

# THE CHALKBOARD

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## The Right to Learn: A Special Issue on Special Education

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[Gail Ray, Barbara Slemmer, and Lillian Greco](#)

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### *Preparing Teachers for the Inclusive Classroom*

**Kathleen McSorley**, *assistant professor and program head, programs in special education*

SPECIAL EDUCATION is the provision of services for students with physical, cognitive or emotional needs in educational settings tailored to maximize each student's individual strengths and to support their areas of need.

The history of special education is relatively new. Although free public education for all children was well-established by the middle of the nineteenth century, children with special needs were not included in the definition of "all children" It took another hundred years for the idea of education for all children to evolve and for the concept of inclusion, whereby students with disabilities receive their education alongside their non-disabled peers, to become the model for special education.

Landmark legislation in the mid-seventies (Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act and the Education for all Handicapped Children Act (PL94-142) provided comprehensive civil rights protections to individuals with disabilities in the areas of employment, education, public accommodations, state and local government services, and telecommunications. Later re-named the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and recently reauthorized in 1997, this act extended the provision of multidisciplinary services to children with disabilities or developmental delays from birth through age 5.

This legislation was not achieved in a vacuum, but was the result of advocacy on the part of parents, educators and legislators, which led to awareness of the injustice of excluding persons with disabilities from public life.

The effect of ADA and IDEA on the education of students with special needs is a long story that continues to unfold; educational interventions for children and young adults with disabilities can be seen as a process of evolution from isolation to inclusion. Research over the last 25 years has helped special education move from emphasis on pathology and deficits, and mastery of discrete skills and behaviors in segregated classrooms, to that of identifying strengths and providing instructional and behavioral supports to students in the general education classroom with the ultimate goal of preparing them for the greatest possible degree of self-determination.

Variations in this paradigm include "mainstreaming"--the practice of placing students with special needs into a general education to maximize opportunities for academic and social interaction—and "inclusion," a philosophy for educating diverse learners rather than a placement strategy based on academic or social/emotional needs.

Inclusion implies the belief that all students with special needs can learn, and that they have the right of access to the general education classroom and curriculum, with the supports needed for success.

Inclusive special education in practice can follow one of several models. Co-teaching or team teaching by a general and a

special education teacher in one classroom with an average ratio of 15 general education students to 10 students with special needs; the addition of related services such as speech therapy, physical therapy or psychological counseling provided by professionals in the context of a general education classroom rather than in small “pull-out” settings; or a modified co-teaching model with a “methods and resource teacher” (a certified special education teacher) supporting special education students in the general education classroom for certain periods of time.

Whatever model is used, effective teaching in an inclusive classroom depends entirely on the competence and commitment of the teaching team -- and its willingness to collaborate in planning and putting inclusion into action. The shift from segregated to inclusive settings means that collaboration among professionals and families is crucial. Decisions about how to structure the learning environment, how to modify curriculum and adapt lessons for the increasingly diverse general education classrooms, are no longer the domain of one particular teacher.

At Brooklyn College we believe that the training of special education teachers must prepare them for the shift in the roles they and other members of the school-based support teams will play. The changing landscape of our society requires that cultural competence be an essential outcome of any graduate program in education. Educators must have competencies to develop culturally appropriate curriculum, to assess the progress of English language learners and students from a variety of cultures, and to design classroom environments that are mindful of each student’s strengths, abilities, and cultural identity. All children are indeed, special.

### ***Inclusion in Action: The Brooklyn College Academy/PS 77 Collaboration***

**Joyce Schreiber**, *Speech and Language Teacher, NYC Board of Education*

**Amy Salant**, *Methods and Resources Teacher, NYC Board of Education*

The Brooklyn College Academy Inclusion Program is a part of PS 77, a public school in Brooklyn with 9 sites throughout the borough, which serves students from age 4.9 to 21 with autism spectrum disorder. The BCA-PS77 at Brooklyn College is an inclusion program, located at Brooklyn College. Students attend general education classes at Brooklyn College Academy, the college’s campus-based alternative high school for students needing sustained guidance and a structured learning environment.

The mission of PS 77 is to bring students into the general education classroom so that they can fit in to the best of their ability. The value to students with autism is to “de-specialize” them, that is, to encourage and support the same social behavior expected of their general education peers. Often hampered by difficulties in communicating and processing language, students with autism can learn by observation and reinforcement how to adapt to their ever-changing social world, thus learning the skills needed to function well outside of home and classroom.

Originating in 1996 with six students, PS 77 at Brooklyn College has grown to three classes of six students each. All attend typical high school classes with peers. Additional educational and social support comes from the methods and resource teacher, who adapts the general education curriculum to each student, develops behavior plans, and acts as a liaison between family, teacher and agencies serving the student. In addition, paraprofessionals are assigned to every two students, managing travel and accompanying students to classes. For PS 77 students, the paraprofessional serves as a day-to-day link to the classroom world, interpreting the curriculum and helping students get the most out of the classroom experience.

