THE SCHOOLWIDE APPLICATIONS MODEL

Wayne Sailor[1]
University of Kansas

and

Blair Roger
Oakland, California

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Efforts to countermand differentiation within special education through inclusion policy have largely failed as a result of the inherent separateness of special education praxis relative to general education. A more promising path to establish a balance with integration may be found in schoolwide application with policy driven by general education.

By Wayne Sailor and Blair Roger

Cell Division in Special Education

As a field, special education presents an excellent case study of the differentiation/integration paradox as defined (in this issue) by Burello & Hoffman. As Skrtic (1991) pointed out more than a decade ago, a large and ever widening gap occurs between the *premise* of special education—to provide needed supports services, adaptations and accommodations to students with disabilities, to preserve and enhance their educational participation in the least restrictive environment—and special education *praxis*. The latter has evolved over three decades into a parallel, highly differentiated educational structure, often with only loosely organized connections to the general education system (Taylor, 1988).

Having become differentiated from general education early on, special education began to undergo a process that, at times, has seemed to mimic cell division. At one point in its ontogeny, the field could list some thirty distinctive eligibility categories for special education services (e.g., learning disabilities, behavioral disorders, severe disabilities, autism, etc., etc.). Many of these early categories further differentiated, with autism for example subdividing into a host of subcategories lumped under "autism spectrum disorders". Learning disabilities gave birth to attention deficit disorders, specific reading disabilities, etc., and ADD, in turn, begat attention deficit, hyperactivity disorders (ADHD), etc.

How has all of this come about? The differentiation/integration paradox with its tensions in praxis and contradictions in policy provides a reasonable hypothesis. To better meet the educational needs of specific *identifiable* groups whose needs *qua* group are homogenous, promotes differentiation. If highly differentiated policy and praxis were to produce exemplary outcomes for those so affected, the strain would be limited to arguments for and against directing scarce resources to meet the needs of a few at the relative expense of the many. The values underlying the premise of special education would likely resolve the tension on the side of customization and differentiation. But available evidence suggests the positive outcomes are not there (Sailor, 2002; Halvorsen & Sailor, 19___; Sailor & Gee, 19___; Lenz, Deschler & Rissom, 2003; Lipsky & Gartner, 200__).

The Medical Model

Special education, early in its inception embraced the diagnostic/prescriptive model that had come to characterize modern medicine, i.e., disability was framed as pathology. Psychology, with its partner the test industry (analogous to some extent to medicine's partnership with the drug industry) became the "gatekeeper" for special education, by accepting referrals from teachers and parents, and by achieving a diagnosis (e.g., categorical label) which can, in turn, be tagged for highly differentiated placement, programs and services. At times, special education policy handbooks at the district level have come to resemble the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) that stands at the heart of medical jurisprudence and psychiatric practice.

Failed Attempts to Resolve the Paradox by Instantiating Integration

In the 1980s, the U.S. Department of Education began to advance policy reform efforts designed to countermand the rapid growth of special education through its increasing

proliferation of categorical placements and practices. These initiatives occurred against a backdrop of publications citing positive outcomes from integrated practices (i.e., Ryndak & Fisher, 19___; Wang, Walberg & Reynolds, 19 ___) and a corresponding barrage of negative outcome findings from separate classroom and pullout practices (i.e., Lawson & Sailor, 2001; Sailor & Halvorsen, 19___; McGregor & Vogelsberg, 1998; McDonnel, McCaughlin & Morison, 1997).

The first of these was called the Regular Education Initiative (Wang, ___), and was designed to stimulate the provision of special education supports and services in general education classrooms. The initiative generated enormous controversy within special education, which culminated in a special issue of the *Journal of Learning Disabilities* devoted entirely to an attempted refutation of the research underlying the policy. The result was to spotlight the paradox. The advancement of special education policy reform, framed as general education policy ("regular" education initiative) failed entirely within the community of special education, with most "regular" educators living in blissful ignorance of its very existence.

