Peers Supporting an Inclusive School Climate

The following are three innovative ways that peer supports can be used to meet the instructional and social needs of students with disabilities in the general education setting.  However, each of these models require upfront planning that includes selecting the right type of strategy, utilizing it at the right time with perhaps individualized outcomes all aligned with the lesson goals.

1.  **Collaborative Learning** – An instructional strategy used to reinforce skills taught by the teacher.  This teaching method allows time for practice, review, and opportunities for students to use higher-level thinking skills.

2.  **Cross-Age Peer Support** is another strategy that assists with the learning in the general education setting.  This approach typically involves older students, usually high school age, who provide instructional support for elementary or secondary students.

3.  **Peer modeling** is another support that can be used to help students learn academic, processes and classroom routines.  It also provides the classroom teacher opportunities to use peers to assist with instruction, clarifying directions and give social reminders with little or no disruption to the lesson cycle.  It is an excellent way for peers to provide appropriate behavioral models of students who need to improve their social skills.

Research has clearly defined the benefits of inclusion and peer supports for the student with a disability.  However, these benefits are not reserved for the students receiving the assistance; the following is a list published by: [www.kidstogether.org/inclusion/benefitsofinclusion.htm](http://www.kidstogether.org/inclusion/benefitsofinclusion.htm),

which boasts the benefits for all student groups when inclusion and peer supports have been planned and implemented individually and appropriately.

**Benefits for Students With Disabilities:**

* + - Friendships
    - Increased social initiations, relationships and networks
    - Peer role models for academic, social and behavior skills
    - Increased achievement of IEP goals
    - Greater access to general curriculum
    - Enhanced skill acquisition and generalization
    - Increased inclusion in future environments
    - Greater opportunities for interactions
    - Higher expectations
    - Increased school staff collaboration
    - Increased parent participation
    - Families are more integrated into community

**Benefits of Inclusion for Students Without Disabilities**

* + - Meaningful friendships
    - Increased appreciation and acceptance of individual differences
    - Increased understanding and acceptance of diversity
    - Respect for all people
    - Prepares all students for adult life in an inclusive society
    - Opportunities to master activities by practicing and teaching others
    - Greater academic outcomes
    - All students needs are better met, greater resources for everyone

The power of peers as shown here has a cumulative effect, which makes issues such a bullying incompatible.  Rather, we have peers helping peers become more integrated into the school culture.  In recent news there have been a number of inclusive schools where together the classmates and adults have created a school system where everyone can be celebrated.   A few examples include students electing their peers with disabilities to class officer roles and homecoming king or queen (USA Today, Nation, 4A Thursday September 30, 2010).  What a celebration this is - for everyone!  Great things happen in inclusive schools!