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Developing a Website to Support the Survival of
First-Year Teachers of Students with Moderate and Severe Disabilities

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Abstract

The product of this project is a website to help a new Education Specialist teachers serving student with moderate and severe disabilities to succeed in responding to the challenges of starting their new job in their first year. The website is named wehelpwecare.com and provides specific examples on a month-to-month basis of how to handle the issues of scheduling, curriculum, technology and troubleshooting. It illustrates 1) how behavior support is your best friend, 2) how technology and online programs can be used to more effectively teach the children, 3) how to communicate positively with the classroom paraeducators so a classroom is a nurturing environment, and more. Included in the website are “dos and don’ts” covering many situations. The website is designed to help a new teacher have tools and flexibility to handle several likely situations hopefully enjoy unchartered terrain.

Keywords: special educator, students with moderate and severe disabilities, behavior support, technology and online resources, paraeducators
Chapter 1

Introduction

In order for a new teacher of students with moderate and severe disabilities to be successful in the classroom, there are numerous issues to address and schedules and activities to balance. For example, there are issues regarding paraeducator training, supervision and support. There is the need for scheduling services to student and planning and implementing Individual Education Program (IEP) plan. There are new students who come and require the development of new IEPs. There are the frequent and important home-school parent communication systems to establish and maintain. There is the scheduling of related services personnel (e.g., Occupational Therapist, Physical Therapist, Speech and Language Pathologist) to provide student services. On top of these student-related activities and necessities, there is the always-important task of getting to know the school culture and the promotion of inclusive educational opportunities in the general education. The student goals need to be connected to the new Common Core Curriculum. Finally, there is the need to stay calm, healthy, and sane!

At first, for a new teacher, all of the tasks above and more may seem so overwhelming. But, if given some guidance and support, while difficult, the new teacher can juggle these many balls and not drop many. The key is to focus upon learning about and addressing the educational, social and behavioral needs of each individual child. Each child is a whole wonderful child, who now is in a teacher’s hands and needs you to find a way to give him or her tools for the future. Each student’s IEP is a roadmaps to this future. But, the IEP do not tell the teacher what motivates each child at a given moment,
as each child grows and changes so quickly. Learn to use your best judgement and discernment. Not every child talks, so listen with your heart.

Often a new teacher of students with moderate/severe disabilities teaching has very few roadmaps, and curriculum that works for other classes may not work for this class. I was in this position a year ago and felt scared, overwhelmed and still sometimes do. But this year I plan on learning from my mistakes and making a website that helps new teachers like myself find a way to manage some of the challenges I faced last year as a brand new mod/severe teacher in a large urban school district.

In a classroom serving students with moderate/severe disabilities, it is important to remember that technology is your friend. By introducing the I-pad to my students last year, the author found a safe way to help her students learn, grow, become motivated and be delighted with them. For my student population the security of an interface that is non-changing has been a huge plus in enabling them to feel safe and relaxed in a classroom setting. As a teacher I did not realize that changing my hairdo, my clothes and my mood was always a constant challenge for some of my autistic students, but the safety of the computer interface, the predictability of the platform and the many funny clips therein proved to be a wonderful tool to motivate them. By no means is it a replacement for human interaction but it serves as teaching tool, as well as an excellent motivator.

Snell and Brown (2011) argue that teachers focus upon the development of student self determination and note the following: Within the conceptual framework of self-determination the student is viewed as an instructional partner. To encourage self
determination, opportunities for learner control and self-direction are infused into instruction” (p. 531). For students with moderate/severe disabilities, there are times when the students cannot easily access the general education curriculum. But, as Snell and Brown (2011) so succintly note:

The point is, whether acting completely autonomously or partially participating in activities with the support of others, students with intellectual disabilities can and should be supported in expressing their self-determination by making things happen for themselves. (p. 531).

