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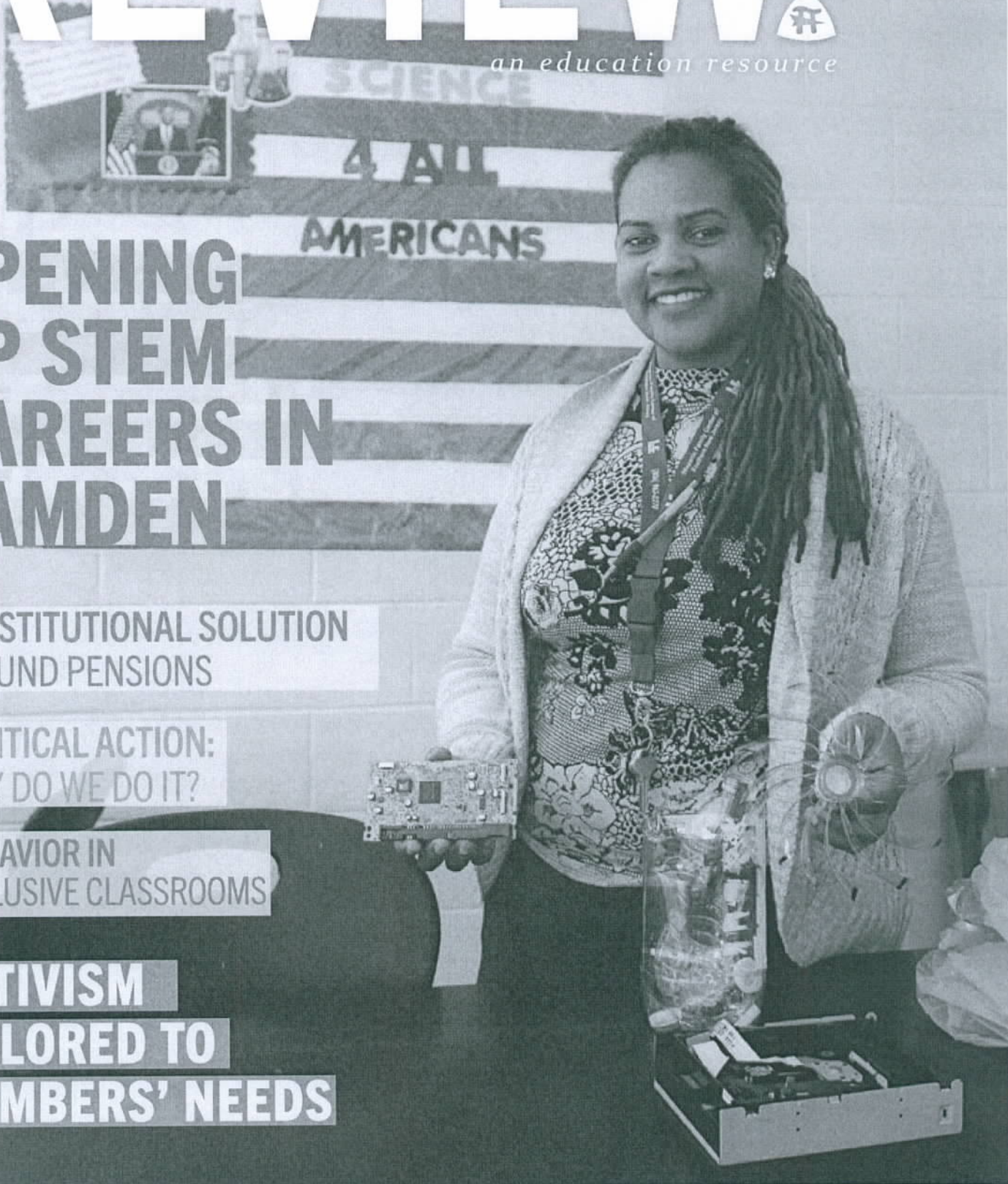
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Supporting Behavior in the Inclusive Classroom:

Yes! There is something you can do!

By Diane Casale-Giannola, Ed.D., and Tracey Garrett, Ed.D.

