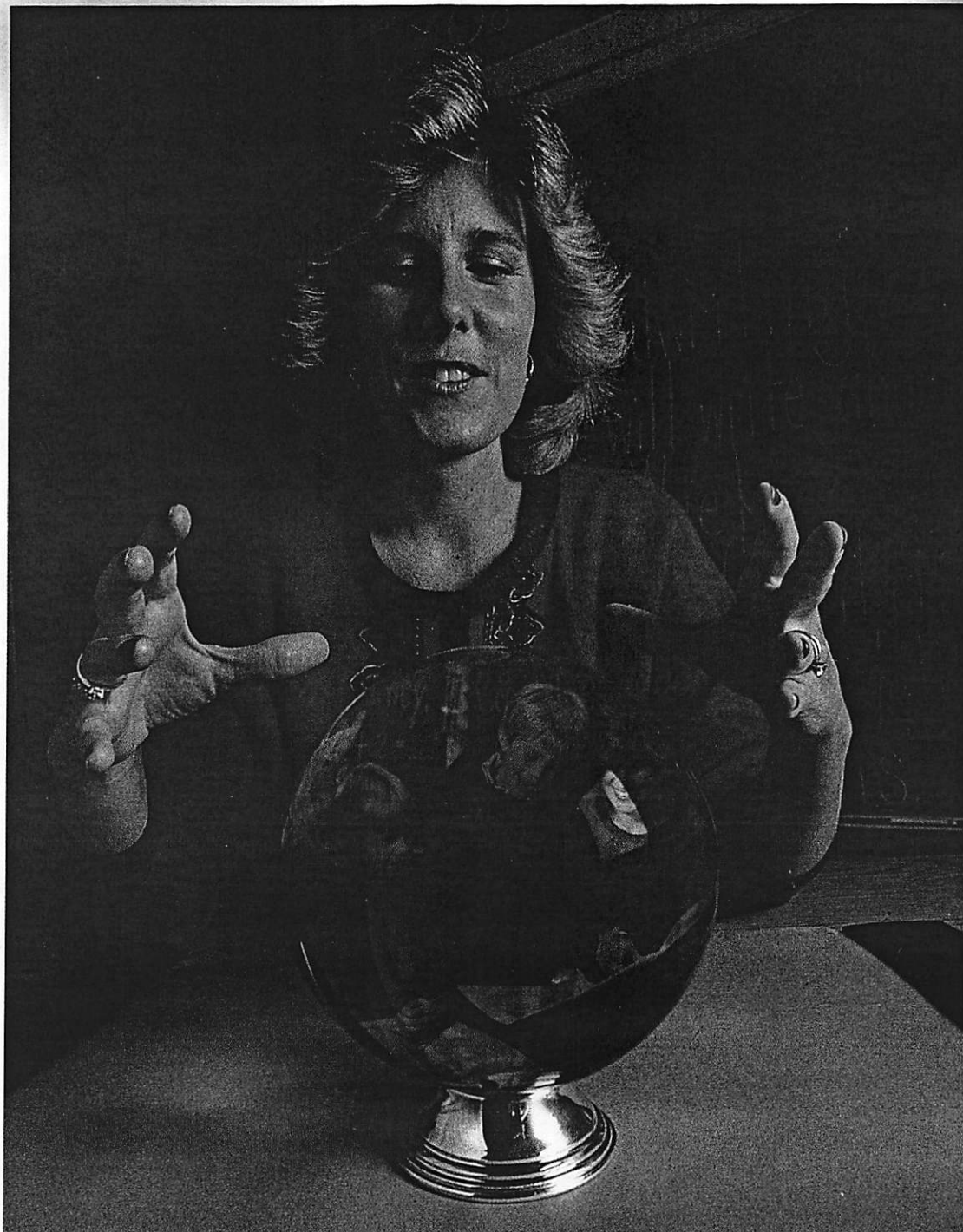


# TEACHING

## EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN

W I N T E R 1990



*Visions For The Next Decade*

THE COUNCIL FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN

# EVERYONE BELONGS

The movement to educate *all* children—even students labeled as severely or multiply handicapped—in ordinary classrooms with their brothers and sisters, friends and neighbors, has caught the imagination of parents and educators across Canada.