1.1.1 Statement of Problem
When faced with a myriad of challenges, a new teacher of students with moderate/severe disabilities can feel overwhelmed and question his or her abilities to be a good teacher. Due to the need for early and structured guidelines for teachers entering this dimension of the field of special education services, a website, if you will, that is based upon the experiences of a first year teacher’s learned survival skills and lessons of determination can be helpful to other new teachers with the challenges and insecurities these new teachers may face. Obviously every person is different and teaching styles are different, but familiarity with another teacher's experience may not only lay out a plan of action, but add humor and help a new teacher realize he or she is not alone and that this job is actually very enjoyable and creative. With the website’s few pointers, templates for scheduling, tried and true sources for good curriculum, and demonstrated ways to access technology resources and benefits, a new teacher may not feel so alone in this new moderate to severe setting.
1.1.2 **Purpose of the Project**

Many of the practices common to teachers of elementary-aged students are not sufficient for teachers of students with moderate/severe disabilities. Students may not have the same benchmarks, testing requirements, or report cards. The grade levels of the students being served may vary widely, from Kindergarten through grade 5. The actual knowledge and skill levels of the students also may vary widely. Common general education curricular assessments may be too difficult and not useful for determining progress for many of these students.

The purpose of this project is to help new Education Specialist teachers serving students with moderate and severe disabilities to survive and enjoy their first year by accessing the website wecarewehelp.com. The website uses the native American "Circle of Courage" framework to offer actions and advice regarding the four dimensions of the Circle of Courage – belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity – for every month of the school year. The website guide features lessons that include technology, incorporates play, and uses Maslow’s hierarchy of needs as a theoretical framework to supplement the Circle of Courage framework.

1.1.3 **Rationale for and Significance of the Project**

Trela and Jimenez argue for the use of “personally relevant” (2013) information to make curriculum adaptations to the Common Core State Standards and differentiate so all students can participate in the general education curriculum and be more than just functioning in a functional (i.e., basic life skills) curriculum. Therefore, the rationale for this project or overall goal is to provide new teachers of students with moderate and severe disabilities to have access to tools to teach to the whole person. The website
created in this project is designed to provide theories and strategies to help teachers of these students to teach to the whole child. For example, the website would have information to help teachers create lessons that include technology and incorporate play. Promote Snell and Brown (2011) note that “words open up new worlds, allowing individuals to expand their knowledge.” (p. 469). Therefore, the website would also offer resources to promote language development and helping children use language to mediate what they know and want. By using Maslow’s hierarchy of needs of physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem and self actualization (Maslow, which in some respect mirrors the circle of courage. What is of most importance for a mod/severe teacher is to emphasize the personal "esteem" of each student. Every student has the right to feel respected, no matter how they behave or how they look or what their challenges may be.

**Key Terms**

**Accommodations.** Accommodations are adaptations that provide a child access to the general education curriculum but does not change that the student is learning (IDEA, 2004).

**Behavior Support Plan (BSP).** A BSP is plan to help a student reduce undesirable behavior of concern and replace it with a socially acceptable desirable behavior. The plan is based upon observations, data collection, a functional behavioral analysis. For student eligible for special education, the BSP becomes part of the Individual Education Program (IEP) plan for a student and is implemented by the
students’s IEP team. It documents necessary interventions and steps to be taken by teachers and paraprofessionals for complicated student behaviors (Hancock, 2009).

**Bloom’s Taxonomy**. Taxonomies are classification schemes for developing objectives that involve categories arranged in hierarchical order. The most widely used taxonomy in education is Bloom’s taxonomy of educational objectives (Bloom, Englehard, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl, 1956). The cognitive domains begin with knowledge at the least complex cognitive category, followed by comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Recent modifications of the taxonomy places synthesis above evaluation, as a more complex cognitive behavior and objective.

**Circle of Courage**. The Circle of Courage is a native American philosophy of education that posits that for a child to grow and be emotionally healthy, that youth needs experiences that create a sense of belonging, mastery, independence and generosity (Brokenleg & Brendtro, 1988).

**Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)**. FAPE is a principle that ensures that students eligible for receive specialize instruction and related services at public expense, without charge to the family (IDEA 2004).

**Individual Education Program (IEP)**. An IEP is the individualized program that is memorialized in a written IEP plan document that states the goals, objectives, current levels of performance, and services needed for a student eligible for special education. (IDEA, 2004)
**Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).** IDEA is federal education legislation that guarantees students with disabilities a free and appropriate public education and the right to be educated with their non-disabled peers. (IDEA, 2004).

**Least Restrictive Environment (LRE).** LRE is a principle that ensures that the educational placement of a student with a disability occurs in a manner that promotes the maximum possible interaction with the general school population, extracurricular activities and general education curriculum. Placement options include, but are not limited to, the general education classroom, general education classroom with support, specialized academic instruction in small group settings, education for all or part of the day in a specialized classroom, home schooling, and even private education programs. (IDEA 2004).