More recently, Department of Education policy has advanced "inclusion" as recommended practice, and has expended significant funds directed to training, research and demonstration through grants, to strengthen the provision of services and supports to students with disabilities in general education classrooms. This initiative too, has failed to significantly change special education placement and service configurations, over about a fifteen-year effort ( ). Again, the policy has drawn fire from within special education (Kaufman,) and has failed to attract interest and enthusiasm from general education, in whose classrooms children would be placed and served under inclusion models ( ).

The No Child Left Behind legislation, for all of its problems, does offer special education an opportunity to once again pursue a pathway to integration policy. First, NCLB makes clear that *all* children in public education are first and foremost, general education students. Second, the law firmly anchors educational praxis in accountability, even going so far as to define "evidence" (as in "evidence based practices") and to restrict scientific inquiry to approved methodologies (Sailor & Stowe, 2003).

If students served under IDEA are general education students with specialized services and supports to be provided through special education; and if evidence for academic and social outcomes is to be evaluated against approved methodologies, then once again an opportunity to achieve an integrated educational policy with which to guide special education praxis has emerged. The sum of available evidence gathered from use of scientifically controlled designs overwhelmingly supports integrated instructional approaches over those that are categorically segregated, regardless of the categorical label and level of severity of disability (Sailor, 2003; Lenz, et al., 2003; Vogelsburg, et al., 19 ___; Deshler, et al., ____).

Schoolwide Applications

One reason why inclusion policy has failed to garner much support from general education may be attributable to the way "inclusion" has been defined. Virtually all definitions that have surfaced in the literature of special education have in common a general education classroom as the unit of interest and analysis for the provision of supports and services. The problem with a classroom-based model is that it often lacks credibility for the general education teacher, whose job is usually perceived as requiring that students proceed as uniformly as possible through the classroom curriculum, so as to advance to the next grade level. Students whose disabilities impede their ability to progress at expected rates, and who, as a result, fall

whole grade levels behind their classmates on various components of the curriculum, seem to the general education teacher to belong elsewhere, and to be someone else's responsibility as a result. Special education is usually there to oblige with separate categorical classroom placements, particularly when "inclusion" fails.

Alternatively, when inclusion is advanced as a core value of the school program, students with IEPs who cannot function in various components of the classroom curriculum, find themselves at tables, usually at the back of the classroom with a paraprofessional who, in a one-on-one approach, works with the student on "something else". Giangreco ( ) suggested that this practice not only segregates special education students within the general education classroom, but can lead to detrimental outcomes for both general and special education students when such practices create a distraction in the classroom (Giangreco, 2003).

Does integrated praxis for special education (i.e., inclusion) need to be tied to a classroom-based model? If the objective is to avoid separate, categorical classrooms as the alternative to general education classroom placements, then a pathway to integrated praxis exists by shifting the unit of analysis to the school rather than the classroom. If Joey is a student who cannot progress at grade level in the third grade due to his disabilities, then the question shifts, under a schoolwide approach, away from a particular classroom placement for him and toward where Joey should be at different times, with whom, and doing what, for those portions of the third grade curriculum that he cannot engage, even with classroom-based supports, accommodations, adaptations and services. The problem becomes one of scheduling, personnel deployment and space utilization rather than one of alternative placement.

A schoolwide approach is not a variant of the older "pull out" model. Students with IEPs are not removed from general education classrooms to receive one-on-one therapies, tutorials or

to go to "resource rooms" under schoolwide models. Provision of all services and supports follows the logic of integration and is provided in such a manner as to benefit the maximum number of students, including those not identified for special education. Special education has, in recent years, developed evidence-based practices that have demonstrable efficacy for general education students as well as those identified for special education. Learning strategies (i.e., Lenz, et al., 2003); positive behavior support (i.e., Horner & Sugai, 2003); Carr,et al, 2001; Turnbull, et al., 2001); and transition planning (i.e., Morningstar,) present two excellent examples. In grossly oversimplified terms, one can imagine a general education teacher saying to a special educator, "why are you bringing these kids back? We created special education in the first place to enable children who we have not been prepared to teach to be looked after by highly specialized personnel". The special educator might now reply, "we have learned much from our experience of individualizing education, partnering with families and specialized service providers for speech, motor-movement and so on, that are now demonstrating benefits for all students". As Ferguson & Kozleski (2001) put it: **<insert from p 11 here>** IDEA contains language under the "incidental benefits" section that encourages applications of special education praxis that hold promise for non-identified students. This approach enables special educators to reframe their practices to support students with special needs in integrated arrangements.

