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Career and community studies: an inclusive liberal arts programme for youth with Intellectual Disabilities

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Post-secondary education for youth with Intellectual Disabilities is an emerging area of research. Although there has been increasing interest and recent programme development in this area, there is little research that explores benefits of liberal learning for these students. This paper describes the experiences of three college faculty who designed inclusive courses for youth with Intellectual Disabilities, grounded in liberal learning, at a mid-sized four-year college, in New Jersey. Each professor describes their approach to course design, instruction and evaluation of student learning. Implications for programme design and instruction are discussed, as well as demonstrated benefits for students with Intellectual Disabilities.

Introduction

Yesterday, someone told me about the Holocaust. I'm 18 years old, and until yesterday I had never heard of the Holocaust. How did that happen?

(Stephen, Career and Community Studies student, May 2006)

A liberal education involves discussion of eternal questions of meaning, beauty, ethics, and civics, exposing learners to multiple perspectives and equipping them to assess the merits of the arguments and assertions they encounter. An event such as the Holocaust is a natural object of study in liberal learning, as its enormity and incomprehensibility challenge us to understand the very essence of what it means to be human. Stephen was never told about the Holocaust in high school, because liberal learning was not a major part of the curriculum at the segregated special education school that he attended.

Luckily, Stephen lives in a time and place where he can take advantage of post-secondary options that include a strong liberal learning component. The Board of

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Directors of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) holds the position that ‘the spirit and value of liberal learning are equally relevant to all forms of higher education and to all students’ (AACU, 1998) but it is only recently that efforts have been made to provide post-secondary liberal learning experiences to young adults with Intellectual Disabilities (ID).

This paper describes the Career and Community Studies (CCS) programme at The College of New Jersey (TCNJ), a four-year programme designed specifically to include students with ID in liberal education experiences alongside their typical college peers. We focus on three courses which approached this challenge in creative ways and supported all participants in achieving important liberal learning outcomes. Each of us was the primary instructor for one of these courses: Jerry Petroff created and delivered the Human Abilities Unplugged Freshman Seminar; Stuart Carroll designed and coordinated the Great Conversations class; and Rick Blumberg wrote and taught Psychological Development of Children and Adolescents. We are all members of the CCS Advisory Council and Curriculum Committee and have collaborated closely in bringing these courses to fruition, so the sections describing each are based on observations and insights from all three of us.

Post-secondary education for youth with Intellectual Disabilities

Post-secondary education and training are essential components of the preparation of young adults with disabilities to become successful, interdependent members of our communities (Blackbory & Wagner, 1996; Wittenburg *et al.*, 2000). Despite the impressive gains that youth with disabilities have made in many post-secondary outcomes, youth with ID continue to lag behind other youth with disabilities in their participation in this important area of transition to adult life (Ferguson & Blumberg, 2002). It is estimated that while 78% of high school graduates enter into some form of post-secondary education, only 37% of youth with disabilities have this experience (Wittenburg *et al.*, 2000) and students with significant disabilities, ages 18–21 years, participate at a significantly lower rate of between 4 and 17% (Page & Chadsey-Rusch, 1995).

There are numerous potential benefits for students with ID who participate in meaningful learning experience in post-secondary settings (Grigal *et al.*, 2002). Research on employment indicates that youth with disabilities who receive post-secondary education are more likely to be competitively employed and obtain higher earnings over time than their peers who do not have this experience (Gilmore *et al.*, 2001). Zafft *et al.* (2002) further demonstrated that participation in a post-secondary programme for students with significant disabilities correlated positively with student employment outcomes, competitiveness, and independence. Other stated goals for post-secondary initiatives include the development of self-determination skills and the promotion of social interaction between students with ID and their typical college-age peers (Grigal *et al.*, 2001).

