CURRICULUM

Every teacher knows what "curriculum" means in the usual sense. It is the program of studies laid down by a school or other authority for an area of learning.

- It may refer to what is studied in math, say, for one year.

 (E.g. the Grade four math curriculum)
- It may refer to math as studied over a number of years at continually increasing levels of sophistication. (E.g. the elementary school math curriculum)

This latter view of curriculum as a continuous process of learning in any area is preferred for inclusive classrooms.

It gives more power to the teacher for the control of what aspect of the curriculum is being studied, and gives more opportunity for children to study at the level of the curriculum appropriate to their needs. The teacher who believes that teaching starts with the needs of the child and that the curriculum should be interpreted flexibly to meet those needs is a teacher who can function inclusively. It is this teacher who realizes that expecting a child to fit into a set curriculum at any grade is a prescription for frustration for the teacher and failure for the child.

THE CURRICULUM IS NOT OUR MASTER.

IT IS OUR SERVANT IN EDUCATION.

The inclusive teacher is a student oriented professional who:

- © knows the student is more important than the curriculum.
- © knows every student is a learner.
- © knows children learn better together than apart.
- knows the teacher can control the curriculum to the benefit of the student.
- knows the effort is worth the prize of a child's learning.

FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL TEACHING

Ask yourself four simple but fundamental questions as you plan your teaching for any student. Reflecting on these questions, and using them as guides, can assist you in working with all your students and ease the challenges of diverse ranges of ability.

1. What is the essential knowledge to be gained?

What is more essential when studying the discovery of America?

That people crossed the ocean in fragile ships from the old world and found the new world?

That Columbus' ships were the Nina, Pinta, and Santa Maria?

There are essential points and points of detail and elaboration in any area. It is interesting,

and may win you a point in a trivia contest, to know the names of Columbus' ships. But it is a complementary elaboration to the essential fact of the finding of the new world.

Most learners are quite capable of mastering the essential facts and fill these out with such elaborations. Others will delve into details and elaborations of the essential facts and master them as well, because that is the level and character of their ability. Still others may find it sufficiently challenging to master only the essentials.

It is the essential information which is the focus of any lesson and of any act of learning. Determine the essentials and the elaborations of any lesson for your benefit and that of your students.

2. How do my students learn best?

We know that different children have different learning styles. Fortunately, the majority can learn under a variety of instructional approaches with relative ease. Others benefit from an approach which is chosen to fit their personal learning styles. It is fortunate also that most teachers possess a basic understanding of learning styles.

Do questions such as these tax your knowledge of how students learn?

If a student has a hearing impairment, is it best for the teacher to rely solely on verbal communication or to support verbal communication with visual stimuli such as print and pictures?

If a student needs some type of movement to support learning, should all students be expected to always remain seated and still?

We are the teachers. We know the answers to such questions and to a great many more.

Just as Helen Reddy proclaimed "I am woman", so we can state proudly "I am teacher". The

inclusive philosophy simply says that if we should remember to ask the fundamental question of how a student learns best, then we will be more insightful and effective in our teaching. We can bring our knowledge to bear to our advantage and that of our students.

Student-centered teaching is more than a concept. It is a practice that you can bring to the benefit of all your students. Later in this manual the basics of learning styles will be reviewed with a focus on including students with diverse levels of ability.

3. What modifications to a lesson would permit more students to learn effectively in my classroom?

Teachers know how to modify. You have studied how to make your lessons meaningful and have made modifications time after time as you assessed your students' learning needs. To review and perhaps extend your knowledge, a later section is devoted to adaptation and modification.

At this point, it is sufficient to look back at your responses to the first two fundamental questions. If you can differentiate the essential information from the details and elaborations of any topic, and if you think about how your students learn best, you will have gone a long way to developing appropriate modifications for any student, no matter what learning ability level he or she has.

The secret of successful modification is flexibility. View the curriculum as a pliable guide which may be shaped to the needs of the student.

For instance, verbal communication, particularly when supported by a hearing aid system,

can do much for many hearing impaired students. However, routine use of an overhead projector, the chalkboard, or other method of presenting essential information visually will help those with hearing impairment. A peer note-taker is a valuable support for the student who must focus on speechreading and finds note taking challenging. At times, an educational assistant or volunteer with sign language skills is valuable. These ideas and others are available through collaboration with resource teachers, peers, parents, and others. A number of these modifications to routine instruction will assist other students in the class as well.

The secret of successful modification is flexibility. View the curriculum as a flexible guide which may be shaped and conveyed according to the needs of the student.

4. How will my students show what they have learned?

Teaching curriculum content does not end when you have presented your lesson. When your part is done, it is time to for your students to show you how well you have taught. Your success is determined by how well your students can demonstrate their learning.

What is the trick to testing your success? The answer is one that most teachers know, if they pause for reflection..

Ask students to respond in a way that they can handle.

Students all have areas of strength and areas of relative less strength. When speaking of difference in terms of ability, it is not uncommon to have students who are challenged by writing, speech, mobility, etc. Do not ask a student to show knowledge through any area of weakness they may have. Use their strengths.

