

The Special EDge

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Teaching Every Student: Five Key Elements

This article is based on an interview with Carol Ann Tomlinson, PhD, the current William Clay Parrish, Jr., Professor and Chair of Educational Leadership, Foundations, and Policy at the University of Virginia's Curry School of Education. Dr. Tomlinson teaches there and serves as Co-Director of the University's Institutes on Academic Diversity. Dr. Tomlinson was named Outstanding Professor at the Curry School in 2004 and received an All University Teaching Award in 2008. One of her many professional interests is curriculum and instruction for struggling learners.

Imagine a science teacher who tells a student who is functionally blind to “just pay closer attention” to a book on photosynthesis; or imagine a history teacher telling a student who is deaf to just listen harder to a film on the Civil War. No one would deny the downright cruelty of these instructional attitudes or argue against providing the one student with a braille reader and the other with closed captioning. Yet it's often harder to find an equivalent degree of commitment to providing supports for less obvious challenges that many students face in the classroom—challenges that can interfere with learning as much as an inability to see or hear.

The Law

For students with disabilities, the law requires that schools provide access to education. Specifically, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates specially designed instruction, classroom accommodations, related services, supplementary aids and services, and specialized transportation—all determined through assessment, specified by the individualized education program (IEP) team, and written into a plan. In general (and by law), these accommodations must be designed to help students with disabilities access a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE).

The list of terms associated with this provision can be confusing: to adaptations, specially designed instruction, accommodations, related services, and supplementary aids and services add modifications, instructional supports, individualization, and differentiated instruction—the list goes on [for a glossary, go to www.calstat.org/infoAdditionalResources.html]. However, these terms all contribute to a focus on attending to the particular needs students and providing a way for each student to learn.

While specific IEP-determined adjustments and supports are required as part of an educational program for every student with an identified disability, a whole lot

more happens—or doesn't happen—in the classroom. As more and more students with disabilities are being included in the general education classroom, more and more teachers face increasingly diverse classroom populations. How does one teacher address every need?

Carol Ann Tomlinson, who has been studying effective classrooms for years, cuts through the jargon and gets to the point: “It occurs to me,” she said in a phone interview “that all teachers have five classroom elements they can work with” to meet the needs of all students. While Tomlinson's ideas are clear and reflect a great deal of experience and common sense, they are particularly compelling for another reason: their fundamental premise is grounded in current research, some of which involves new studies of how the brain works.

Element #1: Learning Environment

Tomlinson believes that the first element for ensuring that every student is able to learn involves the classroom environment: Does the child feel safe, included, and engaged? “Research shows that the brain is designed in a hierarchical fashion. It will always first go to survival, then it will go to social connections, and finally it will go to learning,”

Tomlinson, continued page 5

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**Insert:
Adaptations and Modifications—
What They Look Like**



Fred Balcom

California Department of Education
Special Education Division

It is not just about the curriculum.

We know that removing students from the general education classroom impedes their academic progress and that, conversely, keeping students in general education classes typically improves their school performance—and often their behavior. While a focus on instructing students with disabilities in general education settings and the least restrictive environment (LRE) does not guarantee higher levels of performance, the two are strongly correlated.

However, we promote LRE for reasons that extend well beyond improved scores on statewide assessments. California's richly diverse classrooms provide a context that replicates the complexities of adult life, offering ample opportunities for students to practice—in the few short years that we have them—the kinds of real-world skills they need to

develop in order to become productive citizens. LRE helps students to apply knowledge and learn to make decisions within these contexts. In general, students learn from one another, and isolating certain students lessens educational opportunities for everyone. The more extensively we remove students with disabilities from the general curriculum, the more we reduce the likelihood of their success in all areas.

Quality instruction is an essential component in ensuring success for students with disabilities. How teachers interact with students and how they manage the content and context of instruction contributes significantly to the learning experience for students—and to their chances of success. The best instruction focuses on helping students navigate their environment and on engaging them in the curriculum—first capturing their hearts and then their minds—so they can learn what they will need in order to be successful in life after high school.

Collaboration between general and special educators is one certain approach to this task of providing quality instruction in general classroom settings. General educators are the content specialists—they know the “what” in what needs to be taught. Special educators are the experts in differentiating instruction and creating successful contexts—they know the “how” in how to shape instructional material and strategies so that individual students with disabilities—or with any kind of challenge that impedes learning—can succeed. General and special educators enhance each other's efforts when they work together to provide effective accommodations and modifications so that every student is able to access the core curriculum and has the opportunity to learn.

The world today is rich in ways to support this access. The ever-multiplying modes of technology along with the many approaches to structuring social interactions and to adapting and modifying materials and instruction all work toward enabling students to participate and benefit from their education.

The articles in this issue of *The Special EDge* address some of the complexities of making curriculum and instruction available to all. Ultimately, educating students with disabilities in the general curriculum by providing supports and services helps to level the playing field. We know that all students achieve at higher levels if they are challenged. And as we think about this process of giving the best to all of our students, we must keep in mind the entire context of our student's school experience—and remember that all of this work is not really about school; it is about life.

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Adapting Curriculum and Instruction: A Primer

W

By Jeffrey Sprague, PhD, University of Oregon, Institute on Violence and Destructive Behavior

What happens in school when instruction is too difficult or poorly adapted to the interests, needs, and ability level of the students? For many years we've known the answer: students misbehave. In fact, avoiding instruction or tasks that are too difficult or poorly matched to their ability is one of the most common reasons that students present challenging behaviors.¹

Everyone knows that a teacher's behavior—how a teacher responds to students who are acting up or “checking out”—can help students learn how to manage their conduct responsibly. But the purpose of school involves so much more than just learning how to behave. In fact, most educators agree with educator Robert Maynard Hutchins, who wrote, “The object of education is to prepare the young to educate themselves throughout their lives.” This objective makes teacher behavior—how it consciously and conscientiously adapts curriculum and instruction to the level and interests of students—critical to helping students find their footing on the path of lifelong learning. The more progress students make in any given classroom—regardless of their starting point—the more securely they grow in their identity and confidence as learners. The starting point for teachers is to figure out the starting point for each student. This, in a nutshell, is where curricular and instructional adaptations begin.

Possible? Yes!

Teachers may think that adapting curriculum and instruction is very complicated or time consuming. This does not have to be the case. Effective teachers can adapt or differentiate instruction for all students by using some basic problem-

solving techniques that involve quickly identifying the issue, generating alternative solutions, and trying one or two to see if they work. In the case of preventing problem behavior, we recommend this process of “try and test” rather than investing a lot of time in complicated, but rarely sustainable, behavioral strategies. When adaptations are provided to students who are not getting the lesson content or not learning important skills from lessons designed for most students in the class, research shows two things: curricular adaptations diminish problem behaviors, and they maximize school participation and success.²



Basic Beliefs

The following considerations are fundamental to effective curricular adaptation:

► We have to “meet” the student at his or her current level of performance. Federal and state requirements for academic achievement place immense pressure on teachers today, too often creating a drive for a “one size fits all” or “teach to the test” mindset and practice. Best educational practice is clear: meet each student at his or her current level of performance and build toward longer-term objectives. If we “shoot too high,” both the teacher and the student will be frustrated.

► Poorly adapted instruction can range from being too difficult to being too boring. Either kind is aversive and can promote problem behavior, resulting in either too much of one kind of behavior (students making errors or acting out, for example) or not enough of another (engaging in positive social interactions or making an effort in school work).