In recent years, there has been increasing interest in post-secondary education opportunities for young adults with ID (Hart *et al.*, 2005; Neubert *et al.*, 2001). The

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success of inclusion for these students in the K-12 years, combined with rising parent expectations for further education, and renewed legislative focus on post-secondary education as a viable and desired outcome for all students, have fuelled this interest (Hart *et al.*, 2004; Sitlington, 2003). In response a small, but growing number of post-secondary institutions have opened their doors to these non-traditional students (Hart *et al.*, 2005; Neubert *et al.*, 2001; ThinkCollege, n.d.).

Currently, there are over 120 post-secondary programmes in existence, according to ThinkCollege (n.d.), an internet database of post-secondary programmes for students with intellectual disabilities developed by the Institute on Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts, the Center on Disability Studies at the University of Hawaii, and the Federation of Children with Special Needs. These programmes represent a range of service models and take place in a variety of post-secondary settings, such as community colleges, four-year colleges and universities, and vocational /technical schools.

Hart *et al.* (2004) conducted a national survey of 25 post-secondary education programmes that support 18–22-year-olds with significant disabilities. The researchers reviewed the 25 programmes and classified them as either ‘substantially separate’, ‘mixed’, or ‘inclusive individualized’. Their main findings indicate that most students are served in either mixed or substantially separate programmes in post-secondary settings, which are primarily focused on functional life skills and employment training. Those students in the individualized, inclusive models, considered ‘innovative’ programmes, were provided with greater access to college courses, certificate programmes or internships that may also be inclusive of those available to the general student body.

Since the phenomenon of students with ID accessing typical college courses is relatively rare and recent, there is little research about their experience or on the programme models that support greater access to the benefits of a liberal based education and more typical college experience (Wagner *et al.*, 2005). Such research as has been conducted has been positive about the benefits of students with ID participating in regular college classes.

In a study of eight students receiving individualized support to access post-secondary education, Weir (2004) concluded that students who benefited from an inclusive, individualized support model could make the same types of gains as students without disabilities. Weinkauff (2002) interviewed staff at three inclusive individualized post-secondary education (IPSE) programmes in Alberta, and identified a number of student outcomes including the development of self-esteem and confidence, improvement in academic skills, the development of job skills, and social status enhancement.

A question that has not been explored is whether the benefits found for students in inclusive individualized programmes can also be achieved by students in mixed programmes which provide both separate and inclusive experiences. It is also possible that such programmes provide benefits that more individualized approaches may lack, but again, the recentness of post-secondary inclusion for students with ID has meant that there is a lack of research on various inclusive models.

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The College of New Jersey

TCNJ, a state college located in suburban, central New Jersey, is primarily an undergraduate, residential school, with approximately 5000 undergraduates and about 800 graduate students. Fully a quarter of the undergraduates students are in programmes leading to teacher certification while the remainder are in various arts, science, and professional schools. The mission statement of the college states that 'The College prepares students to excel in their chosen fields and to create, preserve, and transmit knowledge, arts, and wisdom' (The College of New Jersey, 2007a) and this belief is reflected in the number and rigor of liberal learning courses required of all students at The College.

TCNJ's School of Education's conceptual framework calls for 'creating agents of change' (The College of New Jersey, 2007b, p. 1), and among its five core principles demands that graduates demonstrate professionalism, advocacy, and leadership. TCNJ School of Education graduates are to 'become future leaders advocating not only for the needs of children and youth in New Jersey but also for the educational profession at large' (The College of New Jersey, 2007b, p. 3).

The combination of a strong commitment to liberal learning and to graduating education professionals who see themselves as change agents has made TCNJ an ideal venue for a programme in which students with intellectual disabilities can learn about themselves and the world together with their age peers.