This momentum is founded on a simple, yet profound philosophy: *Everyone belongs*. In a system in which each belongs, the homeroom for *all* children is the ordinary classroom. Every child's education begins with placement in a regular classroom, with the necessary support services provided to the child and the regular class teacher. With this system, the use of special, self-contained classrooms is almost extinct. In the Waterloo Region Separate School Board, for example, which has a student population of approximately 20,000, very few children are served in self-contained classes. All the other children with special needs are learning alongside their age peers in ordinary classrooms.

In this article, a case study illustrates how this system works and introduces MAPS, a planning process used to facilitate full participation for

## With the MAPS Action Planning System

children with challenging educational needs.

Marsha Forest  
and  
Evelyn Lusthaus

### Carla Comes to School

In the spring of 1986, Danny and Sandra Barabadora and their daughter

Carla came to their local school to register Carla for seventh grade. Carla was labeled severely mentally retarded, but her parents were requesting their local school to permit Carla to attend class with other children her age beginning the following September. The school board was the Hamilton-Wentworth Separate School Board.

The principal welcomed the family enthusiastically and told them how excited he was to have Carla in the school. He also admitted that he and his staff had a certain amount of anxiety about having a child with such challenging needs entering a regular seventh-grade class and that they wanted to do their best. They had previously integrated other children with special needs, but none whose needs were as challenging as Carla's appeared to be.

A meeting was set before the end of the spring semester to sit down and chat about the overall expectations for Carla's schooling. The principal, receiving home room teacher, and Carla's parents were there. The principal asked about the parents' expectations, explained the school program in general, and provided an overall picture of how Carla could fit in.

Just before school began in the fall, another short meeting was held with the principal, receiving teacher, and parents together with a team of other people who could be helpful. Because Carla had a mental handicap, a special education resource person was present; because her language was very limited, the speech and language resource people were there; because she was being integrated into the school, an outside consultant was invited to assist in the planning process.

Everyone agreed that the teacher, the other students, and Carla all needed to get to know one another for 2 weeks before any specific planning would take place. It was decided that Carla would follow the regular seventh-grade school day and the teacher would get to know her without an educational assistant present. At the end of the 2 weeks, another team meeting would be held.

On the first day, the teacher was exhausted and tense, but by the third day, he mentioned that he was "amazed at how much Carla could



*Through MAPS (Map Action Planning System) children with challenging exceptional needs add to the quality of education for everybody.*



do" and that he was getting to know her very well, particularly because the assistant wasn't there. Could he handle it for 2 weeks? Yes, as long as the team got together again after the 2 weeks.

During that time, the consultant approached Carla's class of peers to begin to build a "friendship circle" around her. This involved speaking honestly and directly to the students about why Carla was being integrated and what the students could do to be involved in the process. The consultant asked for volunteers to form a friendship circle around Carla, and the teacher selected 4 main actors from the 19 students who volunteered. A telephone committee was formed so that Carla would get one telephone call each evening from one of her new classmates. Carla had never before received her own phone call, but

despite her limited language, she was able to communicate with her new friends.

### MAPS: An Action Planning System

The team meeting was the beginning of a formal planning process for Carla's school program. The process they followed was based on a planning system developed at McGill University (Forest, Snow, 1987) called MAPS (Map Action Planning System). MAPS is a systems approach designed to help team members plan for the integration of students with challenging needs into regular age-appropriate classrooms. Members of the MAPS planning team for Carla included the existing planning team as well as her

brothers and many of her new friends at school.

A unique feature of the MAPS planning team is the inclusion of children in the planning process. As the principal of Carla's school said, "If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, I wouldn't have believed it." He was referring to the influence and power of student participation in the planning process. The inclusion of students is a key element in the MAPS process, for students are often the most underutilized resource in schools. The point of the planning process is to come up with a plan that makes good sense for the youngster with challenging needs. In our experience, students often understand this far better than adults, and without their presence on the team the results would not be as good.



The meeting opened with a review of the events to date. Over all, it had been a good 2 weeks. The teacher, the class, and Carla had become acquainted with one another. Now it was time to focus on the seven key questions that are at the heart of the MAPS planning process.

