

Lesson 4 Transcript
What Do They Need?
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So we're going to talk about what kids need in the school environment, and let me start off with a little true story. You know between Mike and I and the number of years we've been doing this; we have a lot of stories. There's this little guy in the Meridian school district, a fourth grader, a very bright intelligent kid who is a great reader, an excellent reader. He knew a lot of factual information, but didn't have very good social skills. We had a lot of the eager interventions going on to create some more social appropriateness, but he didn't have good friendship skills and kind of irritated some of his peers. The interesting thing is that when we did a kind of socio-gram of what do his peers think and we did the circles idea where it asks "who do you think is your best friend and who are some of your good friends?" He came out in this fourth grade class the top point getter as somebody that you want to be friends with because, as Mike was saying when we build on strengths, he was a good reader and he was smart. Kids had overlooked at that age level the social ineptness for the actual academic giftedness that he has. Well things were going fine and well and his parents who were two doctors moved to and relocated to Spokane Washington. In Meridian, this little guy was in a class room fully participating with his educational peers. When they went to Spokane and looked at district 81, all of the options for this little guy because he had a spectrum disorder and some challenging behavior was a self contained school or within a school a self contained program. The parents didn't want that, so they went to a very high class private school, many of you might have heard of it, I think it's called St. Gregory's or something. They wanted to enroll all three of their children, well as the mom is enrolling the kids and talking about the children, the headmaster said, "Oh I'm sorry, but we can't take kids that have something like an autism spectrum disorder." So he denied admission, by the time the mother got back to her office, there was a phone call waiting for her from the president of the school board saying, "We'd like to reconsider that." Now I'm sure the school board was thinking, "Are you crazy, two doctors, three kids, full paying tuition, no scholarship and you said no." So, the situation was, we kind of had to investigate a little bit more. Here was the demand: we'll give him a trial run. You bring him up to our school. We'll bring him in our school for a day, and we'll just see how it goes, and if it goes okay, then we'll go ahead and enter him into the program. Well I was saying that I don't think that's a good idea, not because he can't do it, but there is a lot of prep work behind it. There is a lot of transitioning that we need to do. Certainly he can function, but he needs some additional supports. They said, no it had to be that way, so he's up there and he actually did very well in the morning. In the afternoon what prompted the tantrum is that it was fourth grade, so they were doing state history and the town of Asotin came up on the computer with a red line underneath. This kid was an excellent speller, he used to look at the reader board in the elementary school in Meridian and he could tell by the position of dots that something was misspelled out on the reader board. So he starts to escalate because why is the computer having a red line underneath the word when it's spelled right? Of course nobody knew how to manage his behavior, so he escalates and at the end of the day the headmaster again says to the mom that he can't come to the school.

By the time she comes back to her office, it sounds like a joke but it's a true story, there's another call from the school board which says that, "we'd still like to reconsider." They said they'd like to send a team down to Meridian to see how he does in their school district. So here they come. The headmaster and two teachers are going to observe this kid. We were just praying that everything would go okay. Well he observes, an excellent observation, and when we're in a meeting afterward, he says, "Okay maybe this will be doable, but I want to get something really clear and straight." He said, "Now in watching this classroom you have to understand that students in our school are more like that little girl who is sitting next to him. Her name is Daniella, upper middle class, white, Nike jeans, Nike tennis shoes, designer jeans and clothes. That's the kind of students that come to our school and how do you think these kids are going to respond to him in the classroom?" And you know there is a god you guys, because we had done this activity where we have the students write letters to his new class mate which said what you would want your new class mates to know about this little guy. So I told the headmaster, well I don't know. Let's read the letter and see what it says. And so she goes through and it says, he is so great, he is so smart, we're going to miss him because he helped us with the geography bee when nobody else knows the answer and he does. In her second paragraph it said however, there are some certain things that you need to know about him, and she went through this is what you do when he does this and it was just perfect. So the result is, how could the school refuse? And so we went up and helped them develop a program.

So when we look at what kids need, this is what we come up with. It's pretty exciting, for all kids, this is outcomes for all students, not just kids with disabilities. We do want membership in the general education community, in the school community. We want them to be able to develop relationships that are meaningful and relevant. We want inclusion opportunities where they are included and participate in the same set of activities. Who do they spend their time with? Where are they spending their time? What activities are they engaged in? And of course their repertoire of skills and skill development.

