STRATENOTES

Collegiality and Cooperative Study Groups

In this Stratenotes, we would like to discuss some of the issues that we faced in helping regular classroom teachers begin the hard work of more inclusive teaching. Specifically, we want to discuss the Cooperative Study Group process that we have used for the past four years to promote change and to share with you what our teachers say about good collegiality. Included in this Stratenotes issue is an Executive Summary of a paper that describes how we began to use the Cooperative Study Group process to work with teachers in identifying obstacles to inclusive teaching. Over the past four years, we have refined and continued to develop the process.

Early in the project, teachers defined for us what they believed were the characteristics of "good collegiality". In general, there were four elements that teachers identified as being important:

1. Collegiality means opportunities to share with peer teachers.
2. Collegiality is positive, purposeful, voluntary, and noncompetitive.
3. Collegiality is not an extra time commitment.
4. Collegiality requires support.

These characteristics of collegiality were taken into account in developing the format and structure of the Cooperative Study Group meetings. Meetings were planned with a focus on issues that teachers had expressed an interest in exploring. In response to teacher preference, groups were organized so that colleagues teaching similar content to a similar level of students (middle school or high school) could work together. Meetings were conducted in a spirit of support and sharing.

The Cooperative Study Group Process

Planning and teaching for more inclusion is the goal. One of the first steps we took to make the cooperative study process appeal to teachers was to drop our repeated references during meetings to students with disabilities. We discovered that most of the teachers were concerned about students with disabilities, but that they felt that there were other students in their classes who were more-at risk for failure than students with disabilities. Their perception was that students with disabilities already had the support of special services and had been taught many of the strategies needed to complete class work. Therefore, we broadened our perspective. We simply invited teachers to work with us to discover better ways of responding to diversity in their classes. We then could examine how students with disabilities fared as teachers began to shift toward a more inclusive approach to teaching. In fact, each time we forgot this new perspective, the teachers reminded us that the focus was on helping all students. It made us wonder if we were the ones that had the more "exclusive" mindset!

Teachers are invited, not forced, to participate. All middle and secondary social studies and science teachers in the school districts that we worked with were invited to participate. We explained to them the process, expectations, and time commitment of the project. We explained that we wanted teachers to work with us as co-developers and co-researchers in the quest for ways to better respond to diversity. About 40 teachers out of 300 agreed to work together with us for four years.

Some people have asked us why we didn't recruit teachers resistant to the idea of inclusion. Didn't these teachers need this process more than others did? We found that you need to build on your strengths. Teachers who are interested and committed to a more inclusive approach to teaching tend to have strategies and routines that they have tried or are interested in trying. They are willing to play around with new ideas. Teachers who are interested in being more inclusive in their teaching are more likely to take the time and energy to change than are those who are resistant to change. In addition, we found that as our 40 teachers began to try different approaches and talked about these new methods in their schools, other teachers became interested and were recruited to become involved. As a result of this process, an additional 100 teachers became involved over the past four years in some aspect of implementing the methods developed in the groups .

Meetings are held regularly and with "a touch of class". Meetings were held once each month. In some cases, the groups met more often. Each meeting lasted approximately two hours and was held after school. It

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seemed that the once-a-month, two-hour meeting fell within the time tolerance range for teachers. Refreshments were always available and the meeting place was either in a restaurant or in a building other than the school. The message that we tried to convey was "You are important and we appreciate the effort that you are making." We cannot underscore how important this message was to the teachers and how it affected their willingness to keep coming back.

Teachers assume the role of developers and researchers. It has been a frustrating balancing act, but giving up the idea that we were the only experts has been rewarding. Teachers worked at identifying problems, brainstorming solutions, trying interventions, observing student performance, developing ways to evaluate student progress, and helping to collect data that would show how both teachers and students had done. As the four years progressed, teachers became more confident in proposing questions to explore and were more effective in selecting, developing, and implementing routines that were likely to work.

An "inclusive teaching" facilitator assumes the role of colleague and collaborator. As facilitator, we assumed the tasks of scheduling, arranging space, and making sure that everyone was reminded of the meetings. We tried to bring to meetings key articles and interventions that we believed related to the important issues and would stimulate reflection and action. We listened to teachers. In conversations teachers shared stories about how they had solved some problems and we pushed teachers to think about what was involved in solving other problems. After we listened to teachers, we tried to organize what we thought the teachers were saying and then we brought these ideas back to teachers for confirmation. Sometimes we wrote up procedures to ease implementation of new teaching routines. We regularly visited teachers in a nonevaluative manner to learn more from them and to discuss issues that emerged in their teaching. We avoided bringing to teachers interventions that fitted only our agenda. However, since we viewed ourselves as authentic members of the group, we felt that we could bring up issues that were on our minds and that we could propose ways of solving some problems. Therefore, we were not simply "trainers" or "researchers" ; we were colleagues who played a role in the process and had a stake in the outcomes. We found that we came to appreciate the challenges and struggles of inclusive teaching as we worked at forging colleagueship.

Teachers agree that individually and as a group they will take action. Each teacher was committed to trying out activities in their classes. They chose one class that they wanted to work on each year and targeted one or two interventions that they wanted to try. Sometimes all of the members of the group tried something at the same time. Sometimes a few members from several groups worked on something. In these cases, the teachersreported their efforts to their group. Often other teachers became interested in an intervention and tried it

out.

Overall, we have found that the Cooperative Study Group process is one of the most powerful investments that can be made on behalf of change toward a more inclusive teaching environment in the classroom. These groups appear to break down the isolation of teaching, promote teachers' confidence in their ability to change practices, and allow teachers to build on the strengths that a diverse group of teachers can bring to the planning and teaching process. The time invested in these meetings was valued and used by teachers to guide specific and long-lasting classroom-based changes. The process of establishing these types of groups, learning to make these meetings pay off for teachers, and learning how to use the group process as a mechanism for change appears to be well worth the time and energy required.

