T-CARE

Teachers Connecting to Advance Retention and Empowerment

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It is the end of the school year. Final grades will be due soon, testing is completed, students are frantically turning in missing work and finishing final projects. Educators around the United States are in the same mindset that accountants are around April 15: Busy, busy, busy!

Recognizing this mindset and the need for immediate, concrete strategies, I reached out to the field, asking for experts to boil important concepts down to the nitty-gritty. What do busy educators really need to know to improve their practice? With the theme of "3 things you really need to know about…", experts from a variety of areas gave us the SparksNotes version of the CliffsNotes version of a variety of important topics. Clearly, to go deep, we recommend reading additional sources and research, but the authors of these articles have done an amazing job of narrowing down the most important components for us to ponder and practice.

From learning about students who are twice exceptional, to positive behavior interventions and supports, to keeping teachers from leaving the profession, to assessment, to neurodiversity, these articles provide a plethora of information for readers. Recognizing how busy educators currently are, short-and-sweet to-the-point articles are exactly what is needed for ongoing professional and personal development. These one-page articles are sure to offer ways to end the year on a high note and begin next year feeling far more empowered.

We dedicate this issue to all educators from early childhood to adult education and everything in between. We know most of you do not actually have your summers off, and that you will be spending the next few months in workshops, developing curriculum, revising lesson plans, and honing your craft, while many of you will also be finding fun and educational activities for your own progeny to do while out of school. We thank you for your tireless work in what is often a thankless position. From all of us at the CSUN Center for Teaching and Learning – have a great end of the school year!

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2e Education

Thomas Edison. Justin Timberlake. Albert Einstein. Aaron Armijo. The first three are famous individuals who had tremendous talents alongside disabilities. The last name is a 10-year-old who is struggling to read but has a tremendous sense of humor and always has his classmates laughing. If they were all children in schools today, what kind of services would they receive? "Twice-exceptional", or "2e" students are students who are gifted and have disabilities. Sometimes, they can have their disabilities dominate, so that educators and families don't see their abilities; they might have very significant talents and strengths so that their struggles with their disabilities aren't recognized, or sometimes, their disabilities and abilities can mask each other so that neither the ability nor the disability is served (CEC-TAG, 2021). In all of these cases, the student has significant strengths in particular areas, and significant challenges that can impede the development of these strengths.

Theoretically, 1% of all students are twice-exceptional, since gifted students represent approximately 10% of every population, and special education 15% of students. However, only 3-4% of students in special ed are also labeled as gifted, and only 1-2% of gifted students are identified with disabilities (Hughes, 2023). We are missing close to 60-80% of our twice-exceptional students. Identifying and teaching a child with both talents and disabilities is challenging because of the lack of awareness and the lack of information out there. However, if you can keep three things in mind, you can be proactive in helping identify and meet these children's needs!

1. **Reframe.** So often, learning needs are written as negatives. We talk about a child with autism who has an "obsession" with something. What if we called it a "passion," think of their characteristic as a strength, and help them find like-minded friends? What if instead of noticing that a child "blurts out" we notice that they have "enthusiasm for the subject and want to share"? The child who is extremely negative and anxious might have a future career in risk management, while a child who has social issues at recess might find friends in a laboratory. Go looking for strengths and you will find them! As Del Siegle (2022), former President of NAGC says, "Be a Talent Scout, not a Deficit Detective".

2. **Teach First the Ability.** It is so important to teach first to what a student *can* do or *likes* to do. Our self-esteem is defined by what we do well. If we frame our teaching as helping a child develop their abilities and then removing any barriers or obstacles created by the disability, the focus of instruction becomes not on closing gaps, but on growing the strengths (Hughes-Lynch, 2022). If they are very good at computer games, but struggle with memory, think about using computers to help them remember specific skills. Ask them how their organization of their desk could approximate a computer game console. Using the strengths to overcome the challenges can help both the child and the teacher struggling to engage the child.

3. **Collaborate between gifted education and special education.** Twice-Exceptional students need to have their critical thinking developed as well as their organizational and self-management skills. Gifted educators aren't trained to provide inclusive strategies. Special educators aren't trained to identify and nurture critical and creative thinking. It is very important that schools and educators strive to provide inclusive strategies in a gifted education environment. Together, however, they can create amazing educational experiences. Gifted Education teachers should be at the IEP meetings, while special educators should think about co-teaching in a gifted education classroom. Professional development is critical in helping teachers understand the diverse needs of twice-exceptional students and how to work together.

Many teachers and schools think that the number of twice-exceptional students is not enough to worry about and that the gifted kids will "make it on their own." However, research has found that without support at school, the only children who "make it" are those children with stable, financially-secure families from the mainstream culture (Plucker & Scott, 2016). If we encourage the strengths and mediate the impact of disabilities of twice-exceptional students, "Aaron Armijo" might be sitting in your classroom and just might well be the next Einstein, Timberlake, or Edison.

Council for Exceptional Children- The Association for the Gifted. (2021). Twice Exceptional definition. https://cectag.com/about-tag/position-statements

Hughes, C.E. (2023). Meshing methods: Curriculum Considerations for Twice-Exceptional Children. In J. VanTassel-Baska & C.A. Little (Eds). *Content-based curriculum for high ability learners, 4th ed.* Routledge.

Hughes-Lynch, C.E. (2022) *A Parents' Guide to Bright Children with Autism.* Routledge/ Taylor and Francis.