A simple, problem-solving strategy for quickly developing successful adaptations to curriculum and instruction uses a matrix of 12 strategies for increasing academic success. The table on page four provides definitions of these basic strategies and examples of curricular adaptations for each.

Seven-Steps for Adapting Curricula and Instruction

Research educators have outlined seven simple steps for adapting curricula to support success for all learners.³ The first four are inherent to all instruction; the last three involve adapting curriculum:

General curriculum

1. Select the subject area.
2. Select the topic.
3. Identify the goal for most learners.
4. Develop the lesson plan for most learners.

Adapted curriculum

5. Identify learners who will need adaptations in curricula or instruction.
6. Choose an appropriate mix of adaptations, using the ideas in the table on page four.
7. Evaluate your adaptation.

The seventh step is important for the efficacy of the adaptation, and involves several considerations:

Behavior, continued page 4

1. Crone, D. A., & Horner, R. H. (2003). *Building Positive Behavior Support Systems in Schools: Functional Behavioral Assessment*. New York: Guilford Press.

2. Cole, S., et al. (2000). *Adapting curriculum and instruction in inclusive classrooms: A teacher's desk reference* (2nd ed.). Bloomington, IN: Institute for the Study of Developmental Disabilities.

3. DeSchenes, C., Ebeling, D., & Sprague, J. (1994). *Adapting Curriculum and Instruction in Inclusive Classrooms: A Teacher's Desk Reference*. (1st ed.). Bloomington, IN: Institute for the Study of Developmental Disabilities

- Will this adaptation improve the level of participation in class for the student?
- Is this adaptation the least intrusive (i.e., least interfering) option?
- Will this adaptation give the student a variety of options, or will the same adaptation be used for all activities (e.g.,

always do fewer problems)?

- Does the adaptation ensure an appropriate level of difficulty for the student?
- Can the student use this adaptation in other classes or activities?

With these seven steps, all educators can use the curricular adaptation strategies in the table below in countless combinations to make instruction more

suiting to students who may otherwise struggle. Ideally, general and special educators will work together to identify the best mix of adaptations for any student needing extra support.

Teachers have found this simple, problem-solving process to be quick and effective in reducing mild behavioral problems. More importantly, these strategies help all students learn. ♦

Classes of Curricular Adaptations

Change the Context	Change the Presentation	Change the Behavior Expectations or Consequences
<p>Precorrect Errors</p> <p>Give extra practice for errors you anticipate before instruction.</p> <p><i>Before instruction begins, Tamara asks Mitch to sit down and practice “stay in seat” and “keep hands and feet to self” before the lesson starts.</i></p>	<p>Task Difficulty</p> <p>Adapt the skill level, problem type, or rules to increase accuracy (>75%).</p> <p><i>Jeff is allowed to use a calculator to figure math problems to decrease difficulty and his motivation to escape the task. His teacher gradually increases the difficulty and allows him to practice problems without the calculator.</i></p>	<p>Time to Complete</p> <p>Adapt the time allotted and allowed for learning, task completion, or testing.</p> <p><i>Stephen can complete his seatwork with few errors but it takes him longer than other students. His teacher gives him extra time, and he doesn't lose any credit.</i></p>
<p>Level of Participation</p> <p>Adapt the extent to which a learner is actively involved in a task or activity.</p> <p><i>Pam is very shy about raising her hand in class, so the teacher allows her to write down the answer on a card. She is less anxious and does not act out during lecture.</i></p>	<p>Task Size</p> <p>Adapt the number of items that a learner is expected to complete or master.</p> <p><i>Joe has difficulty completing the entire social studies assignment, so his teacher allows him to complete half to maintain his motivation for learning.</i></p>	<p>Output Method</p> <p>Adapt how the learner can respond to instruction.</p> <p><i>Leslie will often use inappropriate words when asked to speak in front of the class without notes. Her teacher allows her to write her comments and read them instead.</i></p>
<p>Alternate Goal</p> <p>Adapt the goals or expectations while using the same materials.</p> <p><i>In social studies, Ceci is expected to locate just the states while others locate the capitals as well. When she is successful, she makes fewer bids for peer attention during cooperative group activities.</i></p>	<p>Input Method</p> <p>Adapt the way instruction is delivered to the learner.</p> <p><i>Tom has a hard time tolerating morning circle, often getting up and running away. He is allowed to stay at his desk and learn there about the schedule for the class that day.</i></p>	<p>Increase Rewards for Acceptable Behavior</p> <p>Make doing expected behaviors more valuable than errors or other problem behavior.</p> <p><i>Even though Kindle hates to complete math worksheets and often tosses them on the floor, she will complete them if she can earn five extra minutes of recess on Friday.</i></p>
<p>Substitute Curricula</p> <p>Provide different instruction and materials.</p> <p><i>John is in high school and at risk for dropping out. He is introduced to a self-directed curriculum on a computer. He can see his accomplishments clearly and is very motivated to earn high school credits.</i></p>	<p>Level of Support</p> <p>Increase the amount of personal assistance provided to the learner.</p> <p><i>José is given a peer tutor for extra practice in reading grade-level material.</i></p>	<p>Remove or Restrict</p> <p>Take away desired objects or activities when problem behavior is observed.</p> <p><i>George has difficulty with botany facts but can do the work if he is motivated. He and his teacher agree that he will lose five minutes of lunch any day he refuses to complete the daily quiz.</i></p>

From *Best Behavior: Building Positive Behavior Supports in Schools*, by Jeffrey Sprague and Annamike Golly. Longmont, CO: Sopris West.

says Tomlinson. “So if a kid is afraid, everything will shut down because of that fear. And if the kid is isolated or demeaned, that’s also going to capture the brain’s attention first.”

Read More About the Learning Environment

Brain-Compatible Learning:
[www.greenteacher.com/
articles/McGeeban.pdf](http://www.greenteacher.com/articles/McGeeban.pdf)

Carol Dweck’s theory of “mindset”:
[http://news.stanford.edu
news/2007/february7/
dweck-020707.html](http://news.stanford.edu/news/2007/february7/dweck-020707.html)

In her article “Teach Me, Teach My Brain,” Tomlinson writes, “When a child feels intimidated, rejected, or at risk, an overproduction of noradrenalin causes that child to focus attention on self-protection rather than on learning. A fight or flight response may cause misbehavior or withdrawal, but it most certainly will not result in learning. . . . These responses are not willful, not imaginary. They are appropriate responses by a child to chemically induced changes in the brain signaling that the first order of business is self-preservation—not learning.”¹

How a teacher creates a classroom that provides a sense of safety and belonging is tied to that teacher’s attitudes. Tomlinson wonders “how many of us have what [Stanford psychology professor] Carol Dweck calls ‘a fixed mindset’—the belief that you’re born with a set of capacities and not very much can change that.” What too often accompanies this attitude, says Tomlinson, is the belief that “a teacher should try hard, but some kids are going to ‘get it’ and some of them aren’t.” Tomlinson instead calls for all teachers to develop “the mindset that says ‘it’s effort that wins the day,’ and if the teacher is willing to work hard enough and the kid is willing to work hard enough, all sorts of things are possible.

“This is particularly important for kids who don’t see themselves as successful in school. If I believe my teacher thinks I’m not successful, that I’m ‘low man on the totem pole,’ I’m pretty well stuck there. But if I have a teacher who sees me as a human being rather than a label, then I see her as a person to be trusted. And when she says, ‘We’re going to go far, and you don’t have any idea how far. So let’s just get going!’” this attitude creates a teacher-student connection that takes advantage of the emotional component that’s necessary for student learning.



