

T-CARE

Teachers Connecting to Advance Retention and Empowerment

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“A school cannot change without individuals changing. Change truly occurs when individuals begin working in new ways, display new behaviors, use new tools, adhere to new processes and adopt new values. When individual shifts are taken together as a whole, the desired future state of the school is achieved.”

Adapted from Hiatt and Creasey, 2012

Change Management: The People Side of Change

Change.

What came to mind when you read that word? Were you excited, anxious, confused? Did you want to know more, or move quickly away?

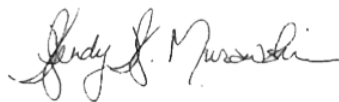
Change isn't easy and yet it is inevitable. Google “quotes about change” and you'll find 6441 options. Clearly, we need inspiration to embrace doing things in different ways or with different people or even with different expectations.

In this issue, authors Lochner & Withrow discuss how schools can use a Diagnostic process to identify areas of needed change and then focus on improvement strategies. Davis and Solomon share strategies for empowering parents and increasing their collaboration with schools. Carruth suggests using developmental learning centers to better address students' academic and cultural needs, while Flores gives a concrete strategy for helping students who struggle with transition. Swedish author Frödj describes how a school in Sweden is using physical activity to include more students and Hutchinson shares how having a therapy dog helps others while also supporting self-care. Each of these articles is powerful if – and only if – readers are open to change, to improvement, and to learning. The first step is recognizing that change may be needed.

Change can also be painful. This year, CSUN, the College of Education, and I personally lost a dear friend and colleague, Dr. Sally Spencer. The world isn't the same without her. She was a powerful force for change - promoting literacy and UDL for humans and no-kill shelters for animals. I have never met a more ethical, big-hearted, cause-focused, loving individual in my life. I miss Sally – as does everyone who ever met her – but I will use her memory to keep me focused on making this world a better place.

Find what motivates you to change for the better.

Remember, change occurs when individuals change. Don't wait for external motivators. Do something small. Do something positive. Do something impactful. *Do something.*



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ADMIN CORNER

LOOKING FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT? GET A DIAGNOSTIC!

Are you trying to improve your school, but at a loss regarding how to start? Are you aware that you need data but unsure what data to collect? This may be the time for a full-scale school diagnostic!

As administrators, it can be daunting to start the process of school improvement. However, we have come to realize that there are times when we need an outside perspective to assist in the improvement of our school. Sometimes we have to be willing to open ourselves up to scrutiny to really see what is working, as well as what is not working. Whether a culture has become toxic or there just isn't enough time to tackle a comprehensive review of your school, a school diagnostic may be just what the doctor ordered.

What exactly is a diagnostic? A school diagnostic is a thorough and streamlined needs assessment. With numerous data points, the diagnostic may provide a school, district or region a clear picture of their current state – the good, the bad, and the geez-that's-embarrassing. It includes not just state assessment data, but a more complete and personalized comprehensive picture.

Think about it. You would not trust a doctor who only did one test and made a diagnosis. You'd want a more complete range of evidence before a diagnosis, otherwise you may be treating the wrong disease. The very same is true for our schools. Sometimes the complete picture is difficult to see from our isolated and entrenched existence in the school itself.

Enter the Diagnostic Process. Originally based on the school turnaround principles (U.S. Department of Education, 2014), there are seven principles that lay a foundation of a high performing school. Those very principles are the bedrock of the diagnostic. They are School Culture; School Leadership; Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment; Student and Family Support; Facilities Management; Professional Learning; and Continuous Improvement. Based on these standards, the diagnostic proactively builds a school profile that identifies successes, weaknesses, and barriers.

The process takes a few days but is thorough. Rubric-based interviews are conducted with administrators, counselors, teachers and students. (Oh, the things we learn when we ask the students!) The classroom observations can be tailored to the needs of the school as well. Depending on the focus of a school and what the desired area is for improvement, a diagnostic can use standards specifically selected to the vision and mission of the school. For instance, if a school is interested in developing a more inclusive environment, the observations will seek to document the current level of inclusive practices. If co-teaching is the area of desired improvement, then class observations would seek to determine if co-teaching teams were meeting the core co-teaching competencies (Murawski & Lochner, 2018).

A diagnostic not only identifies the school's current situation, it can also help to expose the root causes of poor school culture and/or student performance. The results from the diagnostic are provided to the administrator and school leadership team, who then report the findings to the faculty and staff. The diagnostic process also includes specific and strategic ways to work with the faculty on the results, using tools that support the staff in self-identifying priorities and areas to address. All staff are included in this process and have a voice. Root cause analysis and strategic planning tools quickly allow a school to get started on turning around the areas of concern that they have prioritized.