**Maslow’s Hierchary of Needs.** In his classic article, *A Theory for Human Motivation*” Abraham Maslow (1943) theorized a hierarchy of human motivations starting with the meeting of physiological needs as a base, safety being a secondary need, love and belonging being the third, self-esteem being the fourth, and self-actualization being the pinnacle.

**Special Day Course (SDC).** In California, an SDC is a self-contained special education class which provides services to the students with extensive educational needs that cannot be met by the general education program or through the support of a less intensive set of supports. The supports are for students for whom it is deemed that more than 50% of their day needs specially designed instruction (Hancock, 2009).
**Specialized Academic Instruction (SAI).** SAI is instruction that is adapting, as appropriate to the needs of the child with a disability. It can be an adaptation in the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction to provide a child access to the general curriculum, the educational standards within the jurisdiction of the public agency that apply to all children (Code of Federal Regulations, Title 34, Section 300.39(b)(3); IDEA, 2004).

**Students with Moderate and Severe Disabilities.** In California, students with moderate and severe disabilities include students who meet the federal special education eligibility criteria in at least the following disability categories: Autism Spectrum Disorder, Deaf-Blindness, Emotional Disturbance, Intellectual Disability, and Multiple Disabilities.

**Technology.** Technology is a catch all term that represents technological hardware and software (e.g., an iPad; applications or apps; particular programs and tools such as Learning Upgrade and Boardmaker). Technology can provide students with moderate and severe disabilities access to curriculum and a way to show what they know (e.g., type rather than speak).

1.1.4 **Summary**

Getting the keys and entering a room with boxes everywhere and computer stations in a jumble of wires can be somewhat scary for any new teacher. It was for me! The first step is to make the room your own. Yes, belonging is important for the new teacher as much as the students and paraprofessionals. Lakota Anthropologist Ella Deloria described it using these words: “Be related, somehow to everyone you know”
www.reclaiming.com/content/aboutcircleofcourage website.

This belief lends itself to practicing deep respect for students, fellow teachers, students’ parents and to all the other service providers support services, the administration as well as the secretaries and the janitorial services.

The motivation to website for teachers of students with moderate and severe disabilities is that the author, through her own experience as a first year teacher, believes that support is needed for any first year teacher in this field, particular a teacher serving complex students such as those with moderate and severe disabilities. As a second year Education Specialist, the author reflected on her first year and remembers wondering, “Why on earth did I choose to go into this field?” There were a myriad of challenges that felt overwhelming. Among them were increased paperwork loads, lack of planning time, lack of proper staff training, feeling isolated, being dependent upon general educator willingness to include a student with disabilities in the classroom, family relations, being understaffed, and so forth. The website is designed to help new teachers with these and other realities of being a first year teacher of students with moderate and severe disabilities in school that may not have the ideal circumstances or supports for that teacher or his or her students.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

In this literature review, the author examines several areas that inspired the creating of the website for this project. The areas are represented by the topical headings of this section; namely, teacher challenges, ways to think of all students as students first and personalizing curriculum, curriculum and technology in support of students with severe disabilities and the Circle of Courage theoretical framework for education a child as a whole child. Among the authors reviewed were several of the former candidates in my own Master of Arts in Education program here at Cal State San Marcos. They were particularly inspiring to motivate me to develop the website of this project. I wish to acknowledge the authors and their work up front. Thanks to 1) Deborah Ash (2004) for her examination of the sources of teacher shortage and the challenges that special educators face, 2) Michelle Jilly (2012) for her identification of training needs that would contribute to quality support of students with special needs in general education, and 3) Melissa Berns (2013) for her examination of technological tools and applications that support all students, including students with special needs. The literature, particularly these studies, gave me purpose to create a website for teachers of students with moderate and severe disabilities that is easily accessible 24 hours a day from any time zone. My intention is to make available on a website information that might the frustration that I and other special educators have experienced at the click of a mouse of link

Teacher Challenges

Ash (2004) in her examination of teacher shortage describes common problems
faced by new special education teachers and reasons for a higher attrition rate among special educators. Of particular note was workload manageability. According to Billingsley (2003) attrition is influenced by a broad range of factors ranging from teachers’ personal circumstances priorities to problematic work environments variables such as low salary, poor school climate, lack of administrative support, role confusion. The variable all can lead to negative affective reactions - high levels of stress and low levels of job satisfaction and commitment, which in turn can lead to withdrawal and eventual attrition.