The Career & Community Studies Programme

CCS is a liberal studies programme designed to prepare 18–25-year-old students with ID for adult life, including career exploration and preparation, peer interaction, and liberal learning. The programme's core beliefs include the idea that 'access to liberal learning promotes the development of critical thinking, self-reflection, and an understanding of the inter-relatedness required for civic responsibility' (Career and Community Studies, 2006, p. 1)

CCS was developed after a 2003 pilot demonstration project demonstrated the effectiveness of engaging students with ID in college related social and employment training opportunities. It was found that students with and without disabilities evaluated the experience positively and saw the college campus community as a welcoming environment. This experience, our research into existing programme models, and our commitment to inclusion at all levels of education led to the birth of CCS. Subsequently, a grant from the National Downs Syndrome Society assisted in the development of the current full time course of study.

CCS approaches to inclusive college coursework

The CCS programme has developed and implemented three specific and unique courses to provide liberal learning within an inclusive setting for students with ID. These courses are designed and coordinated to introduce freshmen and sophomores



into the college experience. Our experiences with each of these courses have been highly positive, and we believe that they suggest models for how students with intellectual disabilities can (1) be provided with a meaningful instruction in the liberal arts /humanities; (2) become part of the social and academic fabric of the student body; and (3) be prepared to more successfully be integrated into a variety of courses across the seven schools within the college. The following detail these approaches and include initial data that supports their promise as methods of inclusion in higher education.

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Human abilities — unplugged — a freshmen seminar

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Disability is not a 'brave struggle' or 'courage in the face of adversity' ... disability is an art. It's an ingenious way to live.

(Neil Marcus, In performance, December 2005)

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This quote reflects the central focus of the Human Abilities: Unplugged course, one of the over one hundred First Seminars that incoming TCNJ Freshmen can choose to take in their first year of study at The College. The course looks at disability as a key aspect of the human experience and explores it through an alternate post-modern paradigm that views difference from a variety of angles. The course commences and terminates with an attempt to define 'human-ness' or the parameters of what makes us human. Students explore models and theories that examine social, political, cultural, and economic factors that define disability and help determine personal and collective responses to difference. At the same time, coursework focuses on de-stigmatizing disease, illness, and impairment, including those that cannot be measured or explained by biological science.

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The course has a number of unique features, the chief one being the inclusion of all six to eight first-year CCS students together with twelve to 15 typical TCNJ Freshmen. The seminar uses universal curriculum and instructional design to ensure that all students are being provided with a rigorous course that includes significant writing, reading and discussion. At the start of the course students are organized in small groups of four to five which are heterogeneous by gender, major, and disability. These groups are maintained throughout the semester for the purposes of developing relationships among group members and nurturing the individual strengths of participants. Discussions, activities, and outside of class assignments are required to be completed within these groups.

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There are several class requirements and assignments that make complex course material accessible to all students. Each student group is responsible for outlining text chapters by identifying three to five big ideas and concepts. These ideas and concepts are reviewed by the professor, modified with the group as necessary and then reinforced to the entire class through lecture and a series of associated short readings. Subsequently, the core ideas are posted on the course website and can be used by all the students to study or review. Another example of an assignment that represents a universal approach to learning is the required viewing of approximately a dozen

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contemporary films that address specific areas of disability study. Each group is responsible to facilitate a full class discussion of a film and to integrate the course texts. For example, the French film *The 8th Day* (1997) is required as a companion to the lectures and guest speakers addressing institutionalization of people with intellectual disabilities.

Before each class meeting, the CCS students attended pre-teaching sessions with either a programme instructor or the seminar professor. Programme staff and volunteer mentors were also involved in these sessions, which ensured that the CCS students were well prepared. This was a critical factor in assuring success within the course, especially in the beginning sessions and during difficult content lectures.

The course deals with significant and controversial issues, that require students to work out their own values and beliefs as they consider multiple perspectives on some highly-charged topics. Table 1 includes a list of course objectives and topics covered. These are consistent with the course's inclusion in The College's liberal learning programme, and with our commitment to providing a liberal education experience to the CCS students as well as to their typical classmates.