Take Shalini. She struggles with written answers. Would you set her a test that requires her to write? Or are there other possibilities?

What about Mike? He responds best in quiet surroundings. Should he do his assignment at a seat near the door to a busy hallway?

If you aren't certain about someone's strongest response style, why not ask? Students may not always know exactly what their strengths are, but often they will have ideas and they tend to benefit from being asked. If they are really uncertain, or if their degree of challenge interferes with a clear response, ask the other students or the parents. If you have adopted a collaborative approach, you do not have to do it all alone.

The central element in all four fundamental questions is that you have tried to go to where the student is in your teaching. If you do that, you will truly be the master of the curriculum, and your students will do better.

DO I HAVE TO DO IT ALL ALONE?

This is a fair question. In answering it, it is useful to recall another fundamental which often is not emphasized enough in our professional development, nor often enough by the leaders in our schools.

Teaching is a social affair.

Your closest colleague in teaching is the learner. Without the learners, their involvement and their cooperation, you will be in for a frustrating time. Ideas for involving your students as active partners in defining and mastering the curriculum best for them will be found throughout this manual.

You are surrounded by teaching colleagues with a wealth of ideas. You and the

learners do not stand alone in dealing with the curriculum, however. A resource teacher can advise you, suggest programming, teaching, and assessment strategies, and listen to your worries. Other regular class teachers can suggest ways to understand the curriculum and to approach it flexibly. You will benefit also from what they have tried, what didn't work for them, and what did work. They can be a tremendous resource to you, as you can be to them.

Increasingly there are knowledgeable people in the larger community around you. The social service field has professional colleagues who have learned a great deal about child needs, strengths, and desires. Strategies they have developed for the curriculum of life outside the school may work inside it as well. Every community has resource people who work to include all children in the community in clubs, churches, synagogues, mosques, sports, and other areas. Try the Cubs and Scouts, the Brownies and the Girl Guides, dance and music groups, religious instruction groups, and anyone else who may have gathered experience in including people.

Do not forget the other students. They are a fantastic resource! They have understanding of individual needs and abilities. They have wonderfully creative ideas for putting across information. They have patience you can hardly imagine. They are natural risk takers.

Often they don't know that something can't be done, so they go ahead and do it. More about peers later.

Finally, and importantly, there are the parents. They, together with you, know best how a particular child learns, what preferences exist, what times are best for what types of task, and many other things. Though the home may call for a curriculum differing in many ways from that of the school, its value cannot be questioned. It is the missing complementary half to that with which you deal. And they began dealing with their half long before you came on the scene;

they deal with it before you start teaching each day and after you stop for the day; they deal with it on weekends and holidays. They are a resource not to be ignored.

The answer to "Do I have to do it alone?" is collaborative teaching. You have a great many colleagues available to you for your work with any student. In some ways there are more available for support when students with challenging needs are involved. Reach out and ask them to work with you. THEY WILL!

THE ACCESSIBLE CURRICULUM

All of the above deals with making your curriculum accessible to all students at the level of their needs and abilities, making the curriculum accessible. This is really your job as a teacher. It can be challenging. It can be demanding. It does have varying levels of success. You may need to experiment and become a risk taker.

Taking charge of the curriculum and not permitting it to control you and your students is worth it in the returns you and your students will get.

Remember these guidelines.

√ REFLECTIVE

▼ ESSENTIALS

▼ ELABORATIONS

√ STUDENT -CENTERED

√ STRENGTHS

√ ACCESSIBLE

CURRICULUM

MAN IS A SOCIAL ANIMAL

Spinoza declared this

as a fact. Man is a social animal. And Education is a social event. Our society has decided that children learn best when brought together in neighbourhood schools, placed together in age-appropriate groups, and guided by a knowledgeable teacher. Over the past years we have recognized that it is the right of students, regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender, to be educated together for their good and the good of society.

There is no reason to forget this when we think about students with some type of challenge to their learning. Inclusive educators. Inclusive educators believe that the social aspect of learning is so basic that all children of a community should be educated together in the regular classrooms of community schools.

In this belief inclusive educators are supported by <u>Piagetian</u> theory which has given rise to much of our understanding of the process of education and, particularly in recent years, to conflict resolution, Peace Keepers, and other such strategies designed to deal with behavioural challenges in the regular school. <u>Vygotsky's</u> emphases on the positive aspect of socialization on mental functioning and on social interaction to advance learning are supportive as well. A range of other theoretical positions, such as <u>contact theory</u>, which argues that people learn best about each other by being with each other, also bring strength to inclusion of all students in regular classrooms. There is plenty of research available now which proves that when students are educated together, their self-esteem and learning develop more than if they are separated. This

goes both for students with challenging needs and for regular students.

Added to this is the knowledge of every teacher that all children have a right to belong and that self-esteem is largely, if not completely, dependent on the manner in which others regard you. It is only when you are a part of the regular community, in constant contact with peers, walking the same hallways, enjoying the same activities, enduring the same disciplines, and doing all things together, that a sense of self as more similar to others than different can be developed. Inclusive educators recognize the truth of this. They focus on children, not on disabilities, in their professional determination to grant every student the greatest possible opportunity to achieve.