“The brain is very malleable. Most kids can learn a lot more than we think they can if they believe they can and if we’re willing to support them,” says Tomlinson. In fact, according to biochemist James E. Zull, director of the Center for Innovative Learning and Teaching at Case Western Reserve University, “We now know that every brain can change, at any age. There is really no upper limit on learning since the brain neurons seem to be capable of growing new connections whenever they are used repeatedly.”²

The learning environment is also critical as a vehicle for “connecting kids with each other so we function like a team and have a community,” says Tomlinson. “We all need to help each other and be helped

by each other. If we could create all of these things in the classroom—from the growth mindset to the teacher-student connections to a sense of community—that really would be a place that would invite learning.”

Element #2: The Curriculum

The second element that teachers can control involves “the quality of the curriculum we teach,” says Tomlinson “We know from brain research that kids have to do two things in order to learn: they need to make sense of new information and they need to make meaning of it. And ‘sense’ means, ‘I can actually explain to you how it works.’ Not just that ‘I memorized it—or tried to.’ And ‘meaning’ means, ‘I can connect it to my own life in some way.’

“Often when we have children who we believe have some sort of learning barriers or impediments, we assume that all they can do is ‘basic knowledge and skills.’ Those kids are most vulnerable to not making meaning. And when we don’t help them understand how things work and what things are for, it makes it much less likely that they’ll learn at all.”

Read More About Curriculum

Karin Chenoweth on the importance of high-quality curriculum:
www.bepg.org/page/97

Scaffolding:
<http://fno.org/dec99/scaffold.html>

Designing Curriculum for All:
www.cast.org/udl/index.html

Educational research shows that the more ways that students grapple with information, the more likely it is that every student will learn—in ways that are deep and lasting. It took brain research, however, to show that this grappling is not random: it is an orderly cycle that moves from new experience (getting information), to reflection (observing, struggling with ideas and information, and making

1. Tomlinson, C.A. (1998). “Teach Me, Teach My Brain.” *Educational Leadership* 56(3), pp. 52–55.

2. [www.sharpbrains.com/blog/2006/10/12/
an-ape-can-do-this-can-we-not](http://www.sharpbrains.com/blog/2006/10/12/an-ape-can-do-this-can-we-not)

connections and meaning out of it), to developing a hypothesis (creating new ideas), and then to actively testing out the hypothesis/new creation (seeing how it works, demonstrating it/presenting it to others). This process ensures learning because it engages multiple parts of the brain,³ and it is embedded in every good curriculum at every level for every kind of student.

Element #3: Assessments

“Most teachers can tell you what they’re going to cover in a day or a week,” says Tomlinson, “but very few can tell you what kids should be able to know, understand, and be able to do as a result of that learning.” This gap leads “to huge ambiguity in the minds of kids, because they never quite know what the target is. But the gap also leads to misalignment between curriculum and all manner of assessment,” and it “keeps students from assuming responsibility for their own learning because they simply don’t know what they’re aiming for. This is a particular issue for kids who have been identified for special education, where often they have a resource teacher working with them who is covering somebody else’s curriculum, and those teachers themselves don’t know what the target is. So here you have a kid who is vulnerable being taught by someone who is ambiguous.

“This assessment piece is fraught with all kinds of difficulty, but it also holds all sorts of power. If you understand what students should be able to know, understand, and do at any given point in an instructional unit, then you almost have a pre-assessment ready, as well as formative assessments. But because so many teachers lack clarity about that end goal, the formative assessments and the pre-assessments are sometimes only loosely linked.” Tomlinson encourages teachers

3. Biochemist James E. Zull explains how this cycle works with emotions to encourage learning at www.dekampaigne.org/NL/Artikelen/includes/el200409_zull.pdf.

to be rigorous in establishing clear goals for themselves and for their students—essentially to require their “instructional planning to go beyond ‘covering the text’ or ‘creating activities that students will like.’” This clear focus involves “knowing exactly where you want your students to go (to learn and be able to remember and do) by the time the class is over—and having a clear strategy for getting there.

Read More About Assessment

Curriculum-based assessment:
[www.jimwrightonline.com/
pdfdocs/cbaManual.pdf](http://www.jimwrightonline.com/pdfdocs/cbaManual.pdf)

Explicit instruction and assessment:
[http://explicitinstruction.org/
download/sample-chapter.pdf](http://explicitinstruction.org/download/sample-chapter.pdf)

“The second part of assessment that’s really important is helping kids understand how it works so that they can say, ‘I get it. Here’s what I’m aiming for, here’s where I am right now, and this [test] helps me see the things I need to do next.’ But assessment is rarely done with kids. It’s done to them. A shift away from ‘this is something I do to you and then pass judgment on you’ to ‘this is something we do together’ is really important,” Tomlinson believes, in helping children develop ownership of—and emotional investment in—their own learning.

Element #4: Instruction

“The actual thing we call differentiation—or accommodation, or modification—fits into the fourth element, the instructional piece,” says Tomlinson. However, the previous elements are inextricably connected. “Once you see what an assessment reveals about a kid [element #3], you see what you need to do next to help that kid take his or her next step. Sometimes it might be scaffolding or new material or extending the length of time. Sometimes it might be hooking what the kids are learning to an area they care about [element #1], and sometimes

it might be significant enough that the teacher actually has to change the goals, and then it becomes a modification.” Most importantly, good instruction involves helping all students find meaning [element #2].

Tomlinson is a proponent of the work of educator and researcher David Sousa, who laments how “Every day students listen to things that make sense but lack meaning. They may diligently follow the teacher’s instructions to perform a task repeatedly, and may even get the correct answers, but if they have not found meaning after the learning episode, there is little likelihood of long-term storage.”⁴ When teachers help students find importance and significance—the meaning—in what is being taught, the emotional connection is made.

Read More About Instruction

Carol Ann Tomlinson’s resources
on differentiating instruction:
www.caroltomlinson.com/

Free course on differentiation:
[www.curriculumassociates.com/
professional-development/topics/
diffinstruction/index.htm](http://www.curriculumassociates.com/professional-development/topics/diffinstruction/index.htm)

In support of an increased emphasis on meaning, Tomlinson advocates “teaching up” within a curriculum, “starting with the things that you’d aspire for your really fast learners, and then scaffolding for the rest of your students to be able to get there—rather than teaching down to kids, with the assumption that they can’t really accomplish as much as they probably can.” Certainly this requires some planning. “If you have a student who is behind in some skills or has a difficult time with vocabulary, they would need to do some ‘learning backwards’ as they’re learning forward; but the rich understandings [that are the end results of a quality core curriculum] should belong to everybody. And that’s really

4. Sousa, David. (2006). *How the Brain Learns*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. p. 54

what brings the class together so that you become a unit rather than fragmented. And of course that impacts the environment. If you see that some kids are always just filling out worksheets while other students are engaged in meaningful work, that makes it less likely that you're going to create a cohesive group of kids who have a sense of regard for one other."