There is a higher burnout amongst special education teachers than general education teachers (Billingsly, 2003). This may be do to increased paperwork loads, stress associated with job requirements, lack of planning time, lack of support from administrators, lack of proper staff development training, and the wide variety of disabilities that the teacher confronts in the classroom. Paperwork seems to be a large problem. According to the special report commissioned U.S. Office of Special Education Programs’ (OSEP) *Study of Personnel Needs in Special Education*, special education teachers spend as much time doing paperwork as they do preparing lessons. As the report indicates, “53 percent of elementary and secondary special education teachers report that routine duties and paperwork interfere with their job of teaching to a great extent” (OSEP, 2000, p. 1).

Another factor that contributes to attrition of these special educators is the isolation they feel. Gersten, Keating Yovanoff and Harniss (2001) report that special educators feel isolated from both general education teachers and from fellow special
educators at other school sites. Lack of time and resources and excessive meeting responsibilities is also an issue. In Ash’s 2004 study, special educators’ main concern’s were a) paperwork, b) student caseload, c) development and monitoring of student Individual Education Program plan implementation, d) lack of support and e) stress and isolation. Ash notes that 80 percent of the teachers in her study did not have enough time to complete their paperwork on a daily basis. Of the 32 special education teachers surveyed, five indicated they were planning to leave the teaching field. She concludes that the number and types of disabilities served, the special education teacher’s responsibilities, the manageability of workload and the extent of the school caring, as well as lack of time affect the special education teacher’s decision to stay or leave.

According to Billingsley, Griffin, Smith, Kamman and Israel (2009) note, the importance of collaboration with the general education teacher is crucial.

Collaboration is essential in special education in order to effectively serve students with disabilities. As Billingsley and colleagues (2009) note, today 54% of students with disabilities are educated in a general education classroom 80% or more of their school day and are expected to learn Common Core State Standards alongside their peers without disabilities. Therefore, to promote success, for students with disabilities, general and special educators need to collaborate and share responsibility for planning, differentiating instruction, and evaluating students. Yet, many special education teachers report experiencing difficulties collaborating with their general education counterparts. They summarize this challenge in the following statement: “Perhaps one of the most daunting challenges new special educators face is becoming part of the
school community and negotiating the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classes” (Billingsley et al., 2009, p.31). They note that teachers in high poverty districts also have less desirable work conditions than their counterparts in more affluent districts. They also tended to have less preparation with less support from administrators, large caseloads and lack of necessary materials. So, therefore, also do their students. It is for these teachers and students, in particular, that I am motivated to create the wehlpwecare.com website. It is for teachers like these, I would like to create a website.

**Training Needs to Allow for Personally Relevant Curriculum for Students**

Differentiation is a never-ending challenge to a teacher who teaches students with disabilities. Trela and Jimenez (2013) propose that for students with moderate and severe disabilities differentiation now means schoolwork that is *personally relevant* instead of alternative, different functional curriculum that focuses upon life skills - skills that may go on grade after grade with little or no regard to accessing the current grade level curriculum. In the past, programs for students with significant disabilities followed a “criterion of ultimate functioning” principle that led to teaching daily living skills so that the student would be able to function independently. The new way of thinking of using the general education curriculum and making it personally relevant rather than having a separate curriculum.” The trick is to balance the IEP goals with the common core grade level appropriate goals.

Jilly (2012) reinforces this notion in her examination of training needs for special educators to include students in general education. She identifies a main responsibility of
teacher of students with moderate disabilities as helping the students to participate in the general education curriculum and make it personally relevant. In order for that to take place, there needs to mutual understanding of the goals and needs of the student.

Jilly notes that “numerous general education teachers have no experience with significantly increased numbers of special education students in their courses, nor have they had adequate training on ways to deliver specialized academic instruction (SAI), with the appropriate supports and services to student’s with disabilities” (p. 2).

Jilly surveyed teachers at a large Southern California high school to determine training needs to support students with disabilities in general education. Of the 80 surveyed, 31 responded, identifying the following six common areas for training.

- Knowledge of different disabilities
- Use of instructional strategies
- Different assessment techniques
- Classroom management strategies
- Collaboration
- Knowledge of legal aspects of special education.

