

Student learning is supported when teachers own the instruction for students, and when they work in collaboration with students and parents.

(Liberty, Clark & Solomon, 2000; Rainforth, 1998)

Many students with disabilities however are left to teacher aides to manage and instruct, and teacher aides do not always feel they receive adequate guidance and support from teaching staff to provide instruction and support for students with disabilities.

(Giangreco, Edelman & Broer, 2003; Higgins & Ballard, 2000; Hulston, 2000; Thornley, 1998)

EFFECTIVE LEARNING SUPPORT FOR OUR STUDENTS: WHAT DOES THIS REALLY MEAN?

“I learn a lot of stuff now, too. I get to learn stuff I never learned before. The important things that I learned this year are how to speak more clearly and to share my ideas. I’ve learned how to joke around with people. I really like college. Now people call me by my name ... they don’t call me names. My name is Peter and I’m not that special ed. kid anymore ...”

(Hunton & Doyle, 1999, p.22)

A guiding principle for classrooms is that teacher aides should be attached to the classroom, and not to the child with a disability. In this way they can support the teacher in their work with a variety of students. To do this it is important to allow the teacher and teacher aide time together to reflect on and plan for learning in the classroom. When teachers have ownership for all their students and critically reflect on their practice with others who support the student’s learning, they are more likely to be inclusive of their students with disabilities.

(Ainscow, Booth & Dyson, 1999; Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli & MacFarland, 1997; Meyer & Bevan-Brown, 2000; Onosko & Jorgensen, 1998, Tashie & Rosetti, 2002; Udvari-Solner, 1996)

Learning Support

“I really enjoyed the classes where I just went in and was **treated like everyone else**, and if I had not done my homework I would get told off as well ...It was nice when I could be just **one of a crowd**, just be a student. I did **need extra support** and organisation but I think they should have done that in an unobtrusive way, and to try and **integrate the students** as much as possible”.

(Ballard & McDonald, 1999, p.111)



The essential elements of successful collaboration are:

- A willingness to work together to change ways of working
- Developing a common vision, trust and commitment
- Developing communication skills
- Developing leadership skills
- Developing planning skills.

(Johnson, Zorn, Kai Yung Tam, Lamontagne, Johnston, 2003)

Students want

Students can and do comment on what type of support they want provided:

- Individual attention
- Clear explanations
- Demonstrations on how to do tasks
- More time to complete work
- Respect shown towards students
- Programmes that go from easier to harder work
- Make it easy for them to get assistance from their peers
- For adults to motivate them, be patient with them, and make classes interesting.

(Lovitt, Plavins & Cushing, 1999; Vaughn & Klingner, 1998)



Support if a student is not learning:

- Teach an easier skill
- Teach an easier form of the same skill
- Teach in a different way
- Provide more opportunities to learn and practise that skill.

(Jones, Southern & Brigham, 1998)





“Person must not want job for power. Person must be able to **listen to child. Person must understand the limits of safety. Person must be able to **help with friendships**. Person must **be strong and able to lift**. Person must not get ill regularly. Person must **listen to my mummy**”.**

(Shaw, 1998, p.78).

In a British study of over 300 students with disabilities, students often raised the issue of how they related to their adult support staff. Teacher aide presence they felt, had the effect of increasing surveillance and control, and some students saw this as excluding them from their peer group. They frequently talked about their need for privacy. In one school an adult suggested that if it were not for her being there the students would not communicate with each other at all, but observations of students’ interactions when she was away, showed this wasn’t true. Other research has found that when teacher aides were not close by, students were more likely to initiate natural interactions. In another study, primary school students sought times when teacher aides were absent so that they could help their classmates with disabilities figure out ways to do the lesson. Students are often active in their attempts to gain friends at school and their efforts need to be understood and supported by adults.

(Davis & Watson, 2001; Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli & MacFarland, 1997; MacArthur and Gaffney, 2001; Philips, 1997; Watson et al., 2000)



Adult support however, has also been shown to be a valuable mediating influence between students. It just needs to be planned. The eventual withdrawal of support should be included in the planning as young people's natural interactions begin to take place and increase.

(Grenot-Sheyer, Fisher & Staub, 2001; Meyer et al., 1998)

Researchers have commented:

We think our young people are on the right track: What we may need to do is learn how to give these social relationships a “jump start” and then back off while they grow and prosper.

(Meyer et al. 1998, p215 - 216.)



Adult mediation is defined as “any behaviour by an adult that facilitates or interferes with the interaction or learning of students”. Adults in school can look at:

1. The nature of the support and what is supported
2. The influence and impact of adult mediation.

Poor social experiences tend to happen when there are:

- Low adult expectations for the possibility of friendships
- Too much adult surveillance
- Poor attitudes towards students with disabilities in the school
- Adults not taking the time to listen to students' experiences of school
- Little support during unstructured break and lunchtimes.

What happens in your school?

In research, the following ideas encouraged students' interactions, reduced adult assistance, and students with disabilities and their non disabled peers were more likely to identify each other as friends:

- Give non disabled students information about the communication attempts of peers with disabilities
- Help them to interpret their behaviour
- Support natural interactions through cooperative activities, buddy systems and prompts
- A “jump start” from a supportive adult is often needed to establish more regular contact
- A stable pattern of contact with established routines is recommended.

(Cushing & Kennedy, 2003; Hughes, Carter, Hughes, Bradford & Copeland, 2002)