Element #5: Classroom Management

"We underplay the last of the five elements—although research is telling us that it needs to be in the foreground and not just assumed—and that is the way a teacher leads kids and manages details and routines," says Tomlinson. "We often find teachers who can say to us that 'I have five kids who are really struggling with academic vocabulary, and it hurts them in these ways . . . and so in today's lesson if I did this and this with these kids while the others did other stuff, it would be great for the struggling kids. And I could probably accomplish this in ten or fifteen minutes.' Then you go into the classroom and the teacher isn't doing it. The teacher is very motivated, sees the need, even gets the game plan, but he's afraid that if he ever quit trying to give everybody the same stuff with the same sort of command system, it would all fall apart on him. But we can't make a classroom work [for every student] unless we free classrooms to become flexibly managed enough to address a variety of needs, to make room for individual kids. That is the essence of all of it."

In Tomlinson's experience, many teachers find numerous excuses for not breaking loose from "one-size-fits-all" classroom management strategies. She calls these excuses the "yes-buts": "Yes. I could do this, but the chairs are all attached to the floor. Yes, but they only gave me one textbook. Yes, but I don't have enough time. Yes, but the standardized test doesn't recognize difference. Yes, but I have too many kids, my room is too small, there's not enough time. All of these things," she says, "are characteristics of a novice in any field."

And yet, whether or not they believe

they are capable of creating more flexible learning environments, "most teachers see the need. I run into few teachers who say that 'students are all alike, and as long as I stand up in front of the room and say the same thing, they'll all be fine.' Even the teachers with the 'yes-buts' can see the differences. They're just afraid to address them. Some of us begin to grow ourselves up, and we do the stuff that pushes us forward in our development. But many of us stick to the familiar." This is where Tomlinson emphasizes the absolute importance of good leadership to help all teachers "wade into the water" of differentiation. "Good school leaders respectfully help novices take the first step and both encourage and necessitate that forward movement."

Read More About Classroom Management

Effective Instruction and
Classroom Management:
[www.tqsource.org/topics/
effectiveClassroomManagement.pdf](http://www.tqsource.org/topics/effectiveClassroomManagement.pdf)

Flexible classroom grouping:
[www.eduplace.com/sciencelprofdev/
articles/valentino.html](http://www.eduplace.com/sciencelprofdev/articles/valentino.html)

Benefits for All

Imagine again the two students from the beginning of this article, the one who is deaf and the other who is blind. Now imagine different teachers for both. The history teacher is providing closed captioning and soon discovers that all of his students are starting to remember more from their video lessons. And then he realizes that they are getting the information in three ways—by hearing the audio, by reading the captions, and by watching the action of the film itself—and these multiple modes are reinforcing their learning. The science teacher starts to teach extensive labeling and note-taking strategies to support her student who can't see, but all of her students start doing better, because rich language and note-taking strategies are essential for successful scientific study—

and English, and math, and every other academic endeavor. These teachers have discovered that helping every student helps all students.

And the teachers discover something else: that success for everyone in a classroom creates a new place entirely, one that generates "feelings of enthusiasm, zeal, confidence, and persistence"⁵—the entire range of emotions necessary for learning.

The bad news is that there is no definitive list of all possible adaptations and supports. Even the most experienced teachers sometimes strain to find a "work-around" for a struggling student. But the good news is that teaching remains both art and science, and Tomlinson's five elements provide the best of both: the invitation to work flexibly within a clear set of given conditions. The form is there, and, just like the human brain, its shape and potential are boundless.

Perhaps there is more good news. The absence of a strict script keeps teachers' brains growing as well, requiring creativity, creating excitement, and producing intense satisfaction in both the effort and the possibility: that they can be the person who helps every student learn and succeed, not just in school, but in life. ♦

Val Verde

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the kids didn't matter. [The district] had developed a culture that was just dedicated to good teaching and to student success—and they had a commitment to doing things the right way."

The essence of the Val Verde turnaround lies in how it ended up "doing things the right way": establishing a rigorous curriculum, making special education services more flexible, providing focused and sustained teacher training, and using assessment to guide instruction. In short, the district created a system that makes adapting curriculum and instruction to meet the needs of each child not just encouraged but integral to how things work—in fact, inevitable.

Val Verde, continued page 11

5. www.learner.org/courses/learning_classroom/support05_emotions_learning.pdf

Technology and Instructional Adaptations

It's not about the bling; it's about the curriculum," says Gina Guarneri of the Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities at UC Davis' MIND Institute. Educators certainly agree. But they also acknowledge that the "bling"—in the form of hi-tech devices like tablets and laptops—is making inroads in schools. And for good reason. Technology is allowing teachers to customize curriculum for each student based on their ability and capacity for learning, to accurately monitor student progress in real time, and even to increase student participation, confidence, and performance. And contrary to the assumption that technology fosters isolation, Guarneri says that "as technology becomes more common, it helps kids [in special education] be more included."

Greg Barge, principal of Woodside School in the San Juan Unified School District near Sacramento, believes that the use of computer-based technology in schools is only going to increase. "It's the norm for our students; it's part of their learning style." In Barge's school, students in kindergarten through eighth grade are working on iPads and on laptops loaded with Google Apps for Education.

"The kids are ready for this [electronic future]. It will happen soon," says Jonn Paris-Salb of the California Department of Education's Clearinghouse for Specialized Media and Translations. The Clearinghouse provides accessible versions of textbooks, workbooks, and works of literature for students who are blind or visually impaired and students with "print disabilities" such as dyslexia.

The electronic future is already underway in the San Juan district, where six schools are participating in an iPad pilot project. At Cameron Ranch Elementary, each class has a set of six tablets. "It's amazing how it's changed learning," says Principal Theresa Altieri. "It's given our students with special needs a sense of accomplishment." She tells of a second-grade boy who is nonverbal and has been "brought to life" because the tablet speaks for him and of a fifth grader with Downs syndrome who now "has a way to communicate without hitting her frustration level." The iPad, she says, "has given kids with autism more courage to engage." And because students get immediate feedback, "it's taken away the fear of being wrong," Altieri says.

The iPads were purchased by the district's Special Education Department,

Special Education and Assistive Technology

The presence of technology in K–12 education seems to be growing exponentially, and the law recognizes its advantages for students with disabilities. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) states that, when appropriate, "Each public agency must ensure that assistive technology devices or assistive technology services" (§ 300.105) be provided to students with disabilities. However, IDEA's primary provision is for a student's individualized education program (IEP) team to design the IEP plan with "educational benefit" as the uppermost goal—and then to consider whether assistive technology is needed to realize that benefit.

Technology is simply another word for tools, and people have always found new tools to be exciting—and a little seductive. However, the California Department of Education (CDE) encourages "members of the IEP team [to] recognize that technology is just one strategy in a multi-faceted approach in addressing the needs and strengths of students with disabilities. IEP teams will therefore need to balance the degree of technology assistance with the student's learning potential, motivation, chronological age, developmental level and goals/objectives." The ultimate goal when considering any assistive technology is to meet each student's needs with something that works and is sustainable throughout a child's schooling.

A student's need for assistive technology is not casually determined. People with an expertise in matching assistive technology to the needs of students conduct carefully designed assessments, and the results dictate the level and type of technology required. The "latest and greatest" isn't always the only answer or even the best.

In general, assistive technology in schools covers a broad range of supports from low-tech to high—from monoculars and large-print books for the visually impaired, to customized wheelchairs and other mobility supports for students who are physically disabled, to computer software applications that support instruction. Low-tech assistive devices typically include supports that are readily available in schools or "off the shelf," and high-tech assistive technology involves more specialized—and usually more expensive—devices, often for students with low incidence or severe disabilities. These include such things as augmentative communication devices, sound field systems, and specialized software.