Jilly concluded that, given that more and more students in special education are being educated in general education, it is vital to train the general educators in many of the same instructional strategies used to train special education teachers. Given her data, she created a teacher manual with information on how to decode a student’s Individual Education Program plan and a Positive Behavior Support Plan as well as ways to accommodate and modify curriculum and instruction. Her manual is a great resource for
training general education teachers in special education (Jilly, 2012 and is an example of an application of the Trela and Jimmenez (2013) principle of viewing students with significant disabilities are truly students first no different than we think of their peers without disabilities.

**Technology and Curriculum Resources to Support Students with Significant Disabilities**

Courtage and Ludlow (2008) identify curriculum for students with moderate and severe disabilities as another teacher challenge. Namely, teachers of these students need to make it up, change it, modify it, teach to the IEP and do this in a variety of ways so that students can find meaning and purpose in learning through multiple modalities. I never thought there would be a day when I was teaching a student with autism to text me on my phone, so that student could find the meaning of a word. The first time I received a text I was so delighted. Now I have a students who texts back and forth and tells me what he wants to do on the next school day. I make it a point of honoring his requests, so there is meaning and purpose in our communication. Clearly, technology, iPads and the equivalent mobile device are very useful in providing students with moderate and severe disabilities communication tools, curriculum and excitement and motivation to their learn.

Curriculum that allows for language arts and mathematics literacy access is so critical for all students. Students with moderate and severe disabilities are no exception. An example of an approach that combines both is *Shared Story Reading*, described by Cortade, Lingo, Karp, and Whitney (2103). They describe the use of children’s literature
in mathematics education for students with moderate and severe disabilities. The authors argue and demonstrate that Shared Story Reading can help students apply mathematical contexts in real life situations as well as learn to organize ideas and improve communication. These authors provide step-by-step guidelines to teach Shared Story Reading and to adapt books to meet student’s needs and incorporate assessments.

Another curriculum resource is offered by Saunders, Bethune, Spooner, & Browder (2013), who described the Early Science Curriculum to Teach Science Vocabulary and Concepts to Students with Severe Development Disabilities. They argue offer a curriculum that delivers science education for students with moderate and severe disabilities. They argue that science is for everyone that that curricula such as this:

1. promotes a full educational opportunity;
2. prepares students for assessments in science; as required under No Child Left Behind;
3. helps students gain knowledge of the natural world in which they live; and
4. teaches students to explore and pose questions about this world.

Technology also is vital to curriculum access for students who are moderate to severe. The iPad and similar devices are the future of the one-to one educational delivery system if not an education itself (Clanahan & Williams, 2012 p.20). The iPad was used to facilitate reading improvement for Josh (McClanahan, Williams, & Tate, 2012) In this article the boy Joshua had difficulty focusing, but the thing that seems to have made the difference was the use of the iPad as a mediator of the intervention (Raggi, Chronis, 2006). The manipulative touchscreen promotes the use of several modalities, especially,
visual, tactile/kinesthetic. Joshua was able to record his own reading and then play it to hear his mistakes and may have been able to integrate his aural modality with his visual kinesthetic and tactile more easily.

Teachers attempting to differentiate instruction may explore using tablet computers to allow students to work in learning modalities in which they are stronger (Beam, 2009), while simultaneously offering them the opportunity to further develop modalities in which they may be weaker. In the 21st Century, teachers can indeed lead the way for researchers, as one pre service teacher at Swink did with Joshua’s reading improvements on the iPad.

**The Circle of Courage: Supporting the Whole Child**

Many tribal nations had sophisticated child rearing systems designed to teach courage instead of obedience. When attachment, achievement, autonomy, and altruism are assured, most youth become caring and courageous, even in the face of adversity. When these needs are thwarted, people are alienated and discouraged and present a host of emotional, behavioral and learning problems. There is no substantial difference in the basic needs of the most stable or the most troubled child in any neighborhood. The main difference is in whether adults provide opportunities and environments to address these needs. (Brokenleg & Van Bockern, 2003, p. 24)

As a graduate student at Cal State San Marcos I was introduced to the concept of the Circle of Courage and a philosophical framework for teaching all students, including
students with moderate and severe disabilities. I further read about its origins and applications in Villa and Thousand” (2000) *Restructuring for Caring and Effective Education*, where I first was saddened by all the challenges my students face on a daily basis. Then I learned of the Circle of Courage.