Plucker, J. A. & Peters, S. (2016). *Excellence gaps in education: Expanding opportunities for talented students.* Harvard Education Press.

Siegle, D. (2022, October). *Talent Scouts v. Deficit Detectives.* Keynote at the Ohio Association for the Gifted Conference, Columbus, OH.

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CHILDREN WHO HAVE BEEN EXPOSED TO CHRONIC TRAUMA

We call these students "porcupines" – the ones who dominate the time and attention of the principal, school nurse, or school psychologist and are highly reactive. They frustrate teachers either because their behavior is impacting the whole class, or they are just not "tuned in" to learning. These children share a profile of anxiety, frustration, and the inability to cope with situations. Teachers get frustrated with managing these children when their focus needs to be on the others in the classroom. There are things teachers and administrators can do to understand and set up their rooms in ways that support not only these children, but all kids in the classroom.

1. **Children exposed to chronic trauma (ongoing traumatic events) have a changed danger response.** A child who has not had consistent, engaged and encouraging people around them develops without many of the coping strategies that we think children automatically develop. If a child is hungry, lonely, or hurt, and no one responds, then that child may learn they cannot trust others. If life was unpredictable, and they never knew where their next meal was coming from or could not predict how a parent would react to them, then they may learn to turn inward and not ask for help from others. People refer to the "Fight/Flight/Freeze" (FFF) response, because it is the brain's basic response (unfiltered response that is automatic) to unpredictable situations. Children from chronically traumatic situations often interpret their world through the lens of not being able to trust people, and not being able to trust that their environment will be predictable, safe, or that they will be taken care of. Because their body is always on high alert, they are constantly in a state of anxiety, self-protection, and either fighting or avoiding the difficult situation. These coping mechanisms often look like a child who lashes out (fighting), hides under tables (freeze), runs out of the room or the school (flight), or pulls their hoodie up to shut out the world (freeze). Although children can show all of those responses, they typically react in one of those autonomic responses most often.

2. **Children exposed to chronic trauma have poor coping strategies.** When a school student has not had neuro-typical development, there are multiple things that may go wrong. That Fight/Flight/Freeze response becomes the automatic response to difficult situations. Children with chronic trauma may not process the language of what they are told, and instead rely on their senses to interpret an adult's facial expressions, voice tones, and attitude. Children often react to those non-verbals before they can process what is being asked of them. A second issue is that many of these children do not have basic social responses that we would expect of children. If someone bumps them in the hall, they interpret danger and react. If someone looks their way in the classroom or on the playground, they interpret that they are being targeted. Once triggered, they are thrown into the FFF response and respond according to the strategy that they have adopted. Is someone targeting them? They may immediately challenge the person's authority without regard to the person's size, gender, or age (fight). Has someone criticized their work? They may escape the situation by throwing papers, leaving the area, running away or hiding (flight). Is the work too hard or do they not understand the directions? They might look busy, but not be doing any work, might hide in their baggy sweatshirt, or put their head down (freeze). Some students even fall asleep in school; this might be a combination of poor nutrition, poor sleep, or just avoidance.

3. **Children exposed to trauma may need specific supports in order to feel safe and lower their anxiety so they can learn.** While there is no magic cure that immediately cures chronic trauma and a child "stuck" in the fight/flight/freeze response, school staff should be prepared to support these students, and have a plan on how to support them. All schools should incorporate Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) as a part of the curriculum, with the intent that every teacher teach basic skills in their classroom on self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, decision making, and relationships (CASEL, 2022). When children know what to expect in the school environment, and have clear guidance on how to solve problems, their anxiety and stress go down, which brings down that FFF response.

School administrators and teachers need a clear plan on how to support students identified with chronic stress or trauma. First, give every staff at the school basic training on the causes of these behaviors, and how to recognize the signs that a child is falling into the Fight/Flight/Freeze response. Second, create a school plan for a referral system for these students, and the identification of what school staff might be the best person to help intervene with a child. Third, avoid sending students to the office who appear to be caught in the FFF response. Instead, create a plan where the adult goes to the child, sits beside them (not towering over them, and not facing them or forcing eye contact). The adult should exude calm and trust and wait until the student is able to talk. Staff need to be able to identify where the student is on the cycle of escalation, and only once the student is back to a fairly calm state, talk with the student about the FFF response and how sometimes we react because of how we believe something was said or done.

Students come to school and want to be successful; they just don't always have the tools to be successful. The good news is that we can create an environment in our schools to help children in crisis learn and grow emotionally, physically and mentally. Research shows that "brains in pain cannot learn." When we are able to meet the social and emotional needs of all children, we then are able to help them grow academically. Working with children who come from traumatic situations can be one of the most rewarding situations when schools commit to support these children, rather than punish them for their behaviors.

Additional resources:

Green, E. (2014). *Lost at School: Why our kids with behavioral challenges are falling through the cracks and how we can help them.*

Scribner.van der Kolk, B. (2015). *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind and Body in the Healing of Trauma.* Penguin.

https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/what-is-the-casel-framework/

https://revelationsineducation.com

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WORKING WITH STUDENTS WHO ARE DEAFBLIND

When I ask teacher candidates, "What strategies would you use for a student in your classroom who is Deaf or Blind, the most common answers are "I would use sign language' or "I would use Braille". My next question is "Do you sign or know Braille?" to which almost all reply "no." The next question is: "What if your student does not use sign?" or "What if your student does not read Braille?." If I mention that the student may be both deaf *and* blind, I see the fear in their eyes. However, working this population of students does not have to be scary. Check out these tips!

