



Fostering a Sense of Community and Belonging



“If people with disabilities are to become equal partners in the Christian community, injustices must be eliminated and ignorance and apathy replaced by increased sensitivity and warm acceptance. The leaders and the general membership of the Church must educate themselves to appreciate fully the contribution people with disabilities can make to the Church’s spiritual life. They bring with them a special insight into the meaning of life; for they live, more than the rest of us perhaps, in the shadow of the cross. And out of their experience they forge virtues like courage, patience, perseverance, compassion and sensitivity that should serve as an inspiration to all Christians.” (Pastoral Statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on People with Disabilities)

Community

Widening the Circle: The Power of Inclusive Classrooms by Mara Sapon-Shevin

Without a strong school community, inclusion cannot work. Community building, like inclusion, is intentional and requires ongoing focus and commitment. Community building is thoroughly integrated into everything that happens in the school and classroom – it is inextricably linked to the other learning in the classroom. Community building is about how adults talk to students, it’s about what’s on the walls, the books we read, and the songs we sing. And it’s about what happens when something goes wrong in class. Building community is a real lesson in itself.

Safety, open communication, norms of inclusion and cooperation are key aspects of community that contribute to a sense of connectedness and cohesiveness.

- A nurturing community is a place where it is safe to be yourself as you are ***right now***.
- In an inclusive classroom, students talk about who they are, how they are the same, how they are different, and what they need from friends and classmates.
- It is not enough to simply “be” inclusive – it must be something we discuss, understand, and make visible in our interactions.
- Competition and inclusion are fundamentally incompatible. A cooperative classroom is one in which all members work together to achieve mutual goals. These goals can be related to academic learning, social problem solving, and/or conflict resolution.

The heart of successful inclusion is relationships. Thus it makes sense that establishing a positive school climate and environment in which those relationships can flourish is essential to making inclusion work.

Inclusive Values

Index for Inclusion: Developing Learning and Participation in Schools by Tony Booth and Mel Ainscow

Inclusion is most importantly seen as putting inclusive values into action. It is a commitment to particular values which accounts for a wish to overcome exclusion and promote participation.

Values are fundamental guides and prompts to action. In developing a framework of values we state how we want to live and educate each other together, now and in the future.

STRUCTURES	RELATIONSHIPS	SPIRIT
Equality	Respect for Diversity	Joy
Rights	Non-violence	Love
Participation	Trust	Hope/optimism
Community	Compassion	Beauty
Sustainability	Honesty	
	Courage	

All these values are necessary for inclusive educational development – but five – equality, participation, community, respect for diversity, and sustainability may contribute more than the others to establishing inclusive school structures, procedures and activities.

Change in schools becomes inclusive development when it is based on inclusive values. Doing the right thing involves relating actions to values. Relating your actions to your values can be the most practical step you can take in developing your school.

Social Relationships

“The first essential condition for friendship is full inclusion. When people with disabilities are kept apart from society - educated in separate classrooms or schools, employed in sheltered workshops, or engaged in separate leisure activities - there are few opportunities for friendships to develop between students with and without disabilities.” (Carol Tashie)

Going to recess, eating in the classroom, and access to extracurricular activities is recognized as a key ingredient to the formation of friends for all students. Students with disabilities should be on sports teams, perform in band and choral groups, perform in school plays, and so forth. Accessible transportation and staff support when necessary are provided to enable students to participate successfully.

Safe and Caring Schools

In order for children and youth to be successful in school, it is important that the learning environment provides a sense of belonging, acceptance, and safety (emotional, psychological and physical). To support student success, Alberta Education, through the School Act, is focused on ensuring schools are caring, respectful, safe, orderly, positive, productive, and free from the fear of physical and emotional harm.

Section 45(8) of the **School Act** states “A board shall ensure that each student enrolled in a school operated by a board is provided with a safe and caring environment that fosters and maintains respectful and responsible behaviours.” (<http://education.alberta.ca/teachers/safeschools.aspx>)



Something to think about...

The Value of a Safe Learning Environment

(<http://www.insidetheschool.com/articles/the-value-of-a-safe-learning-environment/>)

“Perspective drives learning, and when students feel and see that they have a choice and voice inside their academic journey, they intuitively feel a responsibility for the choices they create and therefore will try and enforce the rules of the safe learning environment. A three-step process unlocks the door to a safe learning environment where teacher, student, and parent meet one another with respect, inquiry, alongside creative and positive academic and emotional outcomes.

- 1. How may I serve you? What do you need? How can I help?*
- 2. We then listen and listen deeply to verbal and non-verbal responses because 70% or more of our communication is non-verbal. We listen beneath words and actions. We listen and embrace a perspective that invites us to understand the heart and mind of another.*
- 3. Finally, we create and design a plan, a template that takes incremental steps, goals and visions that hone in on student’s strengths, intelligences, and interests. We weave this design into an active goal of emotional, social and cognitive growth that guides our students into meeting life’s challenges with success. Collaborative teaching and learning is the cornerstone to a safe learning environment.”*

Positive Behaviour Supports

OSEP Center on Positive Behaviour Interventions and Supports: http://www.pbis.org/school/what_is_swpbs.aspx

Improving student academic and behavior outcomes is about ensuring all students have access to the most effective and accurately implemented instructional and behavioral practices and interventions possible. Positive Behaviour Supports (PBS) provides an operational framework for achieving these outcomes. More importantly, PBS is not a curriculum, intervention, or practice, but is a decision making framework that guides selection, integration, and implementation of the best evidence-based academic and behavioral practices for improving important academic and behavior outcomes for all students.

Supporting Positive Behaviour in Alberta Schools:

<http://www.education.alberta.ca/admin/special/resources/behaviour.aspx>

Overview of Ross Greene’s Collaborative Problem Solving Approach:

www.livesinthebalance.org/sites/default/files/CPSOnePager.pdf

Ross Greene, *Assessment of Lagging Skills and Unsolved Problems (Revised 8/29/11)*:

www.livesinthebalance.org/sites/default/files/ALSUP.rev_8-29-11.pdf