Another unique attribute of this seminar course is that the student groups are required to become researchers and participate in life history interviews of adults with disabilities who have lived in institutions. The professor instructs the group on basic methodology of ethnographic interview research and the class establishes a generic interview protocol to be used in the project. Each group then conducts an in-depth interview. The oral histories for the past two years are currently being formatted to be archived on a TCNJ College Website in a collection called *The Human Abilities Project (HAP)*. The data from the oral histories will be used as texts to be analysed as part of the course in future years.

The seminar culminates with field trips that reflect the overall theme of the course, which is the variance of human ability. The first seminar visits an integrated studio and gallery in New York City that represents artists with autism and other developmental disabilities. This year's class also participated in the New York premiere of a

Table 1. Freshmen seminar: human abilities: unplugged.

Course objectives

Compare and contrast the major perspectives (Moral, Social and Medical models) of disability. Identify political, economic, and social forces that have shaped Western society's understanding of disability.

Demonstrate an understanding of the following disability related concepts among others: disability, handicap, impairment, normal, stigma, eugenics, inclusion and discrimination.

Articulate an understanding of the disability community's position on a variety of issues to include prenatal testing, Deaf-deaf, physician assisted suicide, inclusion, cochlear implants, etc.

Demonstrate an understanding of the intersectionality of disability, race, class, gender, and sexuality.

Demonstrate a basic knowledge of the rights of people with disabilities.

Articulate key moments in the history of the disability rights movement.

documentary film addressing the current abuse of people with developmental disabilities in institutions in Texas.

Evaluation research

During the first year of the seminar, a psychology student worked with the professor to document each class in a participatory research initiative. She took extensive field notes focusing on the inclusion of the students with disabilities within the class; the social acceptance of the students without disabilities and evidence of the use and success of universal design for learning. We are currently conducting a content analysis of this data, and also looking at results of focus group conversations conducted after the second year of the course. Though our findings are preliminary there are strong themes that have emerged:

- Each of the students with ID evolved socially and academically during the course, as evidenced by increased class participation and the assumption of greater roles within the small groups.
- Students without disabilities came to rely more on the CCS students in group work and became more respectful of their role and status in the class.
- There was little to no role for CCS mentors in the class since the professor attempted to implement a universal approach to course design.
- CCS students became less a group to themselves and were more integrated within the fabric of the class. This was most evident in the way that small groups functioned outside of class.
- Students without disabilities became more accepting of the artefacts of disability such as self-stimulatory behaviour or differing communication abilities among the CCS students.

We believe that the experience for the students with ID clearly assisted them in their acclimation to college and reinforced the potential in each of them. As one student stated, 'I know things and words that I never thought I could understand, and I want to know more'.

Great conversations

A curriculum provides domains for conversation, and the conversations that take place within those domains are the primary means of teaching and learning. Through such conversations students will be helped to enter into culturally significant traditions of knowledge in action.

(Applebee, 1996, p. 37)

A core belief of the CCS programme is that its students have a right to be exposed to challenging content in a range of academic disciplines and to develop 'critical thinking, self reflection, and an understanding of the inter-relatedness required for civic responsibility' (CCS Core Beliefs). We hope to achieve this by having students audit

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a range of regular college courses, but we have also seen a need to create a course that would expose the CCS students to numerous college subjects and involve them in scholarly interactions with their typical peers. We named this course Great Conversations (GC), because it is intended both to expose all participants to the conversations that animate the academic disciplines and also to give them opportunities to talk to one another about these important questions.

The guiding principles of the GC course which emerged were that it would engage participants in the discourse and essential questions of the disciplines explored, increase general academic proficiencies such as writing, speaking, reading, and critical thinking, and provide an inclusive learning experience in which CCS and typical college students would all increase content knowledge and academic proficiencies.

The semester long GC course is organized into six or seven two-week modules, each of which deals with a different academic content area. The class meets twice a week for an hour and twenty minute sessions each time, and CCS students are given additional support before and after class sessions to maximize the quality of their participation and learning. Each module considers two or three core questions in its discipline and exposes students to the ways of thinking and forms of discourse that characterize the area.