STRATELINE: Phase 1 of getting Strateline up and running has been completed. Finding a system that supports both Macintosh and IBM type computers has been a challenge. You can help us in two ways: Complete the Strateline questionnaire and return it ASAP. If you don't know the answer to a question, leave it blank and complete what you can. Second, call (913) 864-0618 with your computer and modem and see if you can access Strateline. If you are able to access Strateline you can register and leave a message for the SYSOP (system operator). When you leave your message, let us know if you have problems. If you are unable to access Strateline, please call us at (913) 864-4780 or drop us a note in the mail and let us know what happened. We will try to fix it. Once you are registered - this takes a day or two - you will be able to access Strateline and leave messages. We have some documents that you can download. Try it!! If it works, great! If it doesn't work let us know - just leave a message for the SYSOP. By the way, Strateline can be called 24 hours a day. Specific questions about Strateline should be address to Gerardo, Pam, or - as a last resort - Keith.
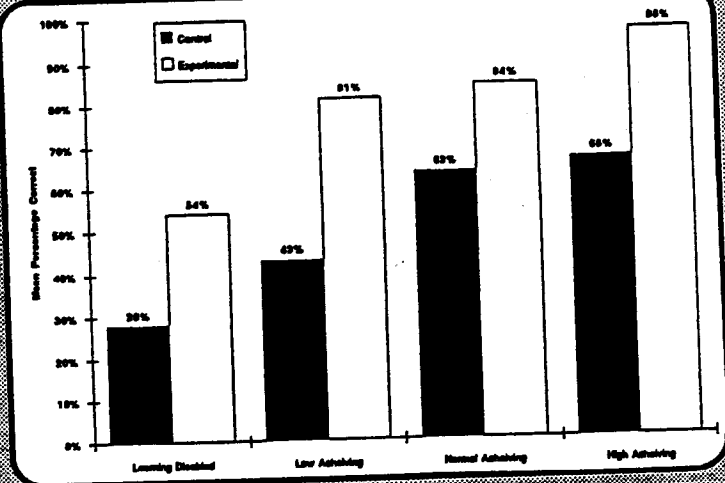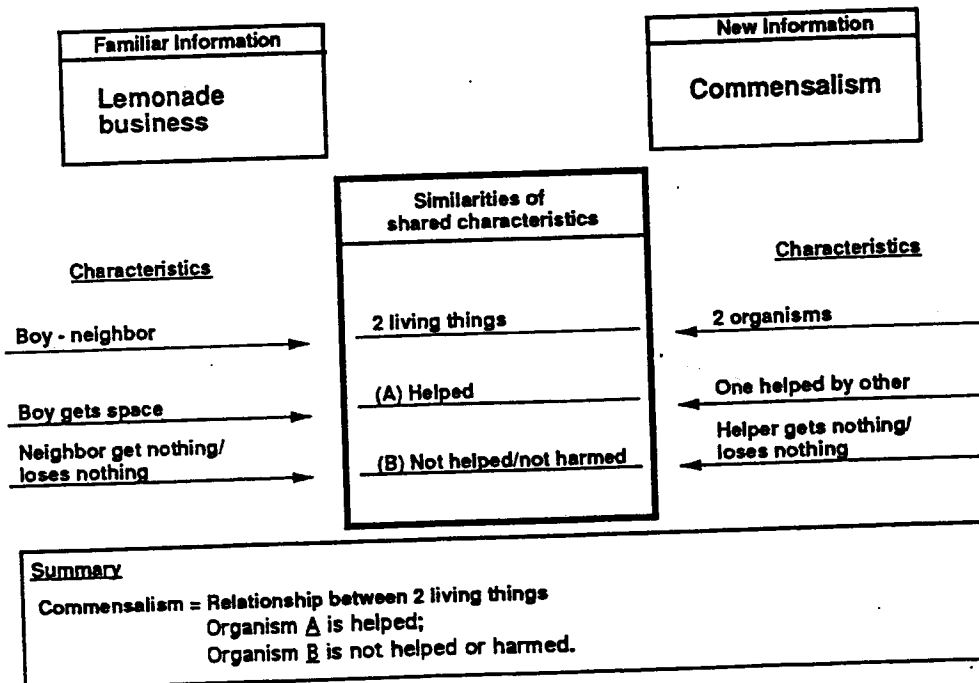
ANCHORING ROUTINE

PURPOSE

To connect new information to previously learned information and increase student understanding and retention of the new information.

STEPS OF THE ANCHORING ROUTINE

- Announce and write the new topic (A)
- Name and write the familiar topic (B)
- Clarify and write characteristics of B
- Highlight and write characteristics of A
- Organize and write similarities between A & B
- Review the important elements and summarize

ANCHORING TABLE

Familiar Information		New Information
Lemonade business		Commensalism

Characteristics

Boy - neighbor ⟶

Boy gets space ⟶

Neighbor get nothing/ loses nothing ⟶

Similarities of shared characteristics

2 living things

(A) Helped

(B) Not helped/not harmed

Characteristics

⟵ 2 organisms

⟵ One helped by other

⟵ Helper gets nothing/ loses nothing

Summary

Commensalism = Relationship between 2 living things
Organism A is helped;
Organism B is not helped or harmed.

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This is a flyer on the Analogical Anchoring Routine. This is a teaching routine that will be included in the Content Enhancement series. The first manual in this series will be premiered at the 15th Anniversary meeting in July!!

For Additional information contact: Janis Bulgren, Jean B. Schumaker, or Donald D. Deshler at the University of Kansas, Center for Research on Learning 3061 Dole Center, Lawrence, KS 66045