1. **Know the Resources Available.** Help is available to you! You just need to know where to find it. Understanding the needs of the student is the first step. What do they need help with and how can you provide it? Try to talk to individuals who are Deafblind, to include your students. Learn who they are and what they need. There are a wide variety of textbooks available, but the fastest, and probably cheapest way to obtain information is the internet. Narrowing down the information, and finding information which is correct and has been researched, can itself be a difficult task. Some of the best places to start include: Perkins School for the Blind (https://www.perkins.org/), Gallaudet University (https://gallaudet.edu/), and the National Center on Deaf-Blindness (https://www.nationaldb.org/). An extremely useful text is *Remarkable Conversations* by Barbara Miles as it focuses on students who are Deafblind. The work by Dr. Jan van Dijk on *Child-Guided Assessment* (https://www.perkins.org/resource/dr-jan-van-dijk-child-guided-assessment/) is another incredible source of information for working with this student population.

2. **Determine the Appropriate Language.** Students who are Deafblind may use a variety of language. Some may use signed language such as American Sign Language (ASL) or tactile signing, while others may use speech, written language, or a combination of various approaches. It is extremely important to use the language the student uses or is learning. Students who use signed communication may have an interpreter while students using tactile signing may have an intervenor. An intervenor is a professional who is trained in tactile sign language (*Teaching students with Deaf-blindness*, 2017). Communicating with the student using their preferred language increases their participation and learning.

3. **Promote Literacy.** It is vital to promote literacy with students who are Deafblind. Literacy gives the student access to far reaching topics. Promoting literacy can be done using Experience Books. Experience books incorporate real objects or artifacts from an activity or event in which the student has participated to create a book recording and telling about the event (Cushman, 2022). Have the child participate as much as possible in the creation of the book, including choosing the topic, telling the story, selecting the items to "illustrate" it, and attaching the items to the pages (Cushman, 2022). Experience Books can easily be created with materials commonly found in the classroom such as three-ring binders, cardstock, glue, tape, and various other items. It is also important to remember the person reading the Experience Book with the student may need printed words so it is important to use both printed words and Braille not only for the teacher, but also for students who may have some limited sight and are able to read printed words on the page.

Working with students who are Deafblind can be daunting task. While they are just the tip of the iceberg, these strategies are a great first step for beginning your journey working with these students. Ask questions and do not be afraid. Learn from any mistakes you may make so they do not happen again. You do not have to be perfect; you just have to be willing to learn and do what is right for the student.

Cushman, C. (2022, May 25). *Experience books*. Paths to Literacy. Retrieved November 26, 2022, from https://www.pathstoliteracy.org/experience-books/

Miles, B., & Riggio, M. (1999). *Remarkable conversations: A guide to developing meaningful communication with children and young adults who are deafblind*. Perkins School for the Blind.

Teaching students with deaf-blindness. Accessible Campus. (2017, February 27). Retrieved November 26, 2022, from

https://accessiblecampus.ca/tools-resources/educators-tool - kit/teaching-tips/teaching- students-with-deaf-blindness/

Additional resources:

https://www.perkins.org/

https://gallaudet.edu/

https://www.nationaldb.org/

https://www.perkins.org/resource/dr-jan-van-dijk-child-guided-assessment/

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International Focus

The 3 Key Things You Need to Know About Addressing Social Emotional Learning Through Play

All children need experiences of joy, connection, and meaningfulness to cope with challenges that occur during their childhood and school time. Social emotional learning (SEL) is therefore crucial to a child's psychosocial capacity to cope and develop life and working skills. Play is an essential part of children's life, social emotional development, and learning. The effectiveness of playful hands-on learning, for both socio-emotional as well as academic learning, has been well-documented for many years (e.g., by Jean Piaget and his theory of constructivism, Leo Vygotsky and his theory of social constructionism, Bruce Perry and his neuro-research). If you are considering playful learning as a strategy to support social emotional learning, these are the three you need to consider proactively.

1. ***Play is Learning***! We often tend to think that: of course play has value, children enjoy it, but it's not really serious. What are they actually learning? Nothing could be more wrong. Being playful, by experimenting with things, trying things out by taking them apart and putting them together again, taking risks with new ideas, is the ultimate way of learning! Abilities such as concentration, self-control, idea visualization, and spatial understanding may be considered by some to be soft skills, or things that are merely a by-product of learning. Not true! The skills that children use when they are motivated to play and make things are the skills that are most critical in problem-solving and creative thinking. These are also a fundamental way of learning language, reading, writing, and mathematics. Clearly then, playing is a critical part of learning, for both a social-emotional outcome and an academic one.

2. ***Play positively impacts a variety of abilities.*** Play works at various levels and not just for young children. The following areas are positively addressed when individuals engage in play. Consider each of these areas as they are used by adults as successful members of society:

   - **Physical abilities** – balance, movement, spatial understanding, exploration, manipulation of objects
   - **Cognitive abilities** – focusing and sustaining attention, keeping information in mind, following rules, problem-solving and flexible thinking, building effective strategies for finding solutions
   - **Emotional abilities** – self-belief, perseverance, confidence, self-control and reflection, understanding, expressing and regulating emotions, knowing one's own limits, practicing, failing and succeeding
   - **Creative abilities** – coming up with new ideas, imagining things that do not exist, using representations, transforming existing ideas into new ideas, making associations and using symbols

   - **Social abilities** – collaborating, communicating, understanding other people's perspectives, negotiating rules, handling conflicts, building empathy

3. ***Play is important!*** In a world full of trauma, stress, and depression, play can help provide children with the following experiences. Using each of these characteristics, consider ending the statement, "Play is…."