On a typical day at Brooklyn College Academy, PS 77 Inclusion students and their paraprofessionals attend one class each in the morning and afternoon, taking tests, doing projects –and homework—just as in a general education program. Students are expected to meet the same standards of responsibility toward their work as general education students, completing assignments on time and participating in class work. In addition to class work, PS 77 students participate in trips around the community, designed to teach aspects of life in the real world, such as food-shopping, riding a bus, or going to the bank. This type of learning lays the groundwork for the transition to employment through volunteer work or the BCA internship program.

How does the inclusive classroom work for general education students? The implicit challenge in the inclusion model is to create value both for general education students and their special classmates. In the democracy of BCA’s inclusive classroom, general education classmates are encouraged to accept the PS 77 student as peers, and peer role-modeling has been a special value both to the modelers and their “modelees.” Lessons in responsibility and acceptance are taught in an inclusive setting, and the task of conveying these values rests with the teacher and the type of classroom structure he or she provides, for this will determine to what extent mainstream and special students will be able to mingle and learn from each other.

### **Life With No Mom**

Life With No Mom Is Like:

Sleeping with no dreams

Dark with no sun Off with no on

Being alone with no friends  
Bald with no hair  
Bad with no good  
Vegetables with no meat  
Pizza with no sauce or cheese  
Standard time with no daylight saving's time  
Ice with no water  
Sour with no sweet.  
But I feel excited because I have a nice mom.

--Ikenna Butler

reprinted from *Voice of Inclusion*, the PS 77/Brooklyn College Academy Newsletter

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## **Brooklyn Transition Bridges the Gap**

**Gail Ray**, *Adjunct Professor of Education, Assistant Principal, Brooklyn Transition Center*

**Barbara Slemmer**, *Inclusion Methods and Resources Teacher*

**Lillian Greco**, *Teacher, Board of Education;*

*Service Coordinator, Brooklyn Transition-Brooklyn College*

A place to grow and become responsible, a community of learners preparing for young adulthood...a school within a school. This is Brooklyn Transition. A special program in Community District 75 (the city-wide program serving students with most severe disabilities who cannot be served in their neighborhood schools), Brooklyn Transition seeks to provide learning experiences that bridge the gap between school and the wider world, gradually preparing students to fulfill their best potential as adults.

For these students and their families the concept of independence, even if not expressed as complete financial and geographical autonomy, is substantially the same as for any adolescent. The idea for Brooklyn Transition students and their families is to nurture independence in diverse ways so that the student can move beyond being perceived as –and functioning as--a child. To promote this growth, the Brooklyn Transition program uses a person-centered approach based on home visits and conferences designed to gain information on what students need to develop their own strengths. Most Brooklyn Transition teachers have undergone training in person-centered planning with Dr. Beth Mount through a grant from Community School District 75.

Located in its own building at 185 Ellery Street, Williamsburg, the Brooklyn Transition program is in its 9<sup>th</sup> year of operation and serves students from high school age (14.9 to 19) to age 21. The site school functions like a high school, with freshman, sophomore, junior and senior classes, using New York State and City standards as adapted for students with special needs. In September the Pfizer Charter School (middle school, general education) will also be operating at 185 Ellery Street and Brooklyn Transition administrators are working with Pfizer staff to develop ways to bring the two schools together for common experiences such as special art events, trips and social opportunities. The schools will share library and multimedia resources. Brooklyn Transition teams also operate on-site and are active in Cobble Hill School and the Street Academy. The program has one teacher in each school, serving students who are part of the center.

At Brooklyn College, the Brooklyn Transition Center provides job oversight and placement for graduates (age 19 – 21) among the eighteen other work sites in Brooklyn. The group meets at the School of Education and is staffed by a teacher whose role is also that of service coordinator, using a transition plan based on what the student and family want for the next few years. Focus on work begins early in high school so that students can have a good idea of what they want to do when they get to the Transition Center.

For the past 3 years Brooklyn Transition has been involved with the Teachers and Writers Collaborative, a funded project of District 75 that is also supported by a number of corporate and non-profit sponsors. The collaborative sends artists to schools throughout the city to work on projects with various students. A book of Poetry, "Give the Angels Back their Wings" was produced by the students in the collaborative and their teachers, as well as mural handprint painting projects and a hands-on musical, "Drum Song" jointly with Brooklyn Transition

The concept of "outcome-based accountability" is used to evaluate the program's effectiveness in carrying out its mandate, and each borough in New York has a transition coordinator. Data are compiled on how many student are working in supported employment. A five-year follow-up is conducted by the Central Board of Education. Funding sources also track the progress of

the program.

Brooklyn Transition faculty are convinced that the Brooklyn Transition model can be replicated, provided administrators believe in its effectiveness and teachers are willing to operate outside their titles to implement the program.

## Poem

Love is when someone is looking inside  
Someone's eyes  
And you see a lot of hearts  
Coming out of his blue eyes  
He had a lot of freedom getting up  
And going Outside  
To see the sun rise in the sky  
The wonderful thing about the world  
Is not knowing  
When death is coming at you.  
Then, you can have all the freedom you need  
Because love, is like a pot of gold  
Hard to keep  
Hard to hold  
So, when you die  
Give the angels back their wings  
And your guardian crown will grant you freedom.