When students have low-incidence disabilities, the state pays for the assistive technology these students need in order to access their education. However, more than 80 percent of students with IEPs have learning disabilities, which are considered "high incidence." These students are not eligible for the technology that is funded through low-incidence monies. But some of the newest trends in educational technology hold significant promise for supporting school success for all students (see the article "Technology and Instructional Adaptations"), particularly students with learning disabilities.

with support from Technology Services. According to Kalei Eskridge, instructional technology integration specialist, it's one of the ways in which the new methods of instruction are bringing assistive technology and information technology closer together.

As Altieri says, “the kids have no fear of the iPad.” Teachers, however, have to be trained in their use. Initially “teachers were using iPads as a substitute for computers instead of seeing them as a new piece of technology,” says Cheryl Dultz, a consulting teacher for the district. So there has been a shift in how the district approaches technology, says Eskridge. “Instead of starting with the device and asking how we should use it, now we are asking, ‘What is the instructional focus and what tool will best meet our needs?’”

Students are starting to have access to a wide variety of these tools, Dultz says—an iPad for math and a computer for writing, for example. At Woodside, a K–8 school, students in Noelle Wegner’s seventh-grade English class are immersed in a writer’s workshop using Google Docs and working in “the cloud.” Each student has a user name and password and can access the program and his or her personal files from any computer at school, home, or a library. As students gather around Wegner, she reads to them a piece of fiction and discusses its literary elements. It looks like a time-honored method of instruction. But then the students in this blended class, five of whom have an IEP, pair up, select a book from the class library, open their laptops, access a template, and work together to fill in the elements of the genre they have found in their book. The exercise is preparing them to write their own stories.

By pushing a button on the laptop, they share their work with the teacher, who can meet with them “virtually” and comment on their writing. “I don’t like writing,” says Makalya, a student with an IEP. “This is so much faster and easier than doing it by hand.” And Clay, who says he’s “not a very good writer,” likes spell-check and the fact the “you can share your writing with multiple

Technology, continued page 10

Virtual Classrooms; Virtual Schools

The computer in the classroom is not new to K–12 schools. The computer *as* the classroom is something else entirely, and more schools than ever are offering online courses of study. A 2011 report from the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences surveyed 2,310 public school districts throughout the country and found that 55 percent of their students were enrolled in distance education courses in 2009–2010.¹ Expanding the variety of course offerings and making courses convenient are two major reasons schools are “trending virtual.”

Both public and private sectors are scrambling to create guidelines and standards for this new world of digital education. One effort by the Digital Learning Council has identified ten elements of high-quality digital learning, two of which hold particular interest for special education: (1) accessibility for all students and (2) customization, so that instruction targets the specific needs and supports the strength of each individual. The U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) released a Request for Proposal in mid-2011 for a Center for Online Learning and Students with Disabilities, suggesting “a newly sophisticated emphasis” by the federal government “on meeting special student needs in online and blended learning.”²

Given the perceived isolation of the online environment, many educators and parents worry that their students may not experience the kinds of personal interactions that will help them grow into healthy, mature adults, especially when many children already spend so much time in front of a computer screen—watching videos, playing computer games, and surfing the Web. Proponents of online learning are working hard to ease these fears. In *Socialization in Online Programs*, the North American Council for Online Learning makes a case in favor of the kinds of personal connections that students are able to make in virtual environments and the egalitarian nature of these connections. Students with significant speech impairments, for example, are able to be articulate in an online chat room. Students with mobility challenges don’t have to struggle with wheelchairs and ramps to attend class. In fact, according to this study, “the online environment eliminates, or greatly reduces, issues that may create social friction, such as appearance, gender, age, ethnicity, physical disabilities, academic progress (e.g., for at-risk or drop out students) or socioeconomic status.”³

K–12 educators are not restricting their visions of the new classroom to “either/or”: all traditional classrooms or all virtual. Blended learning—combining technology and online learning in a face-to-face setting—may prove to be the preferred choice of the future. The North Carolina Virtual Public School (NCVPS) represents one of the more ambitious examples of this kind of blending. The NCVPS combines face-to-face interaction with the opportunities for “learners to engage with the content and be able to learn material in a variety of modalities.” An NCVPS partner teacher works with the classroom teacher to increase and enhance differentiated learning. “This program allows students to work at their own pace and receive a high level of individualized instruction” from two state-certified teachers.⁴

How the balance in education between the virtual and the “real” continues to shift remains to be seen. The only thing that appears certain is that the connection between computers and education looks to be one that will last.

1. <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2012/2012008.pdf>

2. *Digital Learning Now!* 2010. Foundation for Excellence in Education.

3. www.k12bsn.org/files/research/Online_Learning/NACOL_PP_Socialization.pdf

4. www.ncvps.org/index.php/about-us/

people.” That’s one of the advantages of the program: online, real-time collaboration on the same document. The class has been using the laptops for only a few months, but Wegner says she is able to compare “the hand-written papers from the beginning of the year to those written on the laptops and see the improvement.”

Across campus, students in resource teacher Crystal Johnston’s math class are using computers to practice fractions on the Scholastic Fast Math program. Johnston sees the students as “more motivated to do math” when they use the computers. “Fractions on the computer are more visual, more interactive,” she says. “It frees more of their brain to solve the problems.” A growth of 40 points is expected from one semester to the next, Johnston says, “but some of these kids showed growth of 50 to 300 points,” as measured by the Scholastic Math Inventory, which is part of their program.

Technology is constantly expanding the ways it provides access to curriculum. At the Clearinghouse, Paris-Salb has 9,000 files to support this access, including electronic audio, large print, and braille documents as well as publishers’ texts. These days he is encouraging the conversion of all texts to electronic files. With an iPad and these texts, he says, students who are blind or visually impaired can access the curriculum at the same time

as their nondisabled peers. The tablet “speaks” what they touch and describes all pictures and graphics. Among the many advantages of electronic files, he says, is their ability to be modified for a variety of visual needs. “You can change the color of the background to make it easier to read. Or change the font size.”

Other devices are available for students who are blind, including Book Port Plus, an audio and recording device that is the size of a small pocket radio and plays books and provides access to e-mail, voicemail, and the Internet. It is “amazing” what these devices can do for a student, Paris-Salb says. “You pull out one of these and suddenly you’re the coolest kid in class.”

Al Millan and Cheryl Dultz have seen up close how technology can help a student with disabilities interact with nondisabled peers. Dultz says the iPad “was a game changer for my daughter in her general ed classroom. She has access to content she didn’t have before.” Her daughter, who has auditory processing issues, is able to view the lessons online and “she can practice many times.” Millan’s daughter is nonverbal and has “other challenges as well,” he says. Millan is a grant administrator at the Communication Technology Education Center, which provides trainings related to speech-generating devices. His daughter was able to participate in a school play “and programmed her mother’s voice into her

own speech-generating device for the part. You can use peer voices, too,” he says. “It brings friends together around communication.”

Bill Thompson, a school psychologist at the Orange County Department of Education, works with students in the county who have moderate to severe disabilities. “These students usually needed one-to-one or two-to-one instruction,” he says. Now with one student working on an iPad that is projected onto a television set or screen, “you can have 10 to 15 students in their seats and the whole group can see the lesson. It’s the first time these students have successfully participated in group instruction.” While overhead projectors and document cameras also project images, “they lack the visual stimulation these students require, and interactivity is limited,” Thompson says. He can walk around the classroom, iPad in hand, and engage a student in a lesson. When the rest of the class sees what is projected, “this is valuable from a social standpoint. Now they’re interested in what the student next to them is doing.”