You have said yes to the inclusive classroom job offer, but while your ambition and heart were in the right place, now what? Any new teacher has some anxieties, but starting in an environment you are apprehensive about handling can add to your stress.

Among the concerns raised over inclusive classrooms, student behavior is typically at the top of the list. School community concerns include:

- The behavioral needs of special education students may negatively affect the behavior of other students in the classroom.
- Poor behavior and additional needs of classified students may detract from the learning process in the classroom.
- The additional support of students with special needs may limit the time a teacher can spend with other students in the classroom, interrupting and interfering with the learning process for those students.

The good news is that there are some specific guidelines for a teacher to be proactive. You can create effective classroom environment, implementing prevention and intervention strategies that support positive student behavior.

Food for thought

For the inclusive classroom, some specific guidelines can be followed, but first, think about how you think. Hearsay and frame of reference often create bias that may not be valid or relevant, yet can hinder positive outcomes.

- Do not assume that the students with classifications will pose behavioral issues. This is a myth and an unjust stereotype. Students with and without classifications have behavioral strengths and needs. It is more important to build a community of supportive individuals, regardless of labels, in large- and small-group instruction.
- Proactive measures to support classroom management will support positive student behavior and academic performance. You can do more than worry about student

behavior and classroom management. The majority of all-inclusive classroom behavior concerns can be addressed using large-group primary prevention.

- Do not use the token economy reward system as both a prevention and intervention means of addressing student behavior. Positive Behavior Support can be described as an individualized, problem-solving process grounded in Applied Behavior Analysis principles. ABA is a process of identifying target behaviors, collecting related data, finding patterns, and addressing antecedents and behaviors systematically with interventions. It seems that too many teachers in the general and inclusive classroom have interpreted positive behavior support to mean a token economy of rewards. While such rewards can be meaningful to promote positive and compliant behavior, they are often overused and only a short-lived, band-aid solution to the problem. There are many other methods to consider.



The social experience in a lesson can provide opportunities for diverse students to engage and collaborate positively during instruction.

Students who feel that their input is valued, and feel that they have contributed to the design of their own academic or behavioral experience, will more likely have the commitment to working toward success with agreed upon goals and strategies.



Concrete strategies for inclusive classrooms

Here are some recommendations to support a positive educational environment:

Implement the essentials of classroom management

Such essentials include establishing positive student-teacher relationships, providing clear rules and routines with clear expectations, community-building and implementing rewards, and discipline or consequences as needed.

Promoting relationships where students feel valued and safe will help students take risks and work toward instructional goals. A community that builds team spirit and camaraderie supports acceptance and valuing of diversity in the inclusive environment. One of the greatest benefits of inclusion is its impact on typical learners. Typical students get to understand, accept and value their diverse peers, building respect and citizenship.

Create student profiles

Learn about individual students and keep a brief profile for reference. Keep an overview of basic information on one page or one large index card. Such information may be added to as the year progresses. This profile can support meaningful lesson design, grouping, classroom management and individual behavior support. Recommended profile information includes academic/behavioral strengths and challenges with recommended strategies for growth; personal information, such as favorite sports, pastimes, and friends; and social learning preferences such as large-group, small-group, or one-one-one.

As a new teacher, you may be overwhelmed with documentation from report cards, cumulative records, formal assessment skill analyses, student growth objectives, individualized educational programs and 504 plans. Creating a brief profile summarizes and highlights information. Asking students to complete a student survey or an "All about me" introductory school activity will help identify some important personal information.

Information can be gathered through assignments, activities, and in oral or written format, but remember that reported information can sometimes be dated or inaccurate. Keep an open mind and update profiles as needed, using your own observation and evaluation to keep student profiles accurate.

Interest in a student's identity will help build his/her feeling of self-worth. Be sure to share similar appropriate information about yourself with your students. Sharing some appropriate educational history and personal information with students

will strengthen relationship and community-building among students and between students and staff.

Conference with students

Just as teachers conference with students during literacy instruction, teachers can conference with students on other levels. Asking about best and worse school experiences, learning preferences and probing individual success and short-comings can yield critical instructional information. Recognize and praise student progress while seeking opportunities and support strategies to meet personal academic and behavioral goals.