Originally our intention was that each course module would be designed and delivered by a faculty member, but as the course evolved we invited graduate students and upper class undergraduates to participate in curriculum development and delivery, with close supervision from faculty and staff associated with the CCS programme. We briefed all module designers on the course context and assisted them in designing exemplary inclusive lessons and modules. Table 2 lists the Spring 2007 modules and instructors and also identifies the essential questions pursued and some key teaching methods employed.

The modular design of the course has allowed us to cover a range of topics in the Hard Sciences, Social Sciences, Humanities, and Fine Arts, and has enabled us to involve a range of college faculty, students, and staff in curriculum design and delivery. It has also made it possible for us to involve typical TCNJ students as learners in the class.

GC is not a credit-bearing course and we anticipated that it would be difficult to find college students willing to participate in a semester long experience without an extrinsic incentive. We felt, however, that we would be able to find many TCNJ students who would be willing to attend a two week module on a subject of interest to them. We also suspected that once a student had attended one module he or she would be tempted to attend additional ones, which in fact occurred; several students attended the first module then stayed for the entire course!

We found our typical student participants in a number of ways. First, we tapped into the pool of programme mentors who were already volunteering with the programme. Second, we encouraged students who were designing and delivering modules to help find other participants, which led to links with student groups such as New Jersey Water Watch, the History Honors Society, and the Secondary Education Teachers Association. Professor of Secondary Education, Dr Ruth



Palmer, offered her Sophomore Psychology of Learning students the option to participate in GC in lieu of tutoring in a local high school, and many of these students became GC regulars. Finally, we recruited aggressively in our peers' classes, at student organization meetings, and at faculty meetings in the School of Education and across the college. As a result of these efforts a typical GC lesson has twelve to 15 TCNJ students learning alongside the six CCS students.

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Since the group of TCNJ students varies from lesson to lesson, it has been necessary to review extensively at the start of each Great Conversations class. It is possible to see this virtue as a necessity, however, as the CCS students also benefit from revisiting the content. Similarly, we have felt a need to start just about every lesson with an icebreaker activity, but since this has the effect of increasing interaction between the CCS and typical students it has helped to create a positive classroom climate for all learners.

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One issue we have had to address flows from the ambiguous role played by the typical TCNJ students. Our vision is for them to participate as learners together with the CCS students and not as teacher's assistants, but there have been times when we felt they were holding back, refusing to answer questions or participate in activities and instead deferring to the CCS students. We have addressed this with many of them, but it remains a concern.

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On the whole the modules have been intellectually challenging, interesting, and inclusive. Not all modules have been equally successful, however, and we have greatly increased our knowledge and understanding of what can work in this type of post-secondary setting. Some of the guidelines we now give instructors are as follows:

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- Start every class with an icebreaker activity relevant to the content. For example, a poetry lesson could begin with students in small groups making silly rhyming couplets with their names.
- Put the students into mixed ability groups from the start of the lesson and go back to the groups frequently throughout.
- Use sophisticated vocabulary but take time to explain new words and use them in appropriate contexts.
- If groups are to work with written text during the lesson it should be brief and relatively simple.
- Avoid whole group discussion until small groups have addressed a topic.
- Give students a chance to prepare answers to questions in advance, preferably in pairs or small groups. Asking CCS students to come up with answers off the top extemporaneously is usually ineffective and can cause anxiety.
- Ask intriguing, open-ended questions that everyone will want to answer.
- Use experiential and simulation activities where appropriate, and take time to process these experiences thoroughly.
- Revisit the essential questions in each class. If possible, have a written chart or framework that students refer to over time.

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We have not systematically gathered data on the effects of the GC course, but informal conversations with the CCS students has convinced us that they highly value the



class and believe they are learning from it. As a result, we offered a Great Conversations II course to students who continued into the CCS programme for its second year, and are now preparing to offer GC to the new class of Freshmen.