Thompson himself has created apps for Apple devices, one of which measures “attending”: the time a student is actually engaged in the instruction. “One kid went from 10 percent of the time to more than 90 percent,” he says. Much of the evidence of greater student participation and engagement being the direct result of technology is anecdotal at this point. Eskridge says that San Juan is conducting “observation research to see how students are interacting with the content, with teachers, and with other students.”

However, their subject is a moving target. The field of assistive technology is “changing all the time,” says Millan. “There’s a big push now for iPads. It’s an amazing tool, but we have to remember that in all areas of education, the individual student needs a proper assessment of abilities and capabilities and the proper support.” That requires a trained, caring adult.

It’s not just about the bling. ♦

Download the complete article on technology in the classroom from www.calstat.org/infoAdditionalResources.html

Technology, Content, and the Common Core

Technology will be at the heart of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the accompanying assessments of student performance when the standards take effect in the 2014–2015 school year. According to a 2011 review of educational policy and practice, *Keeping Pace*,¹ the eventual commonality of standards established by the CCSS is making it possible “to create content for use across dozens of states and by millions of students. That is helping push online and blended learning, and the trend will accelerate as the common assessment consortiums progress. Open educational resources . . . are helping districts add a digital component without investing in developing or acquiring content.” Jonn Paris-Salb of the California Department of Education notes that, to date, publishers have had to write separate texts for different states. “Now [because of the CCSS] for the first time we can have a national version,” he says, making it easier to adapt curriculum for students with special needs. Forty-eight states, two U.S. territories, and the District of Columbia have agreed to adopt the CCSS.

1. <http://kpk12.com/cms/wp-content/uploads/KeepingPace2011.pdf>.

Rigorous Curriculum

Val Verde first focused on literacy for all of its students and adopted the state-approved Houghton Mifflin core curriculum in 2001. And when district leaders said “all students” they meant “all.” According to Special Education Instructional Coach Sarah Nesvold, they went so far as to throw out all “special education” materials. Butler, now retired for health reasons, recalls that “people were upset. So many of these truly dedicated special education teachers were in the habit of going to their local school supply store and buying worksheets or using materials they had stockpiled over the years. But we got rid of all of that.” In fact, Butler says, “the reading grant we secured required principals to sign off saying that all teachers would use only the core curriculum. And the teachers had to agree as well. It wasn’t easy.” But, as Nesvold explains, “We wanted all of our students to have access to the same standards. This way, however they advanced, they could step right into the general education stream, because essentially they had never left it, either in terms of curriculum or materials—just like kids in general ed.”

Flexible Services

The second powerful element in the district’s flywheel kit involved the way it transformed its culture of special education. According to Troy Knudsvig, Special Education Coordinator, district leaders wanted general education and special education “to speak the same language of curriculum and instructional practice.” Special education, organized under the Student Services division in most districts, was placed under Education Services. Another change involved getting rid of labels for students. “Language counts,” says Butler. “We intentionally changed how we talked about kids. Where a child is placed depends on his strengths and weaknesses, not on a label.”

The district also eliminated all resource specialist (RSP) pull-out classes and restructured its special day (SDC) classes for students with learning dis-

abilities. “Many of the students who would have been in an RSP class are now being supported in the general education classroom,” says Nesvold. The support for students comes from multiple sources. “Either an instructional assistant or a special education teacher helps all struggling kids in every classroom,” says Butler.

At the elementary level, learning centers were established in each school for students with IEPs who needed additional help and extra time with the core curriculum. “We spent a full year preparing for the learning center model,” says Butler. “We met with each principal and with each school’s special education teachers, and we provided workshops for teachers and administrators. We talked through everyone’s fears and concerns.” Butler believes that buy-in came because



Students in one of Val Verde USD’s many learning centers

“we let them do it their own way, create whatever learning center they thought would best serve their students. . . . This helped them to ‘own’ the model. We knew if they created it themselves, they wouldn’t undermine it.”

Mossa is pleased with the flexibility within special education and has seen it change the district’s culture. In his experience, most students don’t even know who has an IEP and who doesn’t. The support is “mobile,” and students with disabilities “don’t feel any different from students who don’t have disabilities.”

For students, “working with an RSP teacher no longer means ‘pull out,’” says

Nesvold. As a result, she says, “Problem behaviors are starting to diminish. Attitudes toward school are more positive.”

Teacher Collaboration

At all levels, general education and special education teachers work together to present assignments, assessments, and supports, making use of the content expertise of the one and the skills of the other in adapting curriculum and instruction to meet the needs of all students, whether or not they have an IEP. While specialized supports and instruction at the elementary level come through both learning centers and collaboration, the latter is the mainstay of Val Verde’s flexible model at middle and high schools.

For older students, “placement tests and formative assessments are the initial steps,” says Nesvold. “Students with specific deficits are then placed in classes that are designed to target the skill the student needs.” If students are two or more years behind in reading, for example, they are placed in a class designed to help them gain two years of proficiency in one. “The push is to make sure kids get through high school and out with a diploma,” says Nesvold. “Since we changed the model we’re seeing growth across the board,” says Knudsvig. “For example, in just one year our CAHSEE pass rates have gone from 81 to 84 percent in math, and from 79 to 83 percent in ELA [English language arts].”

Professional Development

Mossa points to 2008 as a pivotal year in the course of the district’s academic improvements. That’s when the district received a Reading First Special Education Teacher Professional Development (SETPD) grant. “All of our special education teachers in the elementary schools took these trainings,” says Mossa, “so that they knew how to work within the state-approved core curriculum and to provide early intervention services to kids who were struggling to learn how to read.”

Val Verde, continued page 12

“The best programs in the world do not always translate into student success,” says Butler. “A program is only a tool. Teachers need to know how to use those tools.”

Instructional Coaches

A general education initiative to introduce and sustain the presence of instructional coaches throughout the district has been in place since 2006 for the elementary teachers and was introduced in 2010 districtwide. Teachers who serve as instructional coaches, along with school principals, receive training in how to improve teaching strategies, increase student engagement, and target core standards. They then go back to their school sites and work with teams of teachers on the same topics for a sustained period of time, focusing on a particular area of practice. They study, take turns observing and teaching demonstration lessons related to the focus of study, and provide one-on-one support to each other—all with the goal of creating a supportive team that works to help each member effectively implement new practices and “figure out what each child needs in order to learn.” says Butler. The approach is modeled after the Collaborative Coaching and Learning Model developed by Boston City Schools (www.bpe.org/schools/ccl).

The Reading First grant money also helped the district create a position for a designated special education Instructional Coach (IC) who works with all special education elementary school teachers “to make sure everyone has every piece of the curriculum they need, the training they need, and the support and feedback they need to teach every child,” says Mossa, who originally held the IC position.

Butler believes that “this Instructional Coaching Model has made all the difference. We now have coaches at each school and the special education instructional coach works with all other instructional coaches as well as with special education teachers so everyone can effectively work with students to help them become good

readers, especially those students who struggle or who have a learning disability. This approach helped secure buy-in from general education teachers, since we made it clear that we are here to help and teach all kids.”

Assessment

Butler gives the No Child Left Behind Act some credit for the positive change she saw at Val Verde. It “was not a perfect law. It is asking us to do the impossible [in its requirement for yearly progress]. But suddenly students in special education—and their scores—counted. So it was easier to sell the idea of inclusion to principals and regular ed teachers and the importance of giving these students a rich curriculum.”