   - ***Joyful:*** When children enjoy what they do and are internally motivated, they naturally seek information, take pride in challenges, and remember things for longer. Joy means being motivated to take initiative, being open to new experiences to explore gaps in knowledge and understanding and feeling a spark of curiosity.
   - ***Meaningful:*** Children learn through experiences that are relevant and meaningful, by exploring things in the environment that are familiar to them. They process and sort information and experiences that are relevant to their own lives and remember these experiences by turning familiar contexts into symbols, categories, and patterns. This shapes children's mental models and allows them to challenge themselves at their own level and to absorb new experiences.
   - ***Engaging:*** When children are active, they're not only sitting, watching, and listening, but using their body and mind together to remember things better and more deeply. Active hands-on engagement stimulates multiple channels in the brain and makes children active creators of meaning, instead of passive recipients of information who experience the world in only one way.
   - ***Iterative:*** Imagination allows children to come up with new ideas and things, which do not yet exist. Children learn most effectively when they experiment with ideas, produce something new, and iterate by comparing new information to their previous understanding. Using imagination and iteration enables children to think back and forth in time to plan, predict, test, and reflect on outcomes.
   - ***Socially Interactive:*** Children co-construct their knowledge in dialogue with other people. The brain learns effectively through social interactions, jointly creating something, and sharing joy. As part of social interactions, other people's contributions inspire us, create opportunities for reflection, and challenge our own understandings.

Resources mentioned:

playbook-2-eng.pdf (playful-learning.dk)

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The 3 Key Things You Need to Know About

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is a three-tiered framework focused on prevention instead of punishment. The PBIS system hinges on teaching positive expectations and reinforces and rewards students who engage accordingly. Data is used to evaluate students and place them in tiers, according to their behavioral needs. PBIS is not a scripted curriculum and it is not meant to be implemented without quality instruction. To be successful, schools must be fully invested in the process and each PBIS tier is meant to build, rather than replace, supports. For example, a student who needs services at the Tier 3 level would not just be receiving those interventions, but also those at the Tier 2 and Tier 1 level. Although parents, teachers, and administrators should all be involved, PBIS can be drilled down to the classroom level. Educators interested in employing PBIS strategies should start with these three:

1. **Use data to make PBIS decisions.** Tiered interventions cannot occur without first understanding which students will need which type of support. This begins with a school's self-assessment. At the school level, administrators can review disciplinary referrals, or behavior related data, to identify students who need additional support. On a smaller scale, this can also be done at the classroom level. Using data, "hot spots" should be identified (Walker & Barry, 2020). These "hot spots" may include locations like hallways or reading corners, specific groups like students with disabilities, or times of day like midafternoon. Given this deep dive into the data, the school or classroom teacher can determine where to focus their PBIS planning efforts. Data should be ongoing and reviews should happen frequently so adjustments can be made accordingly. It's important to keep doing what works and make changes when it isn't!

2. **Don't forget Tier 1 supports.** Given that PBIS is built upon the evidence-based practices utilized in Tier 1, it is essential for teachers to revisit these practices on a regular and continuous basis. Tier 1 supports are those that should be provided to all students, even those who eventually may receive Tier 2 or Tier 3 supports. These foundational supports include working with parents, aligning classroom rules and procedures with schoolwide expectations, teaching and acknowledging positive behaviors, and explicitly teaching expectations, to name a few. At the classroom level, instructional practices may be what some teachers call "good teaching," and include nonverbal cues, increased opportunities to respond, visual aids, and planned ignoring. While each of these strategies may not be used with every student, teachers should implement these tiered strategies on a consistent basis. Before a student is referred for additional services or tiered interventions, supports at the Tier 1 level should be provided with consistency and with fidelity.

3. **Create a continuum of system supports.** While Tier 1 supports may address the behaviors of most students, there will be additional students who do not respond to Tier 1 support and need more intensive interventions. To address these needs, it is important to know what options are available and have them in place. In Tiers 2 and 3, students need more individualization and they may or may not receive this support in the classroom setting. To fully experience the benefits of PBIS, schools should be prepared to implement check-in check-out interventions (CICO), social skills groups, functional behavior assessments (FBA) and behavior intervention plans (BIP), or behavior contracts. While these interventions will require additional support from administrators, support staff, school counselors, or other key school personnel, PBIS won't work without them. Without a continuum of supports, PBIS isn't PBIS and certainly won't provide the outcomes schools desire.

PBIS is designed to be an iterative process that supports schools, teachers, and students with changing schoolwide behavior. Effective application of the framework requires data collection, implementation planning and action plans, and targeted reinforcement. Although change takes time, developing tiered systems of support and regularly communicating with administrators, teachers, and parents will ensure fidelity and encourage positive behaviors (Walker & Hott, 2017).