When a schoolwide approach is applied to "low performing" schools, such as those sometimes found in rural, isolated settings or in inner-city areas affected by conditions of extreme poverty, evidence is mounting that suggests that positive outcomes can be realized for all students from integrated applications of special education practices (Warren, et al, 2003; Lewis, et al., 2003). In the case of fully integrated applications of learning strategies designed

originally for students with specific learning disabilities, evidence is accruing that NCLB-sanctioned accountability measures for all students increases as a result (Lenz, et al., ____). Where social development, reflected in behavior problems leading to office disciplinary referrals for general education students (and possible removal to categorical placements for special education students) is at issue, schoolwide positive behavior support has resulted in mounting evidence that standardized test scores for general education students in low-performing schools can be turned around and enhanced as a result of an integrated application of special education practice (Utley & Sailor, 2003).

To illustrate how an integrated special education approach works in practice, we describe below our own version, called SAM for schoolwide applications model, which is being implemented and evaluated in four California elementary schools and in one elementary school in Kansas City, Kansas. We describe this model in terms of six "guiding principles" and fifteen "critical features", each of which can be evaluated for its progress over time using SAMAN, an assessment instrument that is designed to enable schools to become self-evaluating in their ability to link specific interventions associated with the schoolwide approach to measured academic and social outcomes for all students (Sailor & Roger, 2004). While this approach can appear to mimic comprehensive school reform in some ways, it is specifically designed to be integrated into the existing values and culture of each individual school, rather than serving as a "template", to be imposed in top-down fashion from district-level administration, to school-level administration. In other words, a school desiring to move from differentiated praxis to integrated praxis, is confronted with 15 critical features, under SAM, to contemplate through team processes and to implement, according to its own dictates and timelines. Across our five

research sites, we are seeing great diversity and creativity on the part of school teams devoted to systems change resulting in integrated praxis.

Guiding Principles and Critical Features

In this section, we present six guiding principles that define SAM and list critical features under each that can be estimated for progress over time using the SAMAN assessment system. In subsequent sections, we discuss measurement strategies as well as the structural requirements at participating schools and their districts for implementation of SAM.

Guiding Principle 1. All instruction is guided by general education. This principle is designed to encourage schools to avoid alternative placements such as private or public special schools for students who require extensive services and supports. Through the Schoolwide Applications Model, schools welcome these students for the opportunity to generate additional services and supports that can be configured to benefit a variety of students through integrated applications. At our research sites, it is school policy to encourage parent participation and involvement, and parents are provided extensive information about the schoolwide model. In those rare cases where parents feel strongly that their child requires a separate, self-contained placement and the district concurs, the student may be referred to a comparable (non-SAM) school that offers self-contained classes for students with disabilities.

SAM does not allow for separate classes for students with disabilities at the school site, so the challenge to the school is to focus on how such students are supported in the general education classroom, how they are supported in other environments and how specialized therapies and services are to be provided. Utilization of space at the school, deployment of support personnel and scheduling issues became significant in realizing this critical feature. At SAM schools, very little attention is drawn to the existence of disabilities among some students,

and the need for special services and supports. Every effort is made to foster friendships and positive relationships among students with and without disabilities.

Most teacher training programs continue to encourage general education teachers to expect special education teachers to assume primary responsibility for students with IEPs. Special education departments at colleges and universities reinforce this idea by training special education teachers in self-contained classrooms and by having little curricular contact with general education departments such as Curriculum and Instruction. An integrated schoolwide model essentially requires teachers to reconceptualize the respective roles that they were prepared to anticipate on the job. Under the SAM practice, general education teachers have primary responsibility for all students, consider themselves responsible for implementing IEPs, and seek consultation from and/or collaboration with special education professionals to educate students with disabilities. At SAM schools the general education teacher is the chief agent of each child's educational program with support from others including special educators, therapists, paraprofessionals and others, as needed.