Val Verde wanted “all students counting” to mean more than just good numbers on end-of-year, high-stakes test scores. So district staff were pleased when

arts and mathematics.

To organize and make use of all of this data, the district utilizes a data system that tracks and monitors students’ achievement by district, site, grade level, subgroup, class, and teacher. The data are disaggregated to identify students’ needs, to allow teachers regularly to track and report students’ proficiency levels, to shape instruction, and to identify at-risk students who need further intervention. The system gives teachers the information they need “to know how far back they need to go to scaffold for reading levels, vocabulary, background knowledge,” says Nesvold.

Ultimate Benefits

So why do some districts go “Val Verde” and others limp along? Butler has an opinion: “We have fabulous leadership. Everyone at the top, from the superintendent on down, understands

*“There was a moment in sports when employing a coach was unimaginable—and then came a time when **not** doing so was unimaginable. We care about results in sports, and if we care half as much about results in schools . . . we may reach the same conclusion.”¹*

teachers at the elementary level were given the opportunity to learn how to “use formative assessments to help direct our class placements, groupings, and instruction,” says Nesvold. From kindergarten through its middle schools, the district uses Dibels assessments, which “gives us the data we need to know each student’s level of skill,” plan programs accordingly, and provide data-driven instruction.

Val Verde has developed and implemented a variety of additional student assessment measures (along with the State Testing and Reporting system, the STAR) that are used K–12 districtwide to evaluate students’ progress toward proficiency in the California academic content standards in reading/language

special education, and they understand that it is important to develop quality special education programs and services—along with the skills the staff needs to implement these programs. Such efforts take investing money for support staff to assist teachers and for staff development. It also takes moral support to back the implementation of inclusive, flexible special education programs.”

This district’s efforts seem to be working. Teachers have come to embrace the changes and clearly enjoy being more effective in the classroom, and students are learning—their scores are proving that. Val Verde’s program improvement flywheel is gaining momentum—and its investments are paying off. ♦

Download the complete article about Val Verde USD from www.calstat.org/infoAdditionalResources.html

1. Gawande, Atul. *The New Yorker*. Oct. 3, 2011. “Personal Best: Top Athletes and Singers Have Coaches. Should You?”

Resources for Assistive Technology

AT Network, a project of the California Foundation for Independent Living Centers and Department of Rehabilitation, connects Californians with new and used assistive technology devices to help them live independently: www.atnet.org; 800-390-2699.

Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (CEDD), works to expand knowledge of and access to appropriate assistive technology and offers training for professionals working with students with disabilities: <http://cedd.mindinstitute.org>

Clearinghouse for Specialized Media and Translations (CSMT), part of the California Department of Education, produces accessible versions of textbooks, workbooks, and works of literature for students who are blind, visually impaired, or have other print disabilities: www.cde.ca.gov/re/pn/sml

Communication Technology Education Center (CTEC), a project of the Supported Life Institute, provides hands-on augmentative and alternative communication trainings related to speech-generating devices: www.supportedlife.org/ctec; 916-921-5639.

Family Center on Technology and Disability (FCTD), a federally funded resource, offers information and services on assistive and instructional technology: www.fctd.info/

SEEDS (Supporting Early Education Delivery Systems), a project of the California Department of Education, Special Education Division, connects California's early intervention programs and families to assistive technology resources for young children with disabilities—infants/toddlers and preschoolers: www.scoe.net/seeds/resources/at/at.html

Internet Resources

All Students

http://aim.cast.org/learn/historyarchive/backgroundpapers/curriculum_modification
“Curriculum Modifications,” from the National Center on Accessing the General Curriculum, clarifies the definition and nature of curriculum modifications, emphasizes their importance in improving education for all children, and provides examples and resources to enrich classroom practices for diverse learners.

<http://nichcy.org/schoolage/effective-practices/gened>
NICHY, the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, provides links to strategies for improving the success of students with disabilities in the general education curriculum and classroom.

www.sdesa6.org/content/docs/StrategiesThatDifferentiateInstructionK_4-080808.pdf
Strategies That Differentiate Instruction: Grades K–4 is a practical, 28-page document that introduces differentiation and explains a variety of strategies for supporting all learners.

English Language Learners

www.cal.org/resources/digest/0108ortiz.html
“English Language Learners With Special Needs: Effective Instructional Strategies,” from the Center for Applied Linguistics, explains how improving the academic performance of students from non-English-speaking backgrounds requires a focus on the prevention of failure and on early intervention for struggling learners. The article offers a framework for meeting the needs of these students in general education and suggests ways to put into place specific systems of prevention and early intervention to ensure that students meet their academic potential.

Accommodations: Instructional and Testing Supports for Students with Disabilities

This training module from the IRIS Center provides examples of instructional accommodations and modifications, suggests ways to implement them in the classroom, and offers strategies for ensuring their effectiveness: <http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/acc/chalcycle.htm>

See also IRIS Center podcasts: Martha Thurlow on using accommodations for students with disabilities (http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/resource_podcast/thurlow_acc01.html); and Ryan Kettler on the relationship between accommodations and assessment practices (http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/resource_podcast/kettler_acc02.html).

Students with Cognitive Disabilities

www.k8accesscenter.org/training_resources/general_educationcurriculum.asp
“Access to the General Education Curriculum for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities,” from The Access Center, explores ways to provide access to general education for students with cognitive disabilities.

Help in the Science and Math Classroom for Students with Learning Disabilities

http://educationnorthwest.org/webfm_send/753
The Northwest Regional Education Laboratory makes available a document designed to help teachers develop inclusive instructional practices in science and mathematics classrooms: *Mathematics and Science Instruction for Students With Learning Disabilities*.

Adapting Curriculum and Instruction in Inclusive Classrooms

S. Cole, B. Horvath, C. Chapman, C. Deschenes, D.G. Ebeling, and J. Sprague. 2000. This video and hand-book set is designed to guide teachers—from elementary school through high school—in curricular adaptations to address the learning and instructional needs of students. DVD with 92-page manual. Call #24237.

The Autism Checklist: A Practical Reference for Parents and Teachers

Paula Kluth and John Shouse. 2009. This book provides information on autism in a concise, easy-to-read checklist format and offers practical advice on topics ranging from behavior to nutrition. 240 pages. Call #24236.

Differentiating Textbooks: Strategies to Improve Student Comprehension and Motivation

Char Forsten, Jim Grant, and Betty Hollas. 2003. This book provides practical direction to teachers on differentiating textbooks as the next logical step to better supporting students' efforts to read, comprehend, and retain what they are taught in content-area materials.

Inclusive Elementary Schools: Recipes for Success

(2nd ed.) by Doug Fisher, Nancy Frey, and Caren Sax. 2004. This book walks readers through a step-by-step process to determine what and how to teach elementary students with disabilities in general education classrooms. The publication highlights strategies for accommodating and modifying assignments and activities by using core curriculum. (See insert to this issue for ideas from Fisher and Frey.) Call #24238, #24239.

The RiSE Library

Resources in Special Education (RiSE) lends materials to California residents, who pay only for return postage. The items on this page represent a sample of the library's holdings. Go to www.php.com/services/libraries to search complete listings. To order materials, phone or e-mail RiSE librarian Judy Bower: 408-727-5775; judy@php.com.

The book also discusses ways to motivate students when they are confronted by less-than-engaging texts. 160 pages. Call #24233.

