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April-May 1989

Learning Together ... How To



In this special mini-issue: (A full issue returns in June)

Learning Together-HOW TO

On Ethics... The Curriculum Under The Curriculum

About our cover: Melissa and Darcy learning together complete sentences in me." They come into my office and INITIATE, appropriately, about what we should talk about...or work on. In remembering all the adaptations and considerations required by the ethics. I have come to know the students in a whole new way.

These are more than ethics. They are an attitude reminding me to take time to wait through the students' mistakes, allowing them the dignity of recognizing their own problems and arriving, when possible, at their own solutions. It is a reminder to ask permission from the students to be observed in the training sites by visitors. All activities are explained, and materials are developed to assist in the explanation. Participation with understanding is a special freedom. The ethics are a "curriculum" that reminds me to encourage and allow the learning between the structured activities.

Certainly the ethics find me catching myself on mistakes of the past. OOPS! An employee at Worden Seating brought one mistake to my attention, and by involving several people and incorporating ideas ...we found a solution. What we have learned, how it has changed our approach, is ours forever. The ethics guarantee the same opportunity for our students. Nothing like a written guarantee.

Learning Together: How To

People often comment that in this newsletter it sometimes seems we are addressing professionals...at other times, parents. That is an accurate observation, since this newsletter is distributed to both parents and professionals. It's a fine line for an editor to walk. With an article such as this, however, we're addressing everyone.

An exciting educational concept has captured the attention of many parents, educators, and professionals. It has directly influenced the lives of many students across the country. At Jenison High School, the concept has directly affected 10% of the entire student body this year alone. Known by many names, among them "supported education", "integration", and "inclusive education"- it refers to the placement of handicapped students in the regular classroom, most often with support, to socially integrate and learn among non-handicapped, age appropriate peers.

This year, we have had three students placed in three different regular education classes: Theatre I, Individualized Writing, and Clothing and Textiles. The results have been fantastic...and we are busy documenting student successes and concerns so we can improve our support to our students and their regular education teachers in the future.

It's a draw on who is learning more, our students or our staff. There are some things we feel, but can't as yet prove. Others we were surprised to learn. Some we have listed here.

1. Osmosis. Some people feel that if you place handicapped

students in regular education environments, they will learn so much by "osmosis". Just PLACE them there...the handicapped student can learn so much by listening to the conversation and responding to the social interactions around him.

This writer believes in learning, but not by osmosis. At the secondary level, in this high school, there are five minutes between classes to be social and communicate. Class begins, class begins. What about our autistic students the remaining 60 minutes? Even in classes that are highly interactive, it is probable our student could get "lost." Where's the dignity in the osmosis of observing 30 students doing something you can't do? This is a potential tragedy of supported education.

We can do better. <u>Insist</u> on an informed and appropriately prepared regular education classroom. <u>Insist</u> on coaches, if only initially. <u>Insist</u> on an adapted curriculum. That brings us to #2.

2. What is an Adapted Curriculum? At first, this writer gazed for weeks at the dittoes from the regular classroom and in desperation decided... "Well, I guess we do half of each?" Objectives were then written for concepts from you guessed it half of each ditto.

NO! We discovered that doesn't work. Don't gaze at dittoes. Review the objectives and goals for the course. LOOK AT THE COURSE TITLE. Then, find the <u>functional correlate</u> for that course and develop objectives and activities for the secondary handicapped student to complete alongside non-handicapped classmates. In sewing, for example, develop activities and adaptations to help the integrated student <u>sew</u>. This is hard to describe within the confines of this newsletter, but for examples of what we mean...contact us.

- 3. What will the result be? We entered the supported education initiative with visions of all students, handicapped and non-handicapped, learning all they have in common. Be prepared, and have supports available, for our students who suddenly realize how they are different. We've several examples. The important thing to remember is that our students become very aware of the limits of their abilities. With support and understanding, all remains well. Our students can come to appreciate, in the end, all they have in common. Again, insist on the best we can do. Insist on monitoring of student performance and how our student FEELS in regular education. Ensure a positive experience. Happiness is important.
- 4. Don't rock the boat. If you have ever been in a canoe or rowboat where it becomes necessary to "change positions", you've experience with this already. Supported education requires that we all get creative and "change our roles" to get to shore. Work together. Cooperate or you will get very wet and the concept may sink. Be conciencious and very, very, careful. Let the student row.