SAM differs from traditional inclusion models by ensuring that students with IEPs are pursuing goals and objectives matched to particular elements of the curriculum being implemented while they are in the general education classroom. Under SAM, no student with disabilities would be found at the rear or sides of a classroom, engaged with a paraprofessional on some task that is unrelated to what the rest of the classmates are doing. The level of participation may be adjusted to the special education student's ability level, or level of current achievement in a particular component, but instruction for that student would still be geared to that component. If the class is engaged in a higher-level curricular example, say algebra, and a student with disabilities cannot access that material with demonstrable benefits, then that student

might be assigned to an integrated grouping outside of the classroom for that period. Instruction in remedial math with other students who may not have IEPs but are operating at the same curricular level would present one such kind of opportunity.

There are times, of course, when one-on-one instruction is appropriate in the general education classroom, but for any students who can benefit rather than just students identified for special education. For example, a child who needs intensive instruction in reading might receive a 30-minute tutorial session in the classroom while the rest of the class is engaged in a reading exercize.

Guiding Principle #2: *All school resources are configured to benefit all students.* In traditional schools, students in special education often do not accompany general education students at equivalent grade levels on field trips, sports events, assemblies, arts performances, after school programs, specialized reading, math and science programs and enrichment programs in art, drama, dance, etc. SAM schools seek to overcome barriers to inclusion of students in all regular school events. All students with IEPs are members of age-appropriate grade level classrooms, and attend all non-classroom functions with their classmates.

Rather than organizing services and special supports so that only identified students receive benefits, the schoolwide model organizes all categorical supports to benefit the most students possible. For urban, multicultural schools that are at risk for punitive consequences under NCLB, this feature allows non-identified, low performing students to receive "incidental" benefits from the integrated applications of special education services and supports, those available through Title I, second language learners, vocational education, etc. School administrators must pay careful attention to state requirements in the implementation of federal, categorical programs such as IDEA. For example, identified students with IEPs still need to be

primary recipients of services and supports provided through special education. General education students can receive benefits from the provision of these supports in well-integrated circumstances.

SAM schools utilize small grouping arrangements at the classroom level and small learning communities at the schoolwide level in large schools, particularly secondary schools. Through staff and professional development activities these schools attain proficiency in harnessing the talents and energy of students to participate in instructional as well as learning processes at school. Cooperative learning group arrangements, student directed learning, peer tutorials, peer mediated instructional arrangements, etc., can greatly enhance outcomes for all students in integrated instructional arrangements (Greenwood, et al., 19___; Lenz & Deshler, ____).

Guiding Principle #3: *Schools proactively address social development and citizenship.* Schoolwide positive behavior support is an excellent example of a comprehensive intervention package originally developed to meet the specialized need for social development instruction for students in special education who also have behavioral disabilities (Carr, et al., 2002), that has demonstrated efficacy for all students, particularly those in schools challenged by urban blight and poverty (Utley & Sailor, 2003). SAM schools incorporate PBS as an excellent way to extend special education innovation to help meet the social development needs of all students. PBS, for example has generated recent evidence that schools with high rates of disciplinary referrals can very significantly cut those rates over a two-year period and can increase depressed levels of standardized test scores in math and literacy possibly resulting from increased instructional time on the part of students formerly being referred out of class (and sometimes school) (Warren, et al., 2003; Lassen, et al. ___).

Guiding Principle #4: *Schools are democratically organized, data driven, problem-solving systems.* SAM schools are encouraged to incorporate additional software at the district level, to enable school leadership teams to benefit from all available databases affecting the social and academic performance of their students (Lassen, et al., ___). Through a process called School Centered Planning (to be described) SAM schools use a variety of performance data fields, disaggregated at the District level, to make decisions regarding setting priorities concerning ongoing elements of school reform.