Resources mentioned:

Walker, J.D., & Berry, C. (2020). *Behavior Management: Systems, Classrooms, and Individuals*. San Diego, CA: Plural Publishing

Walker, J.D. & Hott, B.L. (2017). Positive behavior supports. In W.W. Murawski & K.L. Scott (Eds.) *What Really Works In Elementary Education*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

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Co-Teaching

In a nutshell, co-teaching is when two professional educators co-plan, co-instruct, and co-assess (Murawski, 2010) the same group of students. The overarching goal is to use the unique expertise of both educators to help better meet the diverse needs of the students. This can support individuals with disabilities, those who are English learners, those who require enrichment and challenge, and those who are marginalized for a variety of other reasons. Essentially, two brains, four eyes, four ears, four hands, and myriad teacher looks are better than one! For those just getting started with co-teaching – and for those of you who have been doing it a while, I bet these three areas have already come into play.

1. **Relationships matter.** Ultimately, co-teaching requires a relationship between two professionals. Analogies abound – from marriage, to sports, to dance, to medicine, to peanut butter and jelly. Regardless of your preference, the reality is that teaching with a colleague can be challenging. Teachers often are not used to sharing their classrooms, especially with someone who has a different frame of reference and possibly even a different philosophy, teaching style, or classroom management strategies. Take some time (see the fact that there is never enough in the next bullet) to talk to your new co-teacher about your expectations, preferences, pet peeves, and the skills you bring to the shared relationship. Murawski and Dieker (2004) published the SHARE worksheet to help with that conversation (available at www.padlet.com/wendy_murawski/2TeachLLC) and there are other resources online as well that can help guide new co-teaching teams. You and your colleague do not need to be BFFs (best friends forever), but you do both need to feel valued and that you have parity together.

2. **There's never enough time!** Whether you are co-teaching or not, every teacher struggles with finding sufficient time to get work done. When sharing the load with a partner, this time requirement actually gets better…..*over time*. That's right. At first, yes, it definitely takes longer to get to know your partner's skills, needs, and abilities; it also takes longer for both of you to figure out the best ways to share the content and engage your students. However, there is a bright light to this situation. Once that honeymoon period is over (which for some folks lasts a few weeks and others takes most of a year), the true marriage begins and *less* time is required. Dividing and conquering, tweaking rather than creating, maximizing one another's skills, supporting diverse learners, and even "having one another's backs" when needed is when co-teachers are able to recognize the true value of shared collaboration and feel the benefit of a partnership.

3. **Educate administration.** Co-teachers require common planning time, professional development, and reasonable schedules. While all of those are well-known needs if one is versed in the co-teaching literature, an administrator with little experience in co-teaching may not recognize these needs. Instead of complaining about what is not in place to support strong co-teaching, start to share this literature with your school and district leaders! Come to meetings with recommendations, best practices, and research guidelines. Suggest that administration get their own professional development on their role in supporting co-teaching and even create Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and Communities of Practice (COPs) around co-teaching, such as those described in Murawski & Lochner's text, *Beyond Co-teaching Basics: A data-driven, no-fail model for continuous improvement* (ASCD, 2018).

Solid relationships, shared and common time, and strong administrative support are three things that, when in place, can make most co-teaching relationships successful. If your school is in the planning phases of using co-teaching to support inclusive practices, start a conversation and analyze where you are as it relates to these three key areas. Baby steps are encouraged but when it comes to including all students, there is simply no excuse for not taking any steps at all!

Resources mentioned:

Murawski, W. W. (2010). *Collaborative teaching in elementary schools: Making the co-teaching marriage work!* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Murawski, W. W., & Dieker, L. A. (2004). Tips and strategies for co-teaching at the secondary level. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 36*(5), 52-58.

Murawski, W. W., & Lochner, W. W. (2018). *Beyond basic co-teaching: A no-fail, data-driven continuous improvement model.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum.

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Formative Assessment

Formative assessment is the ongoing process of monitoring student learning in order to adjust instruction to increase student outcomes (Cornelius, 2013). In short, formative assessment is your best instructional tool! You plan engagement opportunities, collect data during instruction, and use that data to inform your next steps. If you are considering adding formative assessment into your practice, these are the three you need to consider proactively.

1. **Plan multiple engagement opportunities for students.** Formative assessment is a purposeful ongoing process. Include many opportunities for students to engage with content into lesson plans. Use apps such as Kahoot!, Formative, or Nearpod to do quick checks for understanding. For those on a tighter budget, go low-tech, use even gestures, response cards, quick writes, and white boards (a piece of white shower panel that can be purchased and cut at a local home improvement store can be very affordable). These techniques allow you to get away from asking one student to reply; they let every student reply at once. There is research that indicates the more opportunities to respond a student has, the better their outcomes (Adamson & Lewis, 2017), *but only if you do something with their responses*. Without collecting the data and recording their responses, these are just fun activities, leading your instruction nowhere special.

2. **Collect evidence of student learning**. Intentionally record student responses to monitor their current understanding; logging student responses enables you to reflect and plan changes more practically (Wormeli, 2018). Afterall, when we rely solely on memory, things can get distorted. If you are going low-tech, create tables in your lesson plan documents; perhaps use an enlarged seating chart and make notes (Cornelius, 2013). You do not need to record a lot of information, just use tally marks. Sometimes it is even easier to mark smaller groups. For instance, if almost everyone gets the correct answers, only record the students with incorrect answers. That will take less time than to go through your entire class and mark down everyone who got the answer correct. Conversely, if more got it wrong, mark those who got it right. You may want to do a "just in time" correction. Meaning, take this opportunity to reteach a concept! Taking the time to write more information than a tally or check mark may derail a lesson you have planned, whereas doing a "just in time" correction will help address the issue immediately.