There are many challenges to the teacher in maintaining an inclusive classroom. Education is not a simple job. It is tough, often demanding, sometimes tiring. It is also a great joy. Here are some strategies which may assist you in creating a socially positive environment which will welcome all children to your classroom. Of course, other ideas may be obtained through collaboration with your teaching colleagues, professional development, and reading. You probably already know those which follow. They are simply samples from which you may extend with your own creativity and knowledge of your children.

Classrooms should be designed for interaction.

Seating plans which allow for small groups and larger group activities, as well as individual learning when appropriate, are encouraged. Related to this is the practice of cooperative learning to be addressed more fully in a later section. Remember to set up a plan which allows all equal access to any activity, but which does not place included students routinely on the edges of the group. You might be tempted to do this for reasons

of convenience which are very sensible, but which might interfere with socialization opportunities.

Group decision making is powerful.

Class meetings, in addition to the weekly opening meeting suggested earlier, are a positive tool which develops social cohesion and can address particular problems and needs.

Say a situation comes up where a few students are fooling around and disturbing others. You can set punishments. Or you can hold a ten minute meeting in which students can review accepted classroom behaviour and discuss appropriate ways to maintain it. In this way you make the group responsible for their own behaviour. It may take a while to set up the routine, and it will not solve all the problems, but teachers find group decision making meetings, effective and valuable in advancing the social curriculum.

Saying "Hello" to your students.

Did you ever attend a class where the teacher appeared not to recognize your existence, or the existence of another student, other than to give you work or note your deficiencies? This is an unfortunate fact in many classrooms for some students. They may be the unattractive, the less than clean, the English as a second language student, the deaf student. What did you feel like? What do they feel like?

As often as possible, be at the door when students enter in the morning, in the afternoon, or after recess. Say hello to them, ask them if they are feeling good, comment on the

weather. You do not have to reflect long to understand the value to all students of being recognized by the teacher. I think it is referred to as being a "model".

If you want to try out this strategy, there are a few things to consider. One is that you may feel it artificial to stand at the door and say "Hello" to a line of thirty students. It is. Try greeting a few each time, or stopping at someone's desk during the day for a personal word, or saying "Goodbye. Have a nice recess". You may not be able to cover every student, every day, but you will be able to cover everyone in short time. If you can't remember who you spoke to, a little checklist maintained in private, and taking up very little time, can be useful.

Being helpful to others.

One characteristic of community is that people help each other. At times the teacher can encourage the development of helpfulness by drawing attention to or creating situations where help can be offered.

For instance, students can assist each other to keep to the schedule by reminding each other of appointment times or how long is available to complete a piece of work.

Someone might need assistance with pushing a wheelchair. Someone else might need help with concentrating on a reading assignment. The teacher can bring such opportunities to the attention of students and draw on volunteers to ensure that things are done as efficiently and as positively as possible.

Be careful not to make helping a duty it at all possible. A duty approach also brings with it the thought of reward, or perhaps imposition. It might also foment a "charitable"

attitude rather than a truly helping one. Some teachers create a "Volunteer Board" on which needs can be noted with a space for a volunteer name. The need can be listed by you or any of the students, or even by others in the school. One benefit of this approach is that the volunteer receives some public recognition. Another is that you can monitor who is volunteering and try to find ways to encourage all to participate.

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As well as developing opportunities for student to volunteer to assist others, it is possible to create opportunity for you and your students to ask for assistance. Somehow in our society we have made it sort of questionable to ask for help. That is one of the things that lead to a charitable view of helping someone, rather than simply the view that it is alright to help and alright to need help at times. It often is the subtle things a teacher does with a class that have the greatest effect. Not all teaching need be direct. This is especially true of the social curriculum.

The idea of a "Request Board" is one that has worked for teachers. You and your students can make a variety of needs known by listing them on the board. Requests such as "I need a red colour pencil to finish my picture", or "I can't read with Jenny today. Could anyone take over for me?" It is useful to led your students know that they can seek the assistance of others, just as they can volunteer assistance.

Seeing the social side of lessons.

Educators tend to have a stronger attraction to the cognitive agenda than to the affective agenda. It is easier to deal with and teach facts than it is how to get along with others. Yet curricula constantly advise that the affective agenda is as important as the cognitive. Inclusion of

some students may mean that the social curriculum is more important than the academic curriculum. This is determined by the most pressing needs of the individual. Fortunately, all lessons have social components and possibilities which will address the social needs of students.

As teachers we need first to recognize the social needs of our students. Secondly, we need to look at the lessons we develop for our students and consider how they might meet these social needs. It perfectly acceptable to develop and teach lessons that address the academic needs of the majority and not to worry too much about the social part of every lesson. As long as other lessons pay attention to the social curriculum. For those students whose need is social development, however, we can put social objectives in first place and relegate the academic objectives to second for some students. The activity of sustained silent reading may hold the academic objective of improving reading ability for most students. It can hold the social objective of appropriate behaviour during the reading activity for another students whose need is to control desire for noise or interaction at inappropriate times.

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