--Jessica Montlavo, reprinted from Give the Angels Back Their Wings,  
published by the District 75 Teachers and Writers Collaborative

## News and Notes

### Alumni

**Horace Mann '43**, Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus at Buffalo State University, was the 1997 recipient of an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree from Buffalo State. He received the Brooklyn College Alumni Association Post 50th Lifetime Achievement Award in 1998, and Alumni Award of Honor in 2001.

**Dov Rokeach '81**, Administration and Supervision, is Deputy Assistant Superintendent, Office of Monitoring and School Improvement for The Bronx, New York City Board of Education. He formerly served the Board of Education as Assistant Superintendent of Clinical Services, All Committees On Special Education.

**Joseph Valentin, Ms.Ed '97, '99**, adjunct faculty, education, will begin doctoral studies in urban education at the CUNY Graduate Center this fall. The Graduate Program Urban Education is the first of its kind in CUNY and offers courses of study on curriculum and policy with a focus on urban issues.

**Jo Anne Cummings, '99, '00**, guidance & counseling, is a guidance counselor/ college advisor in the Bedford Stuyvesant Outreach High School Program. She initiated and coordinated a partnership with the Brooklyn College-College Now program, bringing students to productions at Brooklyn College's Gershwin Theater.

### Faculty

**Stephan Brumberg**, professor and program head, administration and supervision, published an essay, "Jewish Education of Girls," in, *Girlhood in America: an Encyclopedia*, Miriam Froman-Brunell, editor, ABC-CLIO, 2001.

**Alberto Bursztyn**, associate professor, will chair the symposium, "School Psychology in a Changing Culture" at the August convention of the American Psychological Association.

Adjunct assistant professor **Mordechai Gordon's** article "Nietzsche on the Significance of Learning about the Past" was recently

published in the journal *Taboo: the Journal of Culture and Education* (Vol. 4, No. 2).

**Vicki Gay Allweiss Irgang**, program manager, Center for Educational Change, earned a Ph.D. degree from New York University School of Education, Program in International Education; Global & Cross-Cultural Education, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences in the Professions. Her dissertation *Buried Stories: The Narratives of Young Urban Parents in a Career Alternative Program*, has been accepted for publication in fall 2001.

**Donna Linderman**, instructor, theater/education, was a participating faculty member of Brooklyn College Theater Initiative's Summer Institute, a 3-week forum for College Now high school educators, counselors, administrators, and BCTEI teaching artists. The institute explored the use of theater in classroom settings and in creating classroom models to be used during the school year.

**Kathleen McSorley**, assistant professor and program head, special education, presented "Building Bridges at Brooklyn: Collaborations on an Urban College Campus" at the 9th Annual Inclusive Schools and Communities for Children and Youth Conference, May 2001.

**Eleanor Miele**, assistant professor and program head, elementary science, is on the advisory board of WILD TV, a four-part PBS NATURE presentation aimed at developing science skills in eight to twelve year olds by exploring urban and suburban habitats. Broadcasts are scheduled to be aired in Spring 2002.

**Luis Reyes**, assistant professor, was a recipient of the Brooklyn College "Making a Difference Award" for leadership in contributing to student life. Professor Reyes was Grand Marshall for Education for the Annual Puerto Rican Day parade. He recently represented Brooklyn College at the University of Connecticut Institute of Puerto Rican and Latino studies annual conference with a presentation on the status of bilingual education in New York City.

**Deborah Shanley**, Dean, School of Education, was one of eight deans chosen by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education to serve as a member of the AACTE Focus Council for Special Education. The council is charged with preparing recommendations for personnel preparation in special education in the context of performance assessment and INTASC standards. Dean Shanley was also selected to serve on the New York State Task for on the Education of Students with Autism.

**Nina Wasserman**, adjunct professor, created study guides for performances of "Kids and Yiddish", "The I Wan Jan Puppet Theatre", and Mermaid Theatre of Canada's "The Very Hungry Caterpillar and the Very Quiet Cricket" and "Goodnight Opus". She has been documenting the Lincoln Center-connected work of Ed 40 and ED 37 students and providing information on museums and cultural opportunities in and beyond New York.

## Congratulations!

The following students received scholarship awards at the School of Education's Graduate Honors Convocation, May 24, 2001:

**Rosanna Reyes, Sharon Majied, Lori Bethea, Patricia Caballero, James Larson, Paula Marshall-Murrell, Mary D'Emic, Lisa Kent, Gisela Lino, Hadassa Brill, Eliane Kaimeh, Cristina Rodriguez, Jean Palumbo, Iwona Borys, Janice Wright, Michael Amorgianos, Janet Worme.**

The following students received scholarship awards at the School of Education's Undergraduate Scholarship and Awards Ceremony, May 16, 2001:

**Sheila Szklanny, Moza Mfuni, Timothy Nixon, Tracia Warner, Juan Garcia, Gina Scognamiglio Janet Bloom-Halperin, Alfa Yau, Elizabeth Barrett, Gina Chillino, Beancher Dixon, Nadav Avital, Erica Taylor, Deborah Kontos And Munera Fattah.**

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