3. **Use the data.** Once you collect data, analyze it, and then use it to adjust your instruction (Cornelius & Johnson-Harris, 2017). On a daily basis, data collected today can inform tomorrow's warm up, student grouping options, and possible stations for reteaching or enrichment. On a weekly basis, determine if there is a concept that must be retaught before moving on.

Determine when you will circle back to the concepts that were almost mastered, but lingering questions exist (Heritage, 2021). This step of analysis is a wonderful way to collaborate with other grade-level or content teachers to really think about student learning. Look at the data together as you plan upcoming lessons and units. If you are fortunate enough to be co-teaching, you have a built-in partner; after all, you should be co-assessing! If you are solo, then doing this analysis with a colleague is not only smart, it is a sign of professionalism. Remember, when challenging cases arise in medicine, law, or engineering, it is natural for professionals to collaborate with other experts to solve the problem. Teachers are no different; you are a professional and working with a colleague to help analyze the data will only benefit your students and theirs.

Remember, formative assessment is an ongoing process. Plan for it, collect evidence, and then use it! When these three things are incorporated into your practice, you will know more about your students' understanding and be able to take them further on their learning journey. If this is new to you, start small; if this is not new, add more opportunities into your lesson plans.

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The 3 Key Things Administrators Need to Know About

Teacher Retention

Throughout the pandemic, social media has gained momentum as a tool for teachers to connect, encourage, and share outside the school building. Interacting with others online helped curb feelings of isolation in a time when physical interactions were limited. It should be no surprise that relationships formed on social media have continued even as buildings reopened. In a more recent trend, teachers are turning to platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, or TikTok to share stories of leaving. Administrators interested in retaining more of their teachers can learn from their stories and use these strategies to support and retain their own faculty.

1. Read what former teachers are saying!
Surprisingly, in a recent review of posts by former teachers on TikTok, pay and testing stress are rarely mentioned. Instead, more personal matters such as health or family take precedence.

- **Teachers feel personal heath and self-care is being discounted.** Beyond instruction, teachers are being asked to do more than ever before. They are called to support student mental health, fill in for sick peers, and navigate a political landscape beyond their control. Feelings of guilt are common when taking time off to care for self or family. These additional responsibilities are taking an emotional toll as teachers attempt to balance complex student needs with their own.

- **Relationships are changing.** Teaching is a relational job. While months of learning at home impacted student behaviors at school, teachers who left overwhelmingly shared positive student stories - seven to one. As school policies have become increasingly politicized, it was the relationships with parents, administrators, and community members that brought the greatest disappointment. Teachers have found themselves at the receiving end of grievances, challenges, and concerns even though they have limited decision-making agency.

- **Time at work is increasing.** School culture and administrator support both play a role in teacher efficacy. Beyond student learning, former teachers spoke to increased job demands as staffing crunches and student intervention have extended the day. Without regular time to plan, contact parents, or help students rebuild social connections, these teachers found themselves pulling long hours before or after school at the expense of their families or personal health.

2. Work Proactively.
Supporting the individual physical and emotional needs of teachers is an important first step in stemming the resignation trend. School leaders need to actively engage with their teachers to identify key areas to address and do their best to meet them.

Encouraging a culture of authentic care where teachers feel they can speak freely about the issues impacting their lives is a foundational support. This goes beyond simply listening; it means building relationships. The more we learn about our teacher's struggles, the better we can provide support before a choice is made to leave. Building relationships includes encouraging positive peer relationships as well. During the pandemic, teachers took to social media to form connections in the absence of physical closeness. Expanding social bonds within the school helps strengthen feelings of belonging and build trust.

3. Be responsive.
If being proactive is the plan, **being responsive** is the work. Act on what you hear and identify ways to minimize non-instructional tasks. Routinely emphasize the importance of rest and self-care. Consider providing subs or rearranging schedules to allow teams blocks of time to work together. Increasing teacher involvement in decision-making processes can give them greater agency in the school practices that impact their lives. Being responsive means acting on what you know.

Finally, **be present** in the building and do not let your teachers struggle alone. More than one video displayed a teacher packing their room for the last time. These are people who entered teaching to make a positive change but instead left feeling like a failure. Little matters more than the quality of a teacher on student outcomes. Effective school leaders will spend the time to support their teachers in and beyond the classroom.

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The 3 Key Things You Need to Know About

Neurodiversity

Do you say 'autistic child' or 'a child with autism'? There is a current debate in the field about how educators should address students who are neurodiverse/neurodivergent. Neurodiverse or neurodivergent students refer to students whose brain "works" differently from typical brains or "neurotypical" students. Neurodiverse students can include autistic students, students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorders (ADHD) and others. Most importantly, what should teachers know or be able to do when they have neurodiverse students in their classes?

1. **Person first language.** Most special education teachers were trained in our credential programs to use "person first language" when addressing students with disabilities. For example, we should say "the child with autism" not "the autistic child." This is because we aim to highlight the "person first" not the disability. This approach should highlight that a child is a child first. Hence, the disability is just part of the child, but not a defining element. While this continues to be an acceptable option with neurodiverse learners, nowadays another option is increasingly acceptable.