5 CCS students have told us that they enjoy the content they have studied and the interactions they have had with other TCNJ students in the class. All six CCS Sophomores indicated that the class opened doors for them and introduced them to topics and issues that they would not otherwise have encountered. The knowledge they have acquired shows up in surprising places. One student can remember all of the names of the chemicals we tested for in the Water Quality lessons. Another student did a
10 presentation about an intellectual passion and chose Poetry as his topic, using several poems from the previous semester's Poetry module as examples. As a group the students reminisce about simulations and improvisation experiences that were part of the class.

15 Most intriguing to us is that the CCS students view GC as a real college course intended for all its participants, and not as something designed especially for them. When we asked them what they liked best about the course, one student replied that it was great for students to be exposed to different subjects. We thought she was referring to the CCS students, but she went on, 'A Special Ed major might never have taken a Chemistry class, but when they take it in Great Conversations they may realize they like it.' Her perception of the Special Education major as a full student in
20 the class was evidence to us that the course has succeeded as an inclusive experience.

We are currently conducting research on the educational and social impact of various modules and the course as a whole for the CCS students, and also exploring its meaning for the other student participants, particularly those in teacher education programmes whose future careers will include the design of inclusive lessons for their own classrooms. It is our belief that the course has had benefits for all participants and stakeholders.

30 **The psychological development of children and adolescents**

SPE 203, the Psychological Development of Children and Adolescents, is an introduction to Educational Psychology. This course meets an undergraduate Social and Behavioral Sciences requirement, and draws students from across the TCNJ campus, from a variety of academic majors. Through lectures, discussions, films and group
35 activities, the course explores the psychological development of children and adolescents in the critical areas of cognitive, physical, psycho-social, emotional and moral development. The course assignments require students to apply development theories and current research to the assessment of learning problems in children and youth.

40 As with any introductory course which surveys prominent theorists, developmental theory and applied methodologies, this course runs the risk of overwhelming students with information of questionable relevance and utility. For this reason, course instructors strive to connect the material to the individual, lived experience of students, and the solution of meaningful problems. Over the years that we have

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taught the course, the most successful classes have always seemed to be the ones that involved the most interaction between students, and personal discoveries made in the course of applying psychological concepts to important problems and life events.

SPE 203, because of its content and design, seemed an appropriate inclusive experience for students in the CCS Programme. Current thinking about intellectual functioning has focused upon the ability of individuals to create ideas from lived experience, to reflect upon them, and understand them in the context of other ideas (Greenspan, 1997). Students with ID, like other TCNJ undergraduates, have had recent experience as children and adolescents. It was our hope that within the context of the course and with peers of similar age, these experiences could be explored and connected to developmental theory in a meaningful way. We assumed that with adaptation of instruction and evaluation, and given reasonable accommodations, e.g., mentor support and technology, the CCS students could be successfully included in the course.

One of the initial considerations in developing any inclusive learning experience, is how the instructor addresses real issues of student learning differences. The instructor may choose to allow these differences to emerge during the course of instruction and address them in real time, or h/she may decide to prepare students for what they may experience, with information that explains anticipated differences in learning or

behaviour. We chose to adopt a mixed approach in developing the inclusive process of SPE 203.

To prepare the students with ID for the course, we conducted pre-teaching sessions prior to each class session, assisted by student mentors. Initial sessions, held before the course began, focused primarily on appropriate social behaviours expected of all students in the course, with role play to reinforce understanding and skill acquisition. In addition, the learning objectives and academic requirements of the course were discussed, with particular attention given to the adaptations and accommodations available to CCS students.

On the first day of class, the CCS students were included in the course with their typical peers, without any extraordinary introduction. All students were divided into working groups, using a strategy that ensured that the CCS students were evenly distributed among the groups. An icebreaker activity was used to introduce group members to each other, and the learning experience of SPE 203 had begun.