A Lakota drawing of the Circle of Courage by George Blue Bird depicts each of the dimensions of courage – belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity - with four sections of a medicine wheel. With all four dimensions fulfilled, a child can be courageous and claim or reclaim his or her strength. All children eligible for special education are courageous children. They all need and deserve to feel that there is generosity in the classroom. They should feel like they belong in their school and learning environments. They deserve and need masterful instruction to achieve mastery over subjects that challenge them. Finally, they need and deserve opportunities to develop and demonstrate independence - to try new things and be free.

**Summary**

In summary, there are many challenges that teachers of students with moderate and severe disabilities face in teaching the whole child – in creating learning opportunities that promote belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity on a daily basis. Challenges include paperwork and law; general education teachers’ knowledge and skills as well as dispositions regarding students’ abilities; development and implementation of accommodations and modifications, finding and making curriculum personally relevant for; and effectively utilizing technology. They need to soar high and we are here to be the wind. As Winston Churchill put it, “Success is not final; failure is
not fatal; it is the courage to continue that counts.”
Chapter 3

Methodology

1.1.5 Website Audience
This website – wehlepwecare.com - is for teachers like the author (referred to henceforth as “I”) - a new special education teacher started a first job educating students with moderate and severe disabilities and overwhelmed by the complexity and novelty of the job. The author wanted other teachers to know that they had a website to which they can go to learn about and discover probable issues, needs, and supports. Plus, the author wanted to have an easily accessible site for teachers to write a note with a specific question, so the author might respond and/or refer them to possible resources.

Originally the wanted to create a document that could be referenced like a sports player’s playbook. But, living in this age of technology, the author realized that access was an issue and that technology was a solution to access. If a resource for teachers is available on the web 24 hours a day, it easily and readily accessible; and, it is free for anyone who finds it.

A next step was to finding a domain name. I considered the domain names of moderatesevere.info and moderatesevere.org. These names seemed cumbersome, so I came up the name, courageoushelp.com. But I did not spell it correctly; so, how could I expect others to spell it correctly as well. So I settled on the domain name of wehelpwecare.com. Instead of using the .org or .info domain, I decided to use .com, since it is most familiar to people searching for resources on the internet.
1.1.6 Website Design and Procedures
The full and actual website name of the website is http://wehelpwecare.com. It is hosted by Go Daddy and was built using Web Builder 7 from Go Daddy.

The wehelpwecare.com site is organized as follows. The home page is linked to an “about me” page, which contains e-mail contact information, and the following five categories of information for new teachers of students with moderate and severe disabilities.

1.1.7 Paperwork, Schedules and Paraprofessionals.
   a) Making templates to save yourself time to reinvent the wheel
   b) Schedules for IP’s TRI’s Assessments
   c) Paraprofessionals, different categories, joys and challenges for the whole team.

1.1.8 What General Educators Need to Know to Education Students with Disabilities
“Different does not equal differentiated.”
   a) IEP knowledge
   b) Types of disabilities
   c) Adaptations that are personally relevant to a student

3. Curriculum and Bloom’s Taxonomy
   a) Bloom’s taxonomy
   b) Math and English Language Arts programs that work
   c) Science and Social Studies programs that work

1. Technology and the iPad
a) How to use an iPad (or its equivalent)

b) Record and read aloud and Siri

c) Apps and more Apps

2. **The Courageous Whole Child**


b) Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943)

c) What children need in order to love, learn, explore, and give—to be whole

is not a mystery? (Thousand & Villa, 2000 p. 72)

1.1.9 **Website Colors**
The site is constructed in the colors of the Circle of Courage as depicted by the Lakota drawing of the Circle of Courage by George Blue Bird - blue, white, red, yellow and black. Figure 1 shows George Blue Bird’s depiction of the Circle of Courage (obtained from a public domain site on the web).

*Figure 1. Circle of Courage Illustration by George Blue Bird*
As the Figure 1 illustration shows, the whole child is represented by the color blue in the center of the circle. Technology is represented in black, as with the *independence* section of the circle. The white section of *mastery* is the color of curriculum and the yellow section of *belonging* represents general education and personally relevant differentiation and curricula. The red color of *generosity* represents paperwork, schedules and paraeducator support.