SAM schools recognize that all salaried personnel at a school can contribute to the teaching-learning process. A school custodian may have hidden talents for vocational training with students, or a speech therapist may be skilled in music appreciation. The trick is to enable all school personnel to contribute to the primary mission of the school and not be completely constrained by bureaucratic role specifications. Furthermore, SAM schools seek to move away from categorical descriptors (e.g., "learning disabilities", "inclusion", "specials", "push in – pull out services", etc.) Two kinds of teachers are described in the non-categorical lexicon: classroom teachers and support teachers.

Guiding Principle #5: *Schools have open boundaries in relation to their families and communities.* A Site Leadership Team (to be described) is established at SAM sites that is representative of all school personnel and which may include parents as well as community representation. This Team undertakes a process called *School Centered Planning* to evaluate data from school processes linked to student academic and social performance outcomes, to prioritize specific new schoolwide interventions to improve outcomes, and to advance the mission of the school through full implementation of SAM.

SAM schools also go beyond traditional Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) processes and solicit active participation on the part of family members in the teaching/listening process. Some SAM sites have set the establishment of a family resource center (c.f., Lawson & Sailor, 2000) at the site as a schoolwide priority. The creation of a "parent liaison" position is a related priority.

SAM schools also reach beyond the "business partner" relationship that has characterized some school reform processes. These schools undertake a "community mapping" process to understand and relate to their respective community constituencies. The process includes non-traditional schools such as magnet schools; racial balance schools under bussing arrangements; cross-district grade configuration schools; charter schools, etc. where the "community" of the school may not be easily geographically configured. The point is to engage the community in the life of the school, and vice-versa, regardless of how "community" is defined.

Guiding Principle #6: *SAM schools enjoy district support for undertaking this extensive systems change effort.* Schoolwide models such as SAM that offer a significant departure from traditional educational bureaucratic management and communication processes will encounter difficulties early on in the absence of district support. Pilot projects can be undertaken with the understanding that continuation and expansion to additional sites will be predicated upon successful, if not impressive, gains in measured student outcomes.

District level support may be expected to increase following successful demonstrations and sharing results across schools over time. Table 1 summarizes the relationship of each of the fifteen measurable, critical features of SAM to each of the models' guiding principles. In the next section we briefly describe some of the SAM measurement strategies that we have implemented to date; including SAMAN, the SAM analysis and assessment instrument.

Measurement Strategies

Each SAM school employs a package of psychometrically established instruments with which to assess progress related to specific school priorities established through the SCP process. These include but are not limited to: SET (Horner & Sugai, 2004) for assessing positive behavior support processes; SAMAN (Sailor & Roger, 2004) to assess the fifteen critical features of SAM; and EVOLVE (Giangreco, 2003) to assess paraprofessional training and deployment practices, procedures and outcomes.

Districts are encouraged to use the Data Analyzer (Lassen, et al., *in press*) as an adjunct to the District-wide data system, to enable each SAM school to receive school-specific feedback relative to its own priorities and data fields of interest, as well as to facilitate reporting to other teams and committees that make up school operations.

Structural Elements of SAM

SAM is a fully integrated and unified approach to the education of all students. As a process, it is intended to enable schools to engage in collaborative, team driven decision-making activities geared to undertaking specific interventions, as a school, to produce enhanced academic and social outcomes for its students. The process of educating all students together (c.f., Burello, Ashley & Beatty, 2001) presents unique challenges as well as unique opportunities. The SAM approach requires certain structural elements to be in place to accomplish the requisite systems-change agenda. Two elements, School-Centered Planning (SCP) and a Site Leadership Team (SLT) occur at the level of the school. Two additional elements are required at the level of the District, a District Leadership Team (DLT) and a District Resource Team (DRT).

SLT. The site leadership team, usually between 8 and 12 members has the function of evaluating schoolwide progress data; setting priorities, goals and objectives for each school term (i.e., semester, trimester, etc.) and networking with as well as reporting to the other teams and committees that make up school operations. The Principal is usually a member of the SLT but not necessarily its Chair. SLTs follow strict and efficient team procedures (agenda, rules for membership, rules for recognition to speak, minutes, etc.) so that precious school time is not wasted. SLTs meet at least bi-weekly and undergo full day "retreats" at least twice per year (semester school calendars) prior to onset of each new term. The School Centered Planning process (SCP) is engaged during these retreats. Membership on SLTs is usually a mix of school nominations; elections for one-year (renewable) terms; Principal appointments; and invitations to specific parents and community members to solicit participation. Parent and community participant expenses; substitutes for out-of-class meetings for participating teachers; supplies, etc. can become budget items for SLTs.