When we look at membership, some components are neighborhood school placement, participation in physical spaces, activities, teacher student generated peers. We want accommodations to help facilitate that participation and we want participation in all of those elements. This includes teacher designed groups, student designed groups, school wide activities, out of school activities. We want the whole ball of wax. Evidence of this is participation.

Knowledge and skills, what do we want? In order to see this we must provide accommodations and modifications. It's not just about putting them in the class room and hoping that they survive. Opportunity for individualizing conventions. Communication system. Collaboration among service providers. Behavioral supports to promote participation and completion.

What else do we want? Relationships, students need the opportunity to interact, the opportunity for various roles. They need a good communication method, social skills, adults who value them and support information for the students.

So it's about inclusive education and you know this goes back, clear back to the 1970s when we started this business. Why do we want to include inclusive ed? Because it's good for kids with disabilities and good for kids without disabilities. It's good for communities. It's good for families and it was good for St. Gregory's private school.

Here's inclusion bloopers, assuming that being there is enough. Start to kind of self evaluate and think about programs and programs you've been in. How much facilitation do we do for success? Dumping rather than planning. You know I've had kids with some pretty outrageous behavior, injuring other students and, the rationale is that we need to keep them in the classroom. Well yeah, but there is a lot of work that needs to be done to make that appropriate. Not individualizing to meet the students needs, overusing instructional assistants. They come into the district and get assigned someone one on one, and we don't see them from then on. Focusing on activities rather than objectives. Inclusion bloopers. Underestimating the effectiveness of explicit instruction. As Mike was saying, we see small changes, but small changes lead to bigger products. Allowing the program rather than the student's needs to be guiding the interventions. They go to the autism program because that's what the autism program does. We have a situation where they're eligible for special ed, so then they get what the special ed program does, but does that program do what the student needs? It's highly individualized. Assuming that sitting quietly is an appropriate alternative to participation. Don't bother him, at least he's quiet. I did that with my own children, didn't you? All is well, don't rock the boat. In fact, that's what my mother always said about me, "Don't rock the boat."

So inclusion is an Education Placement Philosophy, it's an Instructional Approach. It's an Interdisciplinary Collaboration with Team Members. We're going to be talking about that in this workshop. It's that planning component that needs to be very strong, and it's having that attitude. When St. Gregory's came down they had an attitude. When they met us, we had an attitude. We worked it out for the benefit of the child.

So what common elements exist? Individualization, sufficient intensity to result in meaningful outcomes, data-based decision making. We'll be talking about how do you know you're programs working, what are those small subtle changes, where's the data that backs that up? Emphasis on functional skills, critical skills and family involvement. Highly trained staff/adequate resources. Mike referenced the training of the peer professionals. The people who spend all day are usually the least trained people. We need to correct that situation.

So with inclusive education, doing it wrong, doesn't make it wrong. When we started back in the 70s, there are a lot of times that we didn't do it exactly right. We had a lot of those inclusion bloopers, so then the trend was to do what? It's not going to work, let's create these separate programs. Now we have a lot of kids that even though the staff still believes they have an inclusion philosophy, but when you look at where does the student spends most of his day, it's within the extended resource room.

So in preschool, it looks like intervention begins as early as possible. We know the power of early intervention in preschool programs. Appropriate hours, intensity of intervention is provided in preschool. Most children benefit from blended approaches by multi-disciplinary teams, finding out what strategies work. Opportunities to interact successfully with typically developing children are provided at that very early age. The kids that I've been able to work with in kindergarten wow, it's so cool, to look at being preventative, rather than reactive to behavior patterns that occur.

What does it look like in schools? Well, high quality models are not as well developed. One of the things we want to do through the project as we come in and work with your teams, is to develop some of these model demonstration programs, where we can say, "You want to know how this works, go to this school."

We'll get these program components and elements and get a visual example. Individual programs need to be embedded in high quality general education. Strengths as well as deficits must be addressed for each student. We get so focused on the deficit, we forget about the strength. We forget about having the student doing the PowerPoint. You know, we forget about having them doing a presentation on vacuum cleaners. No, I'm just kidding, but something similar. Social skills must be taught systematically and intensively. It's hard to achieve those skills; we'll be talking about that.

So practices to achieve quality outcomes. It's about membership: general ed., class, neighborhood, school, and active participation. Relationships: involvement with peers. Acquisition of knowledge and skills: active learning is a result of quality programming. So here is your activity to do on the break: I want you to identify as a team, because most of you are here with teams, and if not, individually, identify one area of strength for your schools and one area of growth.