1.1.10 Summary

The reason the author decided to create this website is that she had experienced and had watched other new teachers feeling unprepared - crying in frustration at what they deemed an impossible situation. The author has learned and now better understands that there is so much to coordinate as a special educator and that the paperwork can be overwhelming at times. However, the one thing that kept the author going everyday was the thought of students coming to school. Her students try their personal best and never seem to doubt her ability to teach them, even thought doubt crops into her head at times. The author is determined to try to be like her students - to never give up, try again, and start the day over and see if the new day is better.

The author has found amazing resources in other teachers who also teach in the field of special education. The author wanted to be that resource to other new teachers of students with complex learning and behavioral and social challenge through their access to the website create through this project. The authors wants, through the website, for other teachers to have the tools to experience the happiness that she experiences when one of her students achieves a benchmark or hits a milestone or just has a good day.
profession of special education can be challenging, but it is enriching beyond belief, if a person is as lucky as the author and gets a chance to glimpse into the lives of amazing little heroes.
Chapter 4

Results

The website product of this project, http://www.wehelpwecare.com, is intended for new special education teachers. It is an ongoing work in progress, with the content changing and being supplemented as the needs change for the special educators who use the site and the author finds more resources. A page for a guest writer will soon be added.

Screen shots of the website pages completed at the time of the submission of this project are presented in the remainder of the chapter. Brief descriptions of each page appear below each page.

Above is the home page of the website.
Above is the “About” page and the page for contact the author.
Above is the curriculum page that describes Bloom’s taxonomy.
Above is a page that describes information regarding paperwork, scheduling and paraeducators, and technology resources.
Above is a page that provides general educators information regarding special education.

| IEP (Individual Education Plan) | Types of Disability | Adaptations |
|--------------------------------|
| This is the most important document you will get about your new student. Here you will see how much support the student has had in the past. If there are any food allergies or other things you need to know before your student starts in your room, make sure you read it thoroughly and remember it. It is the law. Take the goals out and create individual folders for you students. These are the goals you will work on for the remainder of the year. Each student has different goals. These goals are as deemed appropriate by your IEP team. | Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorders  
- Blindness or low vision  
- Brain injuries  
- Deafness  
- Deaf-blindness  
- Specific Learning Disabilities  
- Medical Disabilities  
- Physical Disabilities  
- Psychological Disabilities  
- Speech and Language Disabilities  
- Autism spectrum disorder  
Be as informed as you can for your students. |
| Adaptations and Modifications vary depending on the child and the disability. No two children are the same. There are academic and social  
"accommodations / modifications."  
The academic ones focus more on help in the classroom or for a test in the classroom, the social ones are for behavior issues and socialization goals. Work together with the general education teacher. The more you are a team, the better your children will do in both settings. Include your student on field trips, social events, etc. Make sure you plan ahead for their success. |

Above is the page about the Circle of Courage and Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs.

The Circle of Courage and the whole child

- In order for a child to feel significant, they need to feel like they belong.
- For competence, the child needs to have a sense of mastery.
- Power was felt when the student felt independent.
- Virtue was felt when a student showed generosity.

*This is crucial for all members who work in a classroom team. It is essential for the students who come to learn and for the staff that serves them.*

Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs

- Physiological (food, water, shelter, warmth)
- Safety (security, stability, freedom from fear)
- Belongingness (friends, family, spouse/lover)
- Self-esteem (achievement, recognition, mastery, respect)
- Self-actualization (innermost self fulfilling, creativity)

These needs are very similar to the list from the Circle of Courage. Each student needs to feel a sense of belonging before they can learn and master curriculum. So including this sense of belonging leads to self-esteem and creativity and independence.
Ellen Riffenburgh is an Education Specialist working in a moderate to severe setting. This is her second year as a teacher.

News and Events:
Special Education events
https://www.edevents.org/

ISTE
https://www.isteconference.org/2014/
Above are two pages, the first of which includes information about the author. The second page offers helpful websites and upcoming educational events.
Chapter 5

Discussion

The goal of this project was to provide future special education teachers with a small road map for finding curriculum and some ideas on how to tackle a classroom with diverse student needs. As a new teacher myself, I thought I could tackle my beginning teacher responsibilities easily. Then the year started and I was overwhelmed by the amount of paperwork, the various disabilities my students experiences, and the many grade levels present in my classroom. I had always prided myself on being resilient, but after three months I was wishing for a simple roadmap to be a better teacher for my students. I did not know why one of my students was pinching, nor did I understand why another student was so scared she could barely enter the room. I was looking for programs that were research based. Luckily I had a great mentor who provided me with tools to build my new classroom. Her name is Lauri Carpenter and she has also contributing some of her own tips for the website that I constructed for new teachers. Not all new teachers are as lucky as I was. So, for all new special educations teachers I created the website. It is available “24-7,” so that a teacher might surf the web in the middle of the night and come up with some help for a map for the next day rather than feeling overwhelmed or scared.