2. **Identity first language.** Today, an emerging and bold approach advocated by autistic and other neurodiverse individuals is that of an identity-first approach. This means that we should highlight the identity of our students, whenever that is appropriate. In other words, we should say "autistic student," highlighting what is considered a defining element in the identity of the individual. Importantly, some neurodiverse students and individuals do not see themselves as having a disability- just living in a world made for neurotypical individuals. This approach proposes that neurodiverse students are just different, and as such, we should accommodate differently for their successful inclusion in the classroom.

3. **Universal Design for Learning.** While the debate is not settled on the appropriate language to use with neurodiverse students, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) proposes a practical approach to including neurodiverse/neurodivergent students when planning lessons. UDL is a framework for teaching and learning for all students, including neurodiverse, dual language learners and students with disabilities. Importantly, educators are guided to use multiple means of engagement. For example, students can be allowed to write responses or saying them out loud- their choice! Likewise, a UDL approach uses multiple ways of representation of material. For instance, students can read text, look at pictures, or watch videos. Multiple ways of action and expression gives students choice on how they can express what they have learned in their lesson. For example, students can create video responses or write an essay. Hence, student choice becomes a critical element in including neurodiverse students.

You may work with students who will prefer an identity-first approach. Conversely, you may work with students and families who prefer a person-first approach. As educators we simply respect individual preferences. No matter what language is preferred by your students and families, a UDL approach to lesson planning will support the successful inclusion of neurodiverse students. In fact, coteaching can help educators maximize the use of the UDL framework. Co-teaching can help leverage the expertise of the special education teacher in using a UDL framework, while leveraging the expertise of the general education teacher on subject matter.

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The 3 Key Things You Need to Know About

RTI Tier 1 in Mathematics

Today we often hear Response to Intervention (RTI) mentioned as a part of a more comprehensive and strength-based multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) that addresses all students' academic as well as social, emotional, behavioral, and attendance needs. While MTSS is a school-based approach to tiered intervention, this focus is on the academic application of RTI Tier 1 in the mathematics classroom as a tool to plan for student success.

1. **Tier 1 addresses a real and current challenge.** The National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) announced historic declines in math in its 2022 report. Many students are promoted in math each year despite failing grades, poor end of year assessments, and foundational skill deficits. Add COVID to that mix and we find most of our students moving on in math with skills at or below basic.

   Considering the broad learner variability and the wide range of math and reading deficits students bring to the classroom, we need to reimagine how the RTI framework can be applied. Long gone are dreams of homogeneous classrooms where students are ready for today's instruction. ALL students, not just students with disabilities (SWD) come to us with a variety of strengths and needs to consider when planning and delivering instruction. Addressing learner variability must start in Tier 1 and be embedded in our instructional plans.

2. **Planning is critical.** The RTI framework is rooted in the idea that all students receive effective core instruction at Tier 1 using evidence-based practices and that universal screening can be used to identify outliers and provide early intervention. At first glance this idea seems to be unrealistic given the number of learners at or below basic the day they step foot in our classrooms. To use RTI effectively considering this reality, we need to re-imagine what Tier 1 can look like in today's diverse classrooms.

   Tier 1 instruction must meet students where they are and engage them in grade-level instruction that employs high impact, evidence-based core instructional strategies. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles and targeted differentiation used in conjunction with high impact practices can be game changers in Tier 1 for many of our struggling learners. We must proactively plan for and deliver instruction that eliminates barriers and supports the needs of our students, rather than react after signs of failure appear.

3. **Evaluation is ongoing.** Tier 1 instruction never ends but must be continuously evaluated and adjusted to meet learner needs. A typical response to lower-than-expected learning outcomes often involves a cursory review of assessment data that may lead to an unsubstantiated conclusion that student factors such as prior knowledge, motivation, effort, engagement, or mindset are primary contributors to poor performance. But is the real problem what students do or don't know or is it our instruction? Dr. John Hattie, renowned researcher/author of _Visible Learning_, identifies the teacher as the most influential factor in student success. What we do makes a tremendous difference in how our students learn and perform; data driven decision making is the keystone in that process.

True data driven decision-making involves a much deeper and more comprehensive evaluation of assessment data as well as the other factors at play in our classrooms to identify only the extent of poor performance, but the underlying factors that contribute to poor outcomes. While data can easily paint a picture of student errors and misconceptions, an unbiased critical analysis of our teaching often identifies problems with our instruction. Common issues include the use of low impact practices, a mismatch between strategies and learner readiness, insufficient supports, or poor implementation of high-leverage practices. Our inadequate implementation of a high impact strategy can be just as ineffective as a less effective or poorly designed one. As the most influential contributor to strong learning outcomes, it just makes sense that we continuously evaluate and improve our Tier 1 instruction to support strong student learning.

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USING SYSTEMATIC, EXPLICIT, AND WELL-PACED INSTRUCTION

During systematic, explicit, and well-paced instruction, teachers build lessons on each other and make connections between lessons to (a) maximize time on task or learning engagement, (b) promote high levels of success, (c) cover more academic content, (d) increase time spent in instructional groups, (e) scaffold instruction, and (f) address different forms of knowledge (Archer & Hughes, 2010). Don't all of those sound great?! If those outcomes are of interest to you, start your own systematic, explicit and well-paced instruction with these three actions:

1. **Create a predictable sequence.** The best lessons are structured in a predictable sequence from beginning to end. When lessons follow the same structure, students do not have to learn how the information will be presented. This allows the students to focus their attention and energy on the skill or concept being taught. Ask yourself if your lessons have a clear beginning (i.e., teacher led portion where you model the learning expectations), middle (i.e., guided practice where students have many opportunities to practice), and end (opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning)? If yes, then you have created a predictable learning sequence for your students - well done!