With immediate data-driven feedback to administrators and faculty, as well as buy-in as they work collaboratively on selected areas, the path to improvement is almost guaranteed. Need to turn some areas around in your school? Be willing to go to the doctor and get a diagnostic!

Murawski, W.W. & Lochner, W.W. (2018). *Beyond co-teaching basics: A no-fail, data-driven continuous improvement model*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

U.S. Department of Education. (2014, September). ESEA flexibility. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.ed.gov/esea/flexibility/documents/esea-flexibility>



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THE CARING CONNECTION

FOSTERING PARENT EMPOWERMENT IN PREPARATION OF IEP MEETINGS

No matter how you look at it, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) clearly states that teachers and schools are responsible for the development and implementation of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for students in special education. Routinely, teachers and stakeholders engage yearly to ensure these programs and plans are carried out. We genuinely want nothing but the best for our students. However, we often get so caught up in working on getting the IEP process completed that we forget that IDEA also requires we ensure parents are involved and heard throughout this process as well.

As teachers, we try our best to encourage parents to participate in IEP meetings either by providing input on goals and/or providing relevant information that can support the team in making informed decisions for the student. Frequently, parents either do not show up for the meeting or remain completely silent throughout the meeting. “The goal of parental empowerment is the realization that parents should not be passive recipients of decisions made by others (e.g., teachers, administrators) but be active advocates focused on self-control, self-efficacy, and self-determination” (Connor & Cavendish, 2018). If this is the case, how can we improve parent participation in IEP meetings?

Consider using this “teacher self-checklist” before an IEP meeting. This list can be added to, changed, or altered as needed to meet the needs of your students, parents, and schools. It is important to remember that these questions are being asked to empower parents during an IEP meeting.

Connor, D. J., & Cavendish, W. (2018). Sharing power with parents: Improving educational decision making for students with learning disabilities. *Learning Disabilities Quarterly*, 41, 79–84. doi:10.1177/0731948717698828

Hsiao, Y.J., Higgins, K., & Diamond, L. (2018). Parent empowerment: Respecting their voices. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 51 (1), 43–53. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040059918790240>

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 (2004)

As a Teacher, did I ...

- ☐ provide parents with student’s up-to-date test scores?
- ☐ provide student work samples (projects, essays, classwork, artwork, etc.) to the parent to show learning progress?
- ☐ communicate with the parent regularly through their preferred form of communication (phone, email, letters, video chat, Class Dojo, etc.) prior to the IEP meeting?
- ☐ ask parents information about the student’s life outside of school? (Home interests, hobbies, neighborhood team sports, etc.)
- ☐ ask parents about the student’s educational progress outside of school? (books read, new subject interests, application of new skills, etc.)
- ☐ foster conversations related to the child’s short-term goals?
- ☐ foster conversations related to the child’s future goals?
- ☐ inform the parents of their child’s right to individualized services and supports to meet their needs?
- ☐ encourage parents to continue or initiate a dialogue with administrators and other teachers regarding their child’s progress outside IEP meetings?
- ☐ respect cultural differences (language, social-economic status, education level, etc.) by using language and terminology that parents can understand?

If we as teachers prepare parents prior to IEP meetings, they can more effectively contribute to the success of their child. Hsiao, Higgins, and Diamond (2018) stated, “In order for the process of (parent) empowerment to be effective and last over time, it needs the support of teachers and administrators within the individual school environment”.



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WHAT REALLY WORKS

DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE LEARNING CENTERS

“Developmentally appropriate practice” seems like a self-explanatory term: practices deemed appropriate for various developmental levels. However, it is not so easily defined by teachers, or more importantly, it is not easy for teachers to recognize when instruction is not developmentally appropriate. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2009) states developmentally appropriate practices involve knowing about child development and learning, what is individually appropriate, and what is culturally important.

Why is this important?

Children learn best when they are provided relevant experiences that emphasize their interests and ability levels. Teachers learn student interests through building relationships. While relationships are key, familiarity with the developmental norms for not only the assigned grade level, but previous and higher-grade levels is equally important. Understanding these developmental levels helps you adjust your instruction according to the students’ needs and to watch for developmental delays and/or children who are advanced. The supplies we use to teach, daily schedules, and classroom arrangement are all part of developmentally appropriate practices. If we force children into roles they are not ready for, we risk not developing pertinent skills such as self-regulation, persistence, creativity, and higher order thinking.

Why learning centers?