As mentioned throughout this project document, accessing of general education curriculum can be challenging for students with disabilities. Yet, this is vital for the learning, success, and development of self-esteem for all students, but particularly our students with disabilities. Access to the general education curriculum also is a
nonnegotiable, given the requirements of the federal IDEIA legislation, guaranteeing students with disabilities access to and support to progress in the general education curriculum.

Snell and Brown (2011) argue that teachers focus upon the development of student self determination and note the following: Within the conceptual framework of self-determination the student is viewed as an instructional partner. To encourage self determination, opportunities for learner control and self-direction are infused into instruction” (p. 531). For students with intellectual and other severe disabilities, there are times when the students cannot easily access the general education curriculum. But, as Snell and Brown (2011) note:

The point is, whether acting completely autonomously or partially participating in activities with the support of others, students with disabilities, in particular, students with intellectual and other severe disabilities can and should be supported in expressing their self-determination by making things happen for themselves (p. 531).

Trela and Jimenez argue for the use of personally relevant (2013) information to make curriculum adaptations to the Common Core State Standards and differentiate so all students can participate in the general education curriculum and be more than just functioning in a functional (i.e., basic life skills) curriculum. To help students to achieve self-determination and make their learning personally relevant are the goals of my website.
Project Limitations

During the building of my website, the author realized some of the limitation in achieving goal of developing this website. A first big challenge was learning how to build a website and making it user friendly. Making all of the links work and understanding how to navigate in a new web builder program had its challenges. Finding an appropriate name for the site and obtaining a domain name that nobody had yet claimed also was an problem.

The author acknowledges that the website completed for this project just touches on the surface of topics. The in-depth understanding that comes through reading long and complete journal articles is not what is offered on this or many websites, because of page length limitations (e.g., scrolling through pages of text) and the rapidness with which viewers want to access information. The author could have continue on and on, adding many additional topics and pages. But, given that the project needs to be submitted, the author had to be content with the plan to continue to grow the website after the project was submitted to the university library as the author’s Master of Arts culmination experience!

The validity of the website is also limited to one teacher’s understandings - the author’s research, experience, and opinions. There is much to know to successfully education students with moderate and severe disabilities. There are curriculum and instructional procedure choices. All of this could not be explored in this initial website construction effort. The author chose what she had learned worked for students and what had served her well in her first two years of teaching. This is a clear limitation of the content of the website and this project.
**Future Implementation**

Hopefully this subject matter will be studied in more depth and comprehensive common core curriculum will become available to help guide new special education teachers. At this time the only comprehensive program I know of is the Unique learning program but it costs approximately $600 for a teacher and not all districts provide access to this program. Some districts provide access to old versions of this program but it is not Common Core, so it may be useful but it is not in sync with what the general educators are doing. The varied nature of our students with disabilities also does not lend itself to a simple solution.

**Conclusion**

I think the greatest courage belongs to those who walk that path even when they know that the ideal outcome - or even something close to the ideal - is unattainable. This is the courage you must find every day, even though it’s often invisible to the casual observer. This courage is best exemplified by people with disabilities and their parents.

(Villa & Thousand, 2000, p. 624)

This project is intended to honor the courage of the students with disabilities whom the author teaches as well as their families. The website was created out of the author’s personal frustration of wanting ideal resources to create ideal outcomes, of being frustrated by not having ready information available in a quick internet search. The author wanted to make at least a small difference for other teachers through this website.

Further, the author wanted, through this project, to explore and share with others
curriculum and instruction that “excites and delights” students. Steve Jobs, one of the founders of Apple, held a deep conviction that companies should make and offer things that excite and delight customers, rather than merely creating and selling that which is convenient and easy. The author hope that those teachers who find and use the website created through this project find something there to excite and delight their students and themselves in their teaching.
References