## What Is Carla's History?

This question is meant to give all team members a picture of what has happened in the student's life. Parents are asked to summarize the key milestones that have affected their child's life and schooling. For example, one key milestone in Carla's life was that she had been critically ill for about a year, hospitalized, and not expected to live. Someone from the family was with her day and night for over a year, which affected Carla's ability to be without her mother once she went back to school.

## What Is Your Dream for Carla?

Parents of children with handicaps have often lost their ability to dream; they have not had the opportunity to think about what they want most for their children. This question restores the chance to have a vision based on what they really want, rather than what they think they can get. With this question, we tell parents: "State your dream. What vision do you have for your child in the future? Don't hold back. Say what you've never dared to say before. Forget reality for a while and dream."

Sometimes this is the first time professionals have ever had the opportunity to hear what parents hold in their hearts and minds for their children's future. It is important to listen. Carla's parents said they dreamed that Carla would be able to go to high school with her brothers, get a job, and one day live with some friends in the community.

## What Is Your Nightmare?

The nightmare makes explicit what is in the heart of virtually every parent of a child with a handicap. Carla's parents said, "We're afraid Carla will end up in an institution, work in a sheltered workshop, and have no one when we die."

## Who Is Carla?

The next question, "Who is Carla?", was meant to begin a general brainstorming session on Carla's characteristics, no holds barred. We went around the circle and asked everyone to state characteristics until all thoughts were exhausted. Examples of the responses to Carla's "Who" question follow.

- Is 12 years old.
- Is happy and smiling.
- Has two brothers.
- Lives with mom and dad.
- Is lively.
- Loves touch and warmth.
- Pulls her hair.
- Is playful.
- Is temperamental.
- Is inquisitive.
- Has a real personality.
- Is small.
- Has a good memory.
- Is fun to be with.
- Wants to be involved.
- Uses some words.

The facilitator asked the parents to circle the three words they felt best described Carla. Her mother circled "happy," "temperamental," and "real personality," while her father circled "aware," "memory," and "small." One of the teachers circled "temperamental," "small," and "memory." The students circled "personality," "small," and "lively." The rule followed was "No jargon, no labels; just describe how you see the person." The result was that the image of a unique and distinct personality emerged.

## What Are Carla's Strengths, Gifts, and Talents?

This is a vital question, for all too often we focus on what a person's weak areas are. Many parents have problems with this because they have been focusing on negatives for so long. This question turns their focus to the positives. Carla's planning group responded as follows.

- She's a real personality.
- She's persistent.
- She has a good memory.
- She's inquisitive.
- She loves people.
- She's daring.
- She's a good communicator.
- She loves music.
- She can follow directions.
- She eats by herself.

- She dresses and undresses herself.
- She can turn on the VCR and use the tape recorder on her own.
- She washes her hands and brushes her teeth.

## What Are Carla's Needs?

This question is very important. Needs vary according to who is defining them, so Carla's group was divided to get a variety of points of view. Their answers to the question follow.

According to her parents:

- Carla needs a communication system.
- She needs a way to express feelings and emotions.
- She needs to be independent.
- She needs self-motivation in starting things she presently cannot do.
- She needs to stop pulling her hair.
- She needs friends at home and at school.

According to her peers:

- She needs to be with her own age group.
- She needs to feel like one of the group.
- She needs to wear teenage clothes.
- She needs goop on her hair.
- She needs to have her ears pierced.
- She needs a boyfriend.

The teachers were in agreement with the parents on what Carla's needs were, but they added that she needs to fit in and be part of the group.

At the close of this exercise, four main needs were summarized: Carla needs friends at home and at school; she needs a communication system; she needs to learn to be more independent; and she needs to stop pulling her hair.

## Carla's Ideal Day

To many, Carla would be defined as a severely to profoundly mentally handicapped student who should be segregated in a school or class for retarded students. To her receiving school, she was a spunky 12-year-old who should be attending seventh grade with her peers. The school had all the right ingredients: a cooperative family, a welcoming and cooperative school principal, a nervous but inviting teacher, and 27 seventh-grade students.

Thus, with a team approach, the idea that they did not have all the answers, and a spirit of adventure, the

team started to create a plan. The teacher indicated that his main need was for an educational assistant at various times of the day and a program created by the special education resource people.