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Use exit cards

At the end of a lesson or day, students may be asked to complete a simple self-assessment card, evaluating personal daily performance. Teachers may use exit cards to identify student academic and behavioral needs and reach out as needed. Such cards help students self-monitor behavior and instructional achievement. Information can be used to support and design academic instruction and grouping as well as prioritize and address behavioral needs. Returning cards regularly, with comments as needed, makes the exit card experience meaningful for students and an important performance tool.

Design differentiated instruction

Often students are included in the physical classroom setting but excluded from academic instruction because of the disparity in academic levels. Many times, students with special needs are working on completely different work, creating a sense of separation. Such segregation in the classroom can lead to anxiety, low self-esteem and inappropriate behavior. Make sure students are included in the instruction as well as the physical classroom setting.

Adapting curricula and providing opportunities for students to be included in the social learning experience will keep them meaningfully engaged. Provide opportunities for students to participate in discussion and cooperative learning experiences. Teachers can "pre-teach," preparing students to respond to rehearsed discussion questions. Teachers can create physical signals for teachers when they do not

understand, instead of publically drawing attention to their needs. One suggestion is having students turn over green/red cards as nonverbal indicators for teachers, or make a check mark on a desk chart.

Designing differentiated cooperative learning experiences

The social experience in a lesson can provide opportunities for diverse students to engage and collaborate positively during instruction. Sometimes these may be simple tasks, such as matching or sorting cards with different information. Other times, they may be recording and editing a group video project, instead of writing scripts or acting in the video itself.

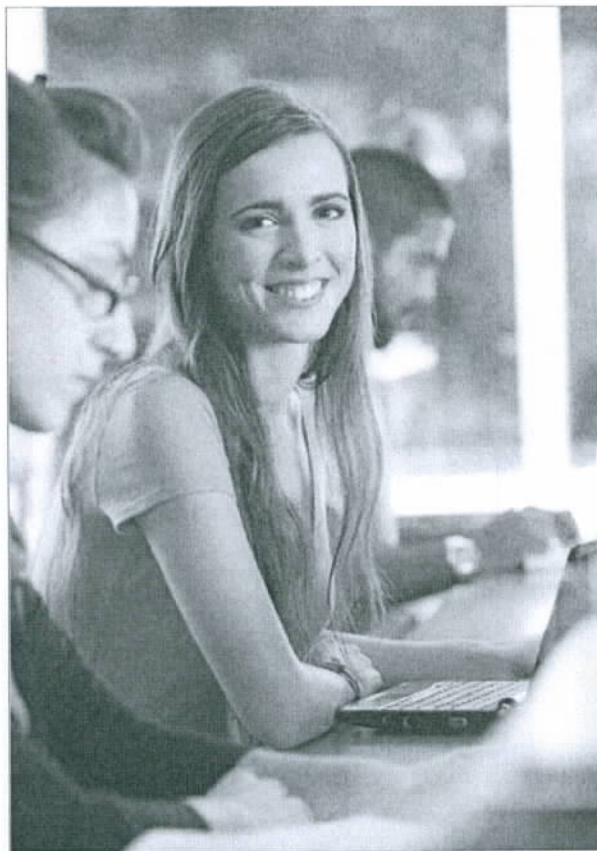
Be sure there are roles in cooperative learning so that everyone is expected to participate and the higher functioning students do not feel that they are doing all the work. Ambiguity and unrealistic goals in cooperative learning experiences typically result in resentment from the high-functioning students doing all the work. Lower performing students feel anxious and inadequate when roles are not

clear. They would like to participate, but do not feel as confident or capable of finding a meaningful contribution.

Overall, these strategies provide active opportunities for teachers to enhance community and practice positive classroom management in the inclusive classroom. Engaging and meaningful lesson design increases time on task, reducing behavioral concerns. Large group community building and individual strategies that recognize and support students' diverse behavioral needs promote a positive classroom climate and culture. Such environments reduce the jitters and empower new teachers while improving student performance. 🌱

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