The Psychological Development of Children and Adolescents uses printed material including the text *Educational Psychology* (Woolfolk, 2007), lecture notes, and supplemental readings. Prior to each class session, the CCS students were pre-taught the content by reviewing the 'big ideas' contained in the lecture notes. For example, in preparing students to learn about Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural theory, the big ideas were presented in the following way: (1) human activity takes place in cultural settings and can't be understood apart from them; (2) learning is co-constructed with others; and (3) development is the transformation of shared activities into internalized processes. In addition, concepts such as *cultural tools*, *scaffolding* and the *zone of proximal development* were explained. These big ideas were reinforced by examples provided by the instructor, and then students were asked to provide their own meaningful examples. In addition, students were pre-taught the objectives and processes of any group activities planned for that class session, and were given an opportunity to discuss assignments, supplementary readings or films.

The result of these pre-teaching sessions was that the CCS students were consistently well prepared to participate in class discussions and activities. In fact, they were typically among the first students to respond to probing questions from the instructor, and often provided cogent and moving examples of life experiences or observations relating to concepts and methodology. Over time, most were active participants in group work, and shared the responsibility of 'reporting back' the group's product to the whole class.

In addition to the pre-teaching sessions, CCS students had the use of mentors to work with them daily during scheduled study periods. These mentors would discuss the readings with them, review the big ideas, help with homework assignments, prepare for tests, etc. CCS students were given adapted tests, with fewer items to respond to. These items related to the 'Big Ideas', and were both multiple choice and brief answer. Students were allowed to refer to their lecture notes in their responses to test items. All test items were taken verbatim from the non-adapted test given to the whole class.

The culminating learning activity for SPE 203, is the 'virtual student' case study project. This is a group assignment that requires students to critically analyse and

apply course content to the assessment of specific student learning problems, and the identification of intervention and support strategies. Each group is given a brief profile of a student in a K-12 classroom. They are given some information about the observable social and academic problems this student is demonstrating. The group is then required to create a 'virtual student' by: (1) identifying the specific factors that are influencing this student's development and learning; (2) using assessment methods and tools to evaluate specific problems of learning; and (3) developing comprehensive plans for intervention and support. The group is required to prepare a written product containing a student profile, assessment report, and support plan. In addition, the group is required to create an engaging presentation of their student for the whole class.

The virtual student project requires students to identify and share the tasks involved in creating the assigned products. These include research, writing, presentation development, and presentation. This is perhaps the most challenging aspect of the inclusive experience for all students in the class. To ensure the success of the group process, I schedule times throughout the semester, to meet with each group to monitor their progress. At first, some of the non-disabled students struggled with how much responsibility to give the students with disabilities. However, provided the out of class support of mentors, the students with disabilities were able to contribute to all of the project development activities. The success of the projects was apparent at the time of group presentations. The CCS students participated equally with their non-disabled peers, and in a few cases, seemed more comfortable and confident (due to pre-rehearsal) than their peers.

All of the students with ID passed the course. They were evaluated using the same criteria applied to other students; the quality of their participation, test scores, and the virtual student project. The adaptations and accommodations provided seemed to be sufficient to enable them to be successful in the course. The typical end of semester course evaluations revealed that the non-disabled students were comfortable with the inclusive nature of the course. Some students expressed initial discomfort, but all stated that this was replaced over time with an appreciation for the contributions of the CCS students. Many student comments reflected that the presence of students with intellectual disabilities enriched the learning experience for them.

The course instructor found that the inclusion of students with ID in a typical undergraduate course forced him to reflect on his learning objectives for all students, and to differentiate instructional approaches in ways that enriched the teaching experience. The adaptations that were made to instruction and evaluation of student learning were efficient in terms of time and effort. The weekly pre-teaching (30-45 minutes per class) required additional faculty teaching time initially, but was soon transferred to undergraduate student mentors. The CCS programme provided mentor and technology support outside of class that was essential to student success.