Have you ever bought a piece of clothing that said ‘one size fits all’? It typically does not fit the majority of people, although it will fit some. The same can be said for our curriculum. Each child brings unique experiences and understandings to the classroom, making “one size fits all” counterproductive. Learning centers are a viable way to make our classrooms developmentally appropriate while enhancing the students’ learning opportunities through structured learning activities tied to the content. Two suggestions for developing a learning center in your classroom include:

- **Select culturally relevant children’s literature:** These should be examined for content, illustrations, stereotypes, and if the author is a part of the community being portrayed

through the story. A few useful websites include:

<http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/culturally-relevant-books-ell-classroom>

<https://inclusiveschools.org/culturally-responsive-books-for-students/>

- **Develop a learning activity:** A content-specific learning activity can use a text, which can be read aloud to the class beforehand or be read as part of the center. Teachers might also consider additional ways to make the text accessible to students, such as a book on tape, a video clip, or even some visuals or pictures that would make the text meaningful even to non-readers.

Learning centers are just for little kids, right?

Discussing developmentally appropriate practices and learning centers typically relates to preschool and perhaps kindergarten. Why stop there? Upper grades can also benefit from a structured environment which includes a variety of learning options, such as learning centers, whole group instruction, movement, and independent work as part of the daily schedule. Learning centers can offer a variety of tasks so that students can show their understanding of the content being addressed.

Sample Learning Center for 3rd Grade Social Studies/English Language Arts

Two texts:

Talkin’ About Bessie: The Story of Aviator Elizabeth Coleman by N. Grimes

Nobody Owns the Sky: The Story of “Brave Bessie” Coleman by R. Lindbergh

Read aloud one of the books above to start conversations as a whole group. Place all books in the learning center with a variety of options for students to connect with the text. Some possible activities would be to build a model plane, research obtaining a pilot’s license, write one’s own story, make their own slogan, follow Bessie’s travels on a map, put events in chronological order, or depict themselves in an artistic way to show what their dreams are. Each of these activities will reach a different type of learner and allow all students to show what they know about the topic.

National Association for the Education of Young Children.

(2009). Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children from birth to age 8 [Policy statement]. Retrieved from <https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/resources/position-statements/PSDAP.pdf>

Leah Carruth, Ph.D., joined Angelo State University in Fall 2015. Leah has experience teaching at the university level teacher preparation program for Texas Tech along with teaching kindergarten and Head Start multiple years. Her research areas focus on early childhood, writing workshop, teacher preparation, culturally relevant teaching, and creativity in the classroom.



WHAT REALLY WORKS

USING VISUAL SCHEDULES IN YOUR CLASSROOM

Visual schedules are used in both special and general education classrooms to help students stay on track through various activities during the day. Visual schedules can be used in whole group settings, allowing the entire class to see what is coming next, or with individual students who need assistance staying on task. Visual schedules are easy to construct and can be as elaborate or as plain as needed to suit the individual needs of the students.

Visual schedules can be used in any classroom to assist keeping students on track throughout the day, or to give them choices for preferred activities once their work has been completed. Students who have issues staying on task, concentrating, or just staying engaged can benefit greatly from a visual schedule. Adults use calendars, phones, applications, and other methods of keeping up with tasks which must be completed, so students should have access to these tools as well.

A visual schedule consists of pictures, objects, or other media which represent a task needing to be completed. The teacher may print out pictures of various activities, such as math, social studies, science, reading, and so on. These are placed on the visual schedule in the order in which they need to be completed. By using Velcro to attach the pictures, teachers may easily change the schedule to fit the activities of the day. The student is also given choices for free time activities they may earn as they complete the tasks on the schedule. These should be preferred activities the student will work towards ensuring academic work is finished before they are given access to activities they view as rewarding. The free time activities can be placed in between academic activities to give the students something to look forward to doing when they have completed the task.

The materials needed to create visual schedules are items which may already be in the classroom, such as:

- ♦ Manila folders;
- ♦ A computer with internet access and a working printer;
- ♦ Paper (white and construction paper depending on how elaborate and colorful the schedule will be). (Be cautious- some students cannot handle the distraction of a colorful background or designs on the schedule so the teacher must be cognizant of the needs of the learners);
- ♦ Velcro, scissors and markers; and
- ♦ A laminator.

The steps for creating a visual schedule are simple:

1. **Determine what activities your students need to complete.** For example, the core subjects, lunch, PE, recess, free time, computer time, lining up to go home, or any other events which occur during the student's daily routine.
2. **Locate pictures or objects to represent the activities.** If your student is more concrete, you may use items such as a ball for PE or a spoon for lunch. If the student can work with more abstract items, then you may print pictures or cut them from magazines to represent the activity, such as a picture of a math problem or a picture of a bus. Consider having the student help find the pictures him/herself!
3. **Place the pictures or objects on the schedule in the order in which they should be completed.** This allows students to see what to expect next and when they will receive a break or access to a desired activity. Knowing what is next on the schedule helps reduce anxiety for students, and allows them to see what they are working towards. Attaching the pictures or items to the schedule with Velcro allows the teacher to easily move items as needed throughout the day.

Samples of visual schedules may be found online on various websites such as Pinterest or by simply searching for visual schedules on any search engine.