From Tutor Scripts to Talking Sticks: 100 Ways to Differentiate Instruction in K–12 Inclusive Classrooms

Paula Kluth and Sheila Danaher. 2010. This book features 100 teacher-designed strategies for K–12 educators working to meet the needs of all students in inclusive classrooms. It offers general and special educators manageable ways to give students extra support, scaffolding, reminders, organizational tips, and enrichment. 280 pages. Call #24235.

Individualized Supports for Students with Problem Behaviors: Designing Positive Behavior Plans

Linda M. Bambara and Lee Kern. 2005. This book is a practical guide to designing positive behavior support plans for students with such disabilities as mental retardation, autism, learning disabilities, and emotional/behavioral disorders. Filled with examples, the book shows how to conduct a functional assessment, how to develop a support plan using a team-based approach; and more. 400 pages. Call #24234.

Special Education for All Teachers

R. P. Colarusso and C. M. O'Rourke. 2007. This comprehensive book focuses on practical issues of educating students

with special needs and students who are at risk for learning problems. The book also addresses assessment and classroom management strategies, the referral process, individualized education programs (IEP), technology, collaboration, and more. 571 pages. Call #24231.

Teachers' Guides to Inclusive Practices: Behavioral Support

Rachel Janney and Martha Snell. 2010. This guidebook gives educators a plan for implementing positive behavior supports using a three-tier process that addresses universal interventions within a whole school, selected interventions with students exhibiting risk behaviors, and specialized interventions with students who need intensive, individualized help. The book also introduces strategies to help students improve communication, social, and self-control skills. 171 pages. Call #22549.

Teachers' Guides to Inclusive Practices: Modifying Schoolwork

Rachel Janney and Martha E. Snell. 2010. Offering approaches to adapting schoolwork for students with disabilities, this book is designed for K–12 educators in inclusive classrooms and focuses on curricular, instructional, and alternative adaptations. It includes step-by-step guidance on planning adaptations for individual students and adapting instruction and tests in key skills and content areas. 150 pages. Call #23416.

Technology and the Diverse Learner: A Guide to Classroom Practice

M. Bray, A. Brown, and T. D. Green. 2004. Designed for classrooms of diverse learners, this book helps teachers incorporate technology into instructions for all students, regardless of ability level or linguistic or cultural background. It also includes useful resources for selecting technologies and instructional strategies that are suitable for particular groups of students. 110 pages. Call #24232.

Calendar 2012

April 24

3:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Triangulating Postsecondary Goals: A Webinar

This online event will focus on identifying postsecondary goals and aligning them with academic and industry standards. Sponsored by the California Community of Practice on Secondary Transition, the Webinar is designed for teams of students, parents, teachers, transition specialists, administrators, business partners, and others. For more information, contact Jill Larson at 916-327-0866 or jarlson@cde.ca.gov.

July 16–17

School Improvement Innovation Summit

This summit, sponsored by the School Improvement Network, is an opportunity for educators to learn from innovative and successful classroom teachers; school, district, and state administrators; researchers; and educational experts, who will discuss what needs to change in schools, how to change, and why innovation is necessary. Topics will include the successful implementation of the common core standards, educational equity, innovative leadership, and more. Salt Lake City, UT. For more information or to register, go to www.sis2012.com/.

July 18–19

Common Core Institute

The Common Core Institute will train educational leaders in giving teachers instruction on understanding and implementing the Common Core Standards. Salt Lake City, UT. For more information or to register, go to www.sis2012.com/.

October 21–24

Virtual School Symposium

Sponsored by the International Association for K–12 Online Learning (iNACOL), this symposium is dedicated

to online K–12 learning and provides professional development for educators and school leaders interested in K–12 education solutions for college-readiness, credit recovery, teacher improvement, overcoming teacher shortages, Web-based core and advanced courses, and personalized learning solutions for students. New Orleans, LA. For more information, go to www.inacol.org/events/.

October 28–30

28th Annual International Conference on Young Children with Special Needs and Their Families

Designed for educators working in early intervention or early childhood special education, this conference provides an opportunity to explore early childhood issues of policy, autism, recommended practices, tiered interventions, challenging behavior, personnel development, research, assessment, cultural diversity, and more. Minneapolis, MN. For more information, e-mail Sarah Mulligan at sarah.mulligan@dec-sped.org or go to www.dec-sped.org/conference.

Awards Available!

Middle school and high school educators may be eligible for the 2012–2013 **Leadership Site Award** for successful programs in one of five areas: special education-general education collaboration, transition to adult life, reading/literacy, positive behavioral interventions and supports, and family-school-community partnerships. Winners receive substantial monetary and technical resources for continuing their success and sharing their work with others. For more information and application materials, go to www.calstat.org/rlsmaterials.html.

The 2012–13 **Regional Institute Host** competition is designed to support schools and districts interested in delivering high-quality professional development and training in their areas. Visit www.calstat.org/ri/materialsx.html for more information and for application materials.

Both awards are sponsored by California Services for Technical Assistance and Training, a special project of the California Department of Education, Special Education Division. Questions? E-mail marin.brown@calstat.org.

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Last spring Jeff Mossa received a message on his cell phone from a number he didn't recognize. When he called back, he heard the voice of a student from three years ago, a boy with learning disabilities who had struggled in school. The boy was now in junior high, and he and his mother had texted Mossa a picture of the boy's report card—all As and Bs. Mossa chokes up a little when he tells this story, clearly moved that after three years the boy still wanted to include him in the celebration of this academic success.

Anyone connected with K–12 education knows the story: School budgets are shrinking. Class sizes are increasing. Staff are being cut. Yet somehow, a number of school districts in the state are showing remarkable improvements. Val Verde Unified in Riverside County, where Jeff Mossa works, is one of them.

Statistically, this district of more than 19,000 students should only be struggling. Students considered “minority” count for 93.6 percent of the student population. Nearly three-quarters of them live in poverty (the average for a district of this size is one-half), and 26 percent of Val Verde's students are English language learners (again above the state average). Indeed, in 2007 Val Verde's elementary schools scored a low 448 in the Academic Performance Index, and they overwhelmingly failed to meet their “targeted growth in academic areas.” This was not a promising picture.

Fast forward to 2011, when the district report read, “All of our elementary schools achieved above 800 on the [API] with two of the elementary schools well above 850.”

What happened?

As it turns out, between 2007 and 2011, nothing terribly dramatic. Unlike many organizations that grab onto the newest trend for improvement in an attempt to produce more favorable results—only to switch after a few years to the next fashionable program or strategy—Val Verde went “old school” and sought what organizational guru

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Jim Collins calls “no miracle moment. Instead, a down-to-earth, pragmatic, committed-to-excellence process, [with] its people on track for the long haul.”¹

Every school in the district has been working hard for a number of years to implement research-proven programs and practices—and ultimately to improve systems. What happens with this approach is what Collins calls “the

flywheel” effect: it takes a great deal of time, effort, and determination to initiate new programs and get them going, but when the effort is sustained, the eventual momentum and power—the flywheel—become unstoppable. Significant change happens.

This flywheel trajectory seems to be exactly what Val Verde is riding.

Vicki Butler, who came to the district

in 2007 as Director of Special Education, clearly loves talking about all of the good things that were in place when she showed up. “There was an enthusiastic special education department with a strong sense of accountability. We do have lots of problems in some of our neighborhoods—poverty and gangs. But to our teachers, the background and the language of

Val Verde, continued page 7



Val Verde USD high school students engaged in a learning strategies class

1. Jim Collins. “Good to Great,” at www.jimcollins.com/article_topics/articles/good-to-great.html