2. **Use a logical sequence.** Systematic instruction including teaching the content in a logical sequence where lessons build on each other. Careful and intentional planning allows teachers to thoughtfully build the lesson around essential components skills or learning objectives. The best place to start is, well, where your students are in their current levels of understanding. Teachers can do this by activating students' prior knowledge at the beginning of the lesson as well as directly link what they already know to what they will be learning. Help students see how the lesson 'fits' into the bigger picture given the learning goals. Allowing students to build on prior knowledge as they learn increasingly difficult skills and concepts will help students persevere through tasks and build confidence. These connections should be explicit so students see the learning pathway clearly laid out. Building these bridges for students between what they know and what they will learn can help prevent them from stumbling into the swamp of learner frustration.

3. **Move at an appropriate pace.** The pace of instruction can significantly impact student success, regardless of what skills are being taught. One way to think about finding the right pace when teaching is to visualize a rubber band around you and your students. If the rubber band is too slack (i.e., pace is too slow), the rubber band will slip off and you will lose the group. If the rubber band is too tight (i.e., pace too quick), the rubber band will snap and you will lose the group. If the rubber band is at the right tension (i.e., appropriate match between content and pace), you will successfully hold the group together. Instructional pace can, and likely should, vary within and between lessons. Monitoring progress during instruction allows the teacher to adjust the lesson pace in the moment to meet the students' needs throughout the lesson. For those teachers fortunate enough to co-teach, you now have two rubber bands you can use for maximum effectiveness!

Creating a predictable sequence, using a logical sequence, and moving at an appropriate pace are three things that, when in place, can make using systematic, explicit, and well-paced instruction successful. When planning your next lesson, consider ways in which you will support the learning environment by establishing comfortable learning where your students understand where they are, know where they are going next, and are moving at the right speed towards their learning goals. Baby steps are encouraged but when it comes to including all students, there is simply no excuse for not taking any steps at all!

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Caring Connection

3 tips for classroom vibe checks:
Learning the lingo and leveraging their learning

Trying to be the *fire* teacher in a generation with so much slang can leave even the hippest of teachers *dizzy*. As teachers, we don't need to use the newest slang in our everyday language (in fact, that would be *trash*), but learning the lingo gives you a greater edge as you build relationships to leverage learning. Here are three *bussin'* ways to give your classroom a vibe check:

1. **Play with Their Technology**
   If you want to be a *CEO* teacher you should play in your students' world: Snapchat (*Snap*), Tik Tok, Instagram (*Insta*), Be Real, and other apps are *the daily* for your students. You don't have to learn a Tik Tok dance to a *banger* or follow your students' social media accounts to understand how visual media is their world. You might get your professional development through Twitter, but newsflash, your students aren't using it! They are opting for *aesthetics*; visual representations of their life by posting highly edited (*Insta-worthy*) pics or daily Snaps of the ceiling, their shoes, or a pic of their environment (but never of their face) to maintain their *Snap streaks*. Students are never afraid to tell you how their technology works, so just ask! Additionally, you might think about how you can create assignments connected to their communication preferences (i.e.-creating an *Insta-worthy* post using visual, nonlinguistic representations within your content area).

2. **Allow Space for Their Language**
   Teacher *goals* are to be one of their faves, *amirite?* You want to connect with your students, but this is challenging in a world where the trends, technology, and slang are beyond your generational comprehension. In their visual world, it is more important than ever to facilitate meaningful classroom discussions. Provide time and space for classroom community building and their language by using open-ended discussion prompts which are relevant to life experiences and give students voice (i.e.-Use prompts such as "Share about a time when you had to stand up to a friend. How did you handle it?"). Follow-up with non-judgmental phrases such as "tell me more about that" to keep communication open while enhancing your classroom culture and building familiarity. Be mindful to not limit their use of language. The transparency and relationships built by allowing space for their language allows your students to be more real and genuine, meanwhile you are leveraging their learning and reaping the positive effects of student relationships on academic achievement.

3. **Laugh with Them**
   Students see through teachers who are *cap*, so don't be afraid to laugh with them, but more importantly laugh at yourself! Laughter changes the mood, creates social connection, and bridges cultural gaps. A classroom with laughter just *hits different.* Laughter has also been shown to increase student learning. Ensure emotional safety in your classroom by allowing for laughter. Be your authentic self and allow your students to be authentic, too. Nothing creates safety more than a teacher trying to use the new generational slang in novel ways (i.e.-Try saying "Did I say that right?!" or "That's what it means, ya?!"), followed by some laughter at yourself, of course. This will surely elicit some giggles from your students, but only if it is *low key* or you might be seen as *sus*. Being open to laughter and allowing your students to teach you something further facilitates relationship building and community.

Vibe check your classroom with these three tips and practice the lingo to create *fire* relationships with your students, build community, improve classroom culture, and leverage learning. Keep in mind, generational slang differences allow you to learn from your students. Be vulnerable, be silly, and embrace the new slang in your classroom! *#goals #IYKYK #mood*

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