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WORLD VIEWS

INCLUSION IN SWEDEN

The diverse classroom is a challenge in Sweden

Elementary schools in Sweden struggle to have calm classrooms where all students have enough “time on task”. Many teachers experience challenges managing a diverse classroom. Many Swedish schools are increasingly focused on evidence based inclusion strategies, such as UDL (Universal Design for Learning), SWPBS (School-Wide Positive Behavior Supports), and cooperative learning. An additional strategy that can help with the inclusion of all students is that of more physical activity and sensory-motor integration within the typical general education classroom.

Integrating a sensory-motor perspective

In Sweden, physical activity through pulse training is used during school time by more and more schools with the aim of enhanced academic results in combination with positive health effects. The Swedish Psychiatrist Anders Hansen published a book in Sweden in 2016 called *Hjärnstark*, which in English is “Brain Power.” The subtitle in English would be: “How exercise and training strengthen your brain”. That book became a real best seller and seems to be one of the key factors that have influenced many schools all over Sweden. Several hundreds of Swedish elementary schools are today using frequent exercise during school time with the aim of improving students’ ability to concentrate during lectures and possibly improving their working memory as well.

In Sweden we have many students who have sensory needs that aren’t met in the classroom. Often students are expected to sit still, even though they can have a sensory need to move. In our classrooms, a trend is to organize activity breaks or brain breaks during class, but a challenge is that when the breaks are several minutes long, some students get so active that it takes them rather long to calm down and regain focus. However, this can very often be successfully handled though organizing the physical environment in the classroom. That can be done in a way that these types of needs are met without having to adapt the teaching itself (even though that also can be helpful).

The sensory-motor “smörgåsbordet” in the Rösjöskolan classroom

In Sweden, we have an elementary school in the city of Sollentuna. The school is named Rösjöskolan and I have had the honor and privilege to work as the principal there for a few years. Rösjöskolan is leading the school development in Sweden when it comes to using sensory motor regulation in the classroom to help students be included. Rösjöskolan teachers are provided sensory motor training to enhance abilities that otherwise would inhibit learning.

In the typical Rösjöskolan classroom, students can sit on a ball, use bouncy bands with their feet, sit on a “bicycle chair,” or work standing. Students who need even more vestibular stimulation can – on their own – take a short break on a small trampoline or they can spin for a while on a board. The classroom is like the Swedish “smörgåsbordet” but concerning different kinds of sensory regulation and adapting the environment based on these varying needs. The other parallel process is that students are offered individualized sensory motor training programs as needed to address their working memory, motor skills, and other needs.

Teachers can organize their classrooms to meet many sensory needs among students with minimal work. Organizing a classroom in an inclusive way based on sensory motor needs is quite easily done and will be very beneficial for many – if not all - students.



Hansen, A. (2016). *Hjärnstark: hur motion och träning stärker din hjärna*. Stockholm, Sweden: Bonnier Fakta.



Kennet Frödj is the principal at Celsiusskolan, a secondary school in the municipality of Ovanåker, Sweden. He has worked in education at different levels (elementary, secondary, special schools, university) for the last 33 years and specializes in sensory-motor development and inclusion strategies.

SELF CARE SPOTLIGHT

CANINE THERAPY AS SELF-THERAPY



“How long did it take River to be a certified therapy dog? My standard answer is, “Six weeks for her and 1-1/2 years for me.” Unlike service dogs who help individuals with specific disabilities, therapy dogs provide comfort and support for anyone. River and I are a therapy team, and she is my segue into private rooms in hospitals, classrooms, nursing homes, and other venues.

Our local libraries and schools have “Paws to Read” programs where children read to therapy dogs. (As a former English teacher, I subtly help them sound out words and use other reading strategies.) Multiple studies indicate dogs in the classroom produce positive effects for children emotionally, physically and educationally (Mulvihill, 2019), and it is obvious why. At the end of one library reading sessions, a little 7-year old reader had barely made it through 1/3 of his ninja book. Undaunted, he hugged River and said, “Let’s just take a picture journey through the rest of the book.” Children with and without disabilities adore River, and I adore taking River into places where I can see the joy he brings.

The first day River put on her official ASCT (Association of Canine Trainers) Therapy Dog vest was the beginning of our journey to compassion, laughter, freedom, life-long friend making, and unconditional love and peace with the disenfranchised. I’ve learned to trust myself and to trust her. What better self-care is there?

Mulvihill, E. (October 25, 2019). Dogs in the classroom improve SEL, cognitive, and even reading skills. Retrieved from <https://www.weareteachers.com/dogs-in-the-classroom>

Linda Hutchinson, Ed.D., was the district K-12 International Baccalaureate Coordinator in Hampton, Virginia. She is now retired and acts as a private consultant, 2Teach Associate, and IB Educator doing consulting, school evaluations and workshops on best practices.



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