiences for the “disabled” and “special needs” within the school system (Lim, Wong, & Tan, 2014, pp. 123-124). Inclusive schooling is designed to include all children, disabled or not, in order to encourage their participation within the classroom and to enhance their learning experience with their peers, whereas previously they were taught in separate classrooms or facilities. Inclusive schooling is a method of academic support and an example of best practice because it provides children of all cognitive, affective, and psychomotor abilities with the opportunity to work in a common space, thereby increasing their opportunity to work on their social skills while also working on their other needs (Kurth, 2013). Inclusive schooling also exposes students to the idea of disability and what it means to approach academics in alternate ways regardless of special needs labels (Ware, 2009).

Inclusive schooling is supported within Hapnot Collegiate due to the number of students in the community who have what could be labelled as disability or special needs. The students in Hapnot Collegiate range from hearing impaired to autistic, and all of these students have opportunities to participate in every course if it is safe for them. With the implementation of inclusive schooling, teachers at Hapnot also use differentiated instruction as common practice within their classrooms to meet the needs of the diverse students. Some issues with inclusive schooling include concerns that there should be better guidelines to differentiate instruction and support students with severe cognitive disabilities in the classroom, while also ensuring that everyone is getting the individual attention that he/she needs (Roy, Guay, & Valois, 2014). In many cases, a student with special needs works with an educational assistant (EA) who can help the teacher work with the student while also attending to the other students in the class (Lim et al., 2014). Hapnot works consistently to integrate students as successfully as possible, with consideration given to safety concerns or other obvious impediments to the students' success.

### **Differentiated Instruction**

The second method of academic support that makes Hapnot Collegiate a good school is differentiated instruction. Differentiated instruction is a method used by teachers to meet the learning needs of all students within the classroom (Roy et al., 2014). All students learn differently and require the information to be relayed in different ways in order for them to understand. Differentiated instruction is the use of "blended" strategies such as traditional teaching, demonstrations, projects, discussions, and internet-based learning (Demirer & Sahin, 2013, p. 518). Differentiated instruction is also a method of academic support and best practice when praxis is applied, because it increases the students' opportunity to understand by applying the information being taught to them instead of memorizing it after a traditionally styled lecture (Freire, 2009). In order for students to understand information, they require the lesson to be delivered in a written, verbal, and visually stimulating way, followed by the application of the information. If teachers did not teach by using differentiated instruction, then many students would not fully understand the material and would not learn to the best of their ability, nor would they understand its application or relevance in society.

Differentiated instruction is supported at Hapnot Collegiate because it is a common teacher practice taught in college, and more high school students are requiring diverse instruction in order to learn. Some issues with differentiated instruction at Hapnot involve working with students who require additional in-class support with their academics, as these students often have an emotional or cognitive disability along with other contributing factors that impede their ability to learn. Generally, a student who needs additional academic support will work with an EA according to an individual education plan (IEP), though on occasion they are not, or only one assistant is provided for several students with different instructional needs ranging from mild to severe. Some students require that the teacher read for them, write for them, or sit with them while they receive the lesson and do their work; this form of differentiated instruction is possible, but it becomes an issue when too much time is required from the student in a large class of other students with needs. Hapnot continuously works to improve its practice by providing differentiated instruction to all students, and additional support is provided to those who need or request it.

### **Individual Education Plans**

The third method of academic support that makes Hapnot Collegiate a good school is the use of individual education plans. IEPs provide teachers with guidelines on how to differentiate a student's learning instruction via adaptations, modifications, or other means (Sanches-Ferreira, Lopes-dos-Santos, Alves, Santos, & Silveira-Maia, 2013). Any students who are

funded or non-funded may receive an IEP if they require assistance in their learning; the IEP should be passed on and updated from teacher-to-teacher at each grade level, in order to ensure that the students are getting what they need, and to monitor progress. IEPs are a method of academic support because they provide clear instruction on how to work with students to increase their ability to achieve academically. Providing students with IEPs also cultivates reflective learning, as the students are required to reflect on themselves as learners in collaboration with their parents and teachers (Kurth, 2103).

Hapnot Collegiate supports IEPs, because there are students who require adaptations and modifications to their instruction in order to learn more effectively. Some issues with IEPs include the lack of training on how to write them, what adaptations and modifications are appropriate, who should receive them, and regular follow-up routines with teachers and students (Sanches-Ferreira et al., 2013). If the process is not clearly defined and the students are not receiving properly planned IEPs or interacting throughout the process, then educational practice cannot occur properly. Hapnot is in a constant state of improving its practice of using IEPs with students by further developing how the IEPs are written, and by means of the follow-up techniques that monitor and guide student progress.

### **Educational Assistants**

The fourth method of academic support that makes Hapnot Collegiate a good school is the use of educational assistants. EAs can be designated to work with single students or with a class as general helpers (Keating & O'Connor, 2012). EAs help students with their learning when additional support is required beyond what the teacher can provide while working with the other students in the classroom setting (Lim et al., 2014). EAs also help to manage the classroom by assisting the teacher to maintain classroom control by acting as a second set of eyes, especially in large classrooms (Keating & O'Connor, 2012).