SCP. The School Centered Planning process is a variant of, and patterned after empowerment evaluation (Fetterman, 19). Using this process, a facilitator, supplied by the district or arranged through a university partnership, assists the SLT to begin with a *vision* for the school in undertaking the Schoolwide Application Model (SAM). A set of goals is derived to realize the vision, and a set of specific objectives delineated to be undertaken by various school/community personnel for the coming term. Measurement strategies are identified for each objective so that subsequent SCPs can proceed with priority and objective-setting discussions occurring on the basis of pupil performance data linked to specific measurable processes. Interim meetings are held by the SLT to review progress in the implementation of each SCP-action plan for the term.

DLT. The District Leadership Team is comprised of district personnel with a vested interest in SAM implementation. The DLT may have the Superintendent as a member, but usually not in the role of Chair of the team. DLTs are usually chaired by the head of curriculum and instruction, since SAM processes are driven primarily by general education. Other members typically include the head of pupil support services; the special education director; the Title I director; and the director of second language learner programs. Other members may be appointed by the Superintendent as needed. The DLT usually meets three or four times per year to review SAM school site plans and consider requests for approval for policy and budgetary considerations arising from these plans (these are usually many at the outset, but tapering off over time).

DRT. The final structural component is the District Resource Team. This Team is usually made up of district-level staff who work closely with the schools such as regional special education personnel; grade level specialists; parent support coordinator; transportation officials, etc. The function of the DRT is to consider each school site SCP for the coming term and assist the DLT in recommending approval, disapproval or further negotiation with the site over requested resources. If a SAM site, for example, requests two additional para-educators to implement one or more objectives on the SCP for the coming term, the DRT will consider the request, balance the needs of the site against the collective needs of all district schools, and make recommendations to the DLT. Typically, DRTs with several SAM sites in the district will meet on a fairly frequent basis to assist the District to stay ahead of the curve of systems change.

SAM and the paradox of differentiation

The Schoolwide Applications Model is a work in progress. It represents an effort to integrate all aspects of comprehensive school reform with a new and innovative approach to the

delivery of special education supports and services. Ongoing research will be needed to determine if the SAM premise holds, namely that *de-differentiated* educational praxis can enhance outcomes for *all* students.

TABLE 1

SAM Guiding Principles and Their Critical Features

1. All instruction is guided by general education.
    - 1.1. All students are served at the school they would attend if disability was not an issue.
    - 1.2. All students are considered to be general education students.
    - 1.3. General education teachers assume responsibility for all students.
    - 1.4. All students are instructed in accordance with the general curriculum with supports as needed.
2. All school resources are configured to benefit all students.
    - 2.5. School includes all students for all classroom and school functions
    - 2.6. School organizes all resources and supports to benefit all students.
    - 2.7. School effectively incorporates general education students in the instructional process.
3. School proactively addresses social development and citizenship.
    - 3.8. School incorporates schoolwide positive behavior support at individual, group and schoolwide levels.
4. School is team-driven, data-based learning organization.
    - 4.9. School is data-driven, collaborative decision-making team organization using team processes.
    - 4.10. All personnel at the school participate in the teaching-learning process.
    - 4.11. School employs a consistent non-categorical lexicon.
    - 4.12. School is governed by a site leadership team.
5. School has open boundaries in relation to its families and its community.
    - 5.13. School has working partnership with families of students who attend the school.
    - 5.14. School has a working partnership with its community businesses and service providers.
6. School enjoys district support for undertaking the extensive systems-change activities required to implement SAM.
    - 6.15. District supports SAM school sites by effectively utilizing a District Management Team (DMT) and a District Resource Team (DRT).