Now the team was ready to go step by step through the day and determine activities, goals, objectives, and environments. In many educational planning processes, goals and objectives stand outside the rhythm of the school day; they *should*, however, flow from the environment and be intertwined with the daily schedule and rhythm of the classroom. The goals and objectives for Carla were arranged around the following schedule:

8:40-8:45 a.m. The day begins. Carla arrives in a taxi and is met by Susie and some other children. Who is responsible for getting Carla from the taxi to the classroom? Volunteer: Susie.

8:45-8:55. Opening exercises. Carla will sit at her desk in the middle of the second row, sing "O, Canada," and participate in the beginning of the day.

8:55-9:30. Language arts period. Does it make sense for Carla to follow the seventh-grade program? Does it meet her needs? No. Can it be modified? No. Should she have her own program in the language and communication area? Yes. Where should this take place? In the room, at the side table where other students do individualized work. The educational assistant will carry out a program designed by the special education resource team to improve Carla's functional reading, writing, and speaking.

9:30-9:50. French. After much discussion, the team agreed that Carla enjoys French and that the French teacher welcomes her, but she should not stay for the whole period. She will stay 20 minutes for the conversational French portion of the class, songs, weather, and so forth. She will listen, learn to recognize French, and learn a few words. She can learn numbers and colors and point to some pictures in French. Carla's homeroom teacher and the French teacher will design this curriculum with the assistance of the special education resource person. No educational assistant is needed in this time slot.

9:50-10:10. Individualized computer program work. Carla will work on the

computer with the educational assistant or by herself in the homeroom classroom where everyone else uses the computer. Programs will be developed in cooperation with the school district communications team.

10:10-10:25. Recess. Carla will get ready to go out with a volunteer circle of friends. They will make sure that she is not trampled.

10:30-11:00. The seventh-grade class has either French or communications. At this time a creative communication program developed by district personnel is being put in place for Carla. For example, one goal is learning to dial and talk on the telephone. The school principal has volunteered both his office and his telephone (no long distance calls).

11:00-11:20. Silent reading. Carla will choose library books and do silent reading along with her classmates. No extra help is needed other than that from peers.

11:20-11:50. Religion. Carla will have a modified program designed by her homeroom teacher and the special education resource teacher. No extra assistance is needed except for what other children offer. She will have tasks to complete along with the other students, but they will be at her level of performance.

11:50-12:30. Lunch. Carla will eat with a group of friends, and the assistant will be available, but out of sight. She will go out or stay in with her friends and listen to music or play as the rest of the group does.

12:30-1:00 p.m. Lunch hour continues. Carla will have some quiet time with the other students who read books or listen to music, tapes, records, or videos. She will be with a circle of friends (boys and girls).

1:05-2:05. Math. Carla will have a parallel math program and work with the educational assistant on learning to use the computer, and calculator, counting, numbers, shopping, and related skills.

2:05-2:20. Recess.

2:20-3:30. Rotary. It was agreed that this would be inappropriate for Carla, and here was where in-school work experience could be built in to her schedule. Carla, who likes plants, will work with the educational assistant in taking care of all the plants in

the school. They will also buy seeds and start new plants, and in the spring they will plant them outdoors.

3:30. Dismissal. Carla's day is full, with a variety of environments, activities, and events. Both Carla and her parents like it. It will be revised and reviewed as needed. The overall objectives for communication, independence, and making friends are an integral part of the daily schedule.

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## Conclusion

Of course, providing Carla with a good education within the regular classroom means making a commitment of extra resources. This requires a change in perspective of the school system administrators so that special education personnel and resources can be used to support children in regular classrooms.

Such changes are occurring in school districts where administrators are, as George Flynn, Director of the Waterloo Region Separate School Board, put it, "committed to quality education for *all* children; this means *all* children attending school together."

Quality education means effective teaching of the 3R's, but it also includes emphasis on another R: *Relationships*. The philosophy that "everyone belongs" encompasses the children who have previously been told they do *not* belong. As they bring their gifts and special needs to regular classrooms and enter into relationships with their neighbors and classmates, they can add to the quality of education for everybody.

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## Reference

- Forest, M., & Snow, J. (1987). *More education! integration*. The G. Allan Rocher Institute, Toronto.

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Marsha Forest is Director, Center for Integrated Education and Community, Frontier College, Toronto, Ontario. Evelyn Lusthaus is Professor, Faculty of Education, McGill University, Montreal.

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