Hapnot Collegiate supports the use of EAs, because some students require additional support while a teacher is working with the rest of the class, which provides the students with a sense of value and inclusion within the school. Some students at Hapnot also require closer supervision during their work, especially if safety is an issue. One issue with EAs is the teacher and EA not knowing the EA's job expectations and requirements (Keating & O'Connor, 2012). Within Hapnot Collegiate, in some cases the EA works with entire classes and other times with just one student. There is no clarity on when the EA should work with one student or the entire class. Other times, EAs feel that they are not trained thoroughly enough on how to handle severely disabled students, which creates mixed feelings on dealing with them. Without the clarity of expectation of the role of the EA, there is potential for students to be left un-aided when they need academic assistance and monitoring. Hapnot improves the practice of using EAs in the classroom by clarifying their role when working with the students; clarification is achieved by instructing them to direct their attention to students who require assistance while the teacher is occupied with other students.

### **Academic Motivation**

The fifth method of academic support that makes Hapnot Collegiate a good school is academic motivation. Motivation is the encouragement for students to engage and participate in their school courses (Whitaker, 2012). Motivation is stimulated when students experience positive relationships with their teachers, cultural relevance, teacher enthusiasm, the feeling of worth at school, and interest in the subject (Muhammad & Hollie, 2012). Motivation is a method of academic support because it is the hook that makes students want to be in school and learn about the subject. Motivation can change the students' view regarding their learning. If students are not interested in the subject matter for whatever reason, then they will not try and will therefore suffer academically (Chih-Yuan Sun, 2014).

Hapnot Collegiate supports motivation techniques by teaching its staff to try different teaching methods to engage the students. Teachers are also encouraged to create positive relationships with their students and to be passionate about their teaching; if they are motivated and passionate, the students are more likely emulate the behaviour (McGregor & Mills, 2014). Whether it is a geography course or an industrial arts course, teachers at Hapnot work to make the information socially and culturally relevant to the students. Some issues that teachers face with motivation are caused by lack of student attendance for many reasons, resulting in poor academic performance (Wilkie, 2012). It is difficult to motivate students if they are not present and their motivation declines due to apprehension about returning. At Hapnot, the staff are aware of the students who have motivation issues due to illness, absence, drug abuse, poor life circumstances, etc. The staff members work to motivate the students by getting them help for any issues, bringing in speakers relevant to their lives, and demonstrating how the courses can be applied in day-to-day life. Hapnot constantly works to improve the practice of motivating its students.

### **Resource and Tutoring**

The sixth method of academic support that makes Hapnot Collegiate a good school is resource and tutoring. Resource and tutoring are additional supports provided to students who either need or request help with their academic work, though tutoring is also available for recreational activities as well (Bray, Zhan, Lykins, & Kwo, 2014). Resource assistance often takes place during school hours in a designated space where students are either assigned to go for academic help, or choose to go on their own (McGee, 2012). Tutoring is more personalized and can occur during school and after school by request (Bray et al., 2014). Resource and tutoring are forms of academic support because they provide students with the assistance they need to comprehend their work (McGee, 2012). Resource and tutoring encourage students to reflect on their learning while they participate in team-based learning (Fink Consulting, 2014).

Hapnot Collegiate supports the implementation of resource and tutoring to help the students comprehend their academic work. Students are encouraged to seek help with their studies if they do not fully grasp the content during class time. At Hapnot, issues occur with resource and tutoring when students do not seek out the additional help. Often, students will appear to be doing fine in class and attention is not given to them until their grade point average drops to a low point, by which time there is a huge learning gap and recovery is difficult. Hapnot is working to monitor students more closely by tracking previous academic issues and by encouraging students to ask for help when needed. Furthermore, students will be signed up for resource if they do not request help on their own.

### **Parental Involvement**

The seventh method of academic support in Hapnot Collegiate is parental involvement. Parental involvement consists of parental support in the lives of the students, in particular their own children (Child Trends, 2013). Parental involvement includes attending parent-teacher interviews, extra-curricular events, taking interest in the students' work, being involved in the school, and many other potential contributions (Gurian, 2014). Parental involvement is a method of academic support because they can help to support their children with studying and the completion of their work (Child Trends, 2013). When parents are involved in a student's life, there is a team-based approach to the child's education, along with support for the child's work and teachers' instruction. Changing the children's view of their education from singular to team based creates a desire to succeed, because they know that they are supported and being monitored for success (Gurian, 2014).

Hapnot Collegiate supports parental involvement through many methods. Hapnot includes parents by inviting them to take part in the school website, events, parent-teacher, and

volunteer work. For parents who are less involved, teachers will call home to inform the parents of their children's academic progress. A couple of issues with parental involvement are when parents have no interest in the schooling of their children, refuse to support the teachers' requests or decisions, and do not participate in attempts to alter behaviours and practices that hinder the academic achievement of the students. Hapnot works diligently support the education of its students by providing them with counselling and offering additional support to show them that they are important and valued.

## Conclusion

Schools are constantly changing and adapting their philosophies and practices in order to be good schools. Academic support is huge part of what makes a good school, and it has many methods that can be altered as necessary to meet the needs of the students and society. The methods of academic support listed above are some of the many that Hapnot Collegiate values as a part of its philosophy and practice. Each method is constantly being adjusted as educational issues arise in critical pedagogy, in order to make educational practices more effective at all levels. Academic achievement methods used by Hapnot do have flaws, but their value within the community gives them support and purpose. If any of the seven methods used by Hapnot assist in meeting the needs of every child while also teaching him/her to find value in education in preparation for entrance into society, then they are worth practising as a part of the school's philosophy.

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