In summary, the students with intellectual disabilities participated in course activities and demonstrated their learning in much the same way as their non-disabled peers. Based upon student products and course evaluations the inclusive experience



was successful for all students. Did meaningful learning take place? Well, what Educational Psychology professor has not wondered what their students remember about dear old Vygotsky a week after the final exam?

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Conclusions

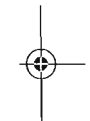
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The Career and Community Studies Programme is in its fourth semester of providing inclusive post-secondary coursework and experiences for students with intellectual disabilities on the campus of the College of New Jersey. As a faculty, we are very impressed with the growth of our students, both socially and academically. It is an ongoing struggle for us to capture the varied and rich effects of a curriculum grounded in liberal learning upon students who, due to mistaken views of their abilities, previously had limited exposure to academically challenging coursework.

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Access to meaningful post-secondary experiences for youth with intellectual and other developmental disabilities is an important new frontier in the process toward full inclusion for persons with disabilities. Post-secondary education is a necessary experience for many young people, in that it supports the development of knowledge, skills and relationships that foster financial and social success, civic participation, and we would argue, quality of life. We believe that it will require many compelling examples of successful approaches to inclusive post-secondary education to change current attitudes in academia and K-12 public schools, so that post-secondary education is a viable option for students with intellectual disabilities. The intent of this paper was to describe some of the important things we have learned so far from our admittedly brief and limited experience. Based upon our classroom observations, critical/collaborative reflections, our evaluation of student work, and evaluation feedback from both CCS students and their typically admitted peers, we will share a few of our important learnings.

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Under the scheme put forward by Hart *et al.* (2004), the CCS Programme, which views participants as members of a defined cohort, and includes some separate supportive experiences, would be viewed as a mixed model of post-secondary inclusion, rather than the individualized approach they favour. While we are eager to involve CCS students in regular coursework and all aspects of campus life, our experience suggests that a structured programme of academic and social skills preparation, carefully designed early inclusive experiences (during freshman and sophomore year), combined with collaborative planning and support for faculty, facilitates rather than hinders successful inclusion.

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We have come to believe that access to inclusive liberal learning for students with Intellectual Disabilities is best accomplished within a comprehensive programme structure. A formal programme with well identified goals, objectives and components, both identifies and facilitates opportunities for meaningful and successful inclusion. At TCNJ, the Career and Community Studies programme, has been an effective structure for student support; faculty outreach, support and collaboration; and perhaps most importantly, a vehicle for communicating the vision of a truly inclusive college community.





We have found that the concepts and methods of special education (individualized education) can be effectively transferred to a post-secondary setting. One of the most exciting things we have learned about this experience is that what we have come to think of as best practices in K-12 inclusion, really translates well to what happens in our college classrooms. We have seen that universal design, collaborative planning, peer mentoring, activities based instruction, pre-teaching, adaptation of inputs and outputs, to cite just a few approaches, has enabled our students to engage with academic content and demonstrate their learning in meaningful ways. From a programme development perspective, we think that adaptations and curriculum modifications should initially emerge from the efforts of trained and experienced faculty, then through a consultative model be disseminated to other faculty for use in less structured inclusive settings.

We are continually engaged in a practice of reflection, collaborative evaluation and programme improvement. Our initial evaluation efforts suggest that our students with ID, given CCS programme support, combined with effective adaptations and reasonable accommodations, are successfully participating in inclusive coursework and meeting course requirements. This is demonstrated through significant, meaningful participation in class discussions, group activities and projects. Through participation in coursework grounded in liberal learning, our students with ID have demonstrated the ability to apply conceptual knowledge to their own experience, and actively engage with the important social issues of the past and present. We have yet to examine the benefits of such classes for the typical students and the instructors in the classes, but we can only hope that exposure to inclusive educational practices will influence all to reconsider beliefs about intelligence and who can and cannot learn

Notes on contributors

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