

From Possibility **to Success**

Achieving Positive Student Outcomes
in Inclusive Classrooms

Patrick Schwarz

Foreword by Harvey “Smokey” Daniels

HEINEMANN
Portsmouth, NH

Heinemann

361 Hanover Street
Portsmouth, NH 03801–3912
www.heinemann.com

Offices and agents throughout the world

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Schwarz, Patrick.

From possibility to success : achieving positive student outcomes in inclusive classrooms /
Patrick Schwarz ; foreword by Harvey “Smokey” Daniels.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN-13: 978-0-325-04668-6

ISBN-10: 0-325-04668-9

1. Inclusive education—United States. 2. Learning disabled children—Education—United States. I. Title.

LC1201.S383 2013

371.9'0460973—dc23

2012045063

Editor: Holly Kim Price

Production: Victoria Merecki

Interior design: Monica Ann Crigler

Composition: Gina Poirier Graphic Design

Cover design: Lisa A. Fowler

Front cover photo: David Stirling

Back cover photo: Natacha Horn, www.natachahorn.com

Manufacturing: Steve Bernier

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

17 16 15 14 13 EBM 1 2 3 4 5

For all of the kids and teachers
(licensed and new teachers) who appear in the book.
You awe me by making common miracles happen every day.
You are the inspirations for this book.

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Foreword

These are challenging times for teachers. Our classrooms are becoming increasingly “multidiverse,” welcoming students who have learning, cognitive, or physical disabilities; have ADD/HD; need English language support; face emotional or behavioral challenges; lack interest or engagement; have autism or Asperger syndrome; or are gifted and talented. We know it is best for all these kids, and for the wider community, that everyone be educated in the regular classroom to the greatest extent possible. But how?

In this era of national standards and testing, the pressure on teachers to meet a wide range of needs grows ever greater, but practical supports seem hard to find. The conversation too often focuses on students as “data” and teaching methods as “delivery systems,” with teachers judged by their “fidelity” to mandated programs. If you are a teacher sincerely eager to support a wide range of learners in your classroom but need some concrete and principled guidance, this book is for you.

As with all of Patrick’s work, stories of real kids are at its heart. So get ready to meet Max, Sophie, Trevor, Josh, Dan, Brian, Marcel, Bridget, Gabriel, Christopher, Jonah, Brooklyn, Jack, Harley, Angelica, Bill, Anita, Marianne, Joelle, Matthew, and many more learners who deserve the thoughtful and caring support of their teachers. And watch how those teachers listen, think, act, adjust, accommodate, and provide challenge in their classrooms.

The practicality and explicitness of this book are hard to beat. Patrick gives you detailed lesson designs, forms, lists, and handouts—all the tools you need to plan for *everyone* in your classroom. He uses the flexible model of universal design to show how to set goals for all, for some, and for a few students—and offers formative assessments that reveal when kids have achieved these goals.

Patrick is not afraid to say that school should be pleasant and enjoyable. There are really only two ways that schools can get kids engaged in the curriculum: coercion or curiosity. Patrick's book is a clarion call for curiosity. If all kids can dream, follow their passion, make choices, take responsibility, and be allowed to work hard, most of the problems of dealing with diversity disappear. As coauthor of a book about best practice K–12, now in its fourth edition, I feel that Patrick has written the best-practice companion text for differentiating instruction in the inclusive classroom.

I know you'll devour every practical, passionate, and powerful page of this book. And I also wish you the opportunity to experience Patrick "live." The passion you can sense between the lines here explodes in a workshop setting, where Patrick will have you laughing, crying, dancing, working with strangers, and making an unforced recommitment to look more closely and think more deeply about all the kids in your classroom. Patrick Schwarz is a gift to our profession and to all the kids in our schools. Happy reading and teaching!

Harvey "Smokey" Daniels

Acknowledgments

Thank you to the many students, teachers, and families who inspired me in this book through your stories, beliefs, convictions, and actions, turning possibility into success.

I am massively grateful to my loved ones for their major support with this book. Thanks Bill, for being an amazing editor before the other editors got to look at it! Your ideas, positive feedback, honesty, integrity, and insightfulness immensely strengthened this book and provided a clarity that was moving to me. Thank you to Katie and Haley for continuing to inspire, and Dan and Becca for providing new inspiration by teaching me important concepts of possibility and success through your stories. Vicky, Mom, Bob, Tim, and Sarah, you continue to cheer me on and it feels very good. I genuinely appreciate all of the kindness and support from my new family, Ed, Laurie, Gary, Gil, Marliis, Stacy, David, Caryn, Howard, Sheila, Andrea, Chris, Jack, Stephen, Ann, Juliana, Ellis, Janet, and Melinda.

I have amazing colleagues that are major professional forces in this field. Paula Kluth, you constantly move me with your brilliant viewpoints and the energy you use to relay them. I am thankful you are in the field every day because you make the world a better place. I look forward to collaborating with you on future works! Alice Udvari-Solner, your wisdom and conviction with supporting people in a landmark way put me through a belief boot camp when I first started practicing in the field. You are a superb paradigm pioneer, yet so kind, humble, spiritual, and never comfortable with anything, since you are always taking the next step—wow! Smokey Daniels, you have always been here for me and wrote my favorite 2009 educational book on inquiry circles with Stephanie Harvey. Your ability to positively change schools makes learning work for all! The foreword you wrote for this book brought tears to my eyes and thanks for all you have taught me. Huge appreciation goes to Lou Brown, Anne Donnellan, Kurt Schneider, Jacque Thousand, Richard Villa, Norman Kunc, and Emma Van der Klift for changing lives, including mine, through your work!

My friends are a never-ending support through listening, knowing when to push me off the soapbox and providing all around fun. Thank you Bucky, Sandy, Tracy, Natacha, Kassira, Todd, and Victoria for being you.

Tanita, you are a very special artistic friend who astutely understands the writing and performing process, which helps me to be a better writer, presenter, and facilitator. I am always moved by the quality you expect of yourself and therefore you are a significant model. Your kindness, communication, support, and beliefs mean the world to me.

Early on before the book was written and my annotated table of contents was being developed, Anita Gildea from Heinemann believed in my ideas immediately. She pitched the book to a team of editors and made the next steps a reality. Thank you Anita for getting it.

Huge special recognition goes out to Holly Kim Price, who took one look at my annotated table of contents and shared to all, "I want to be the editor of this book." As the editor, you have been astute in your understanding of my viewpoints and a professional soulmate in your beliefs and learner-centeredness. Your support, ideas, and quality expectations are admirable. You are a huge part of making this book a reality.

In addition, thank you also to Alan Huisman for his great editorial work and Victoria Merecki for her strong production work. To Lisa Fowler who beautifully designed the cover and made my idea come alive, to David Stirling for his brilliant photography and to Monica Ann Crigler for the great interior design. I am so grateful to my amazing team from Heinemann.

Finally, thank you to all the students, families, school systems, professional organizations, and universities that I have the honor to work with through my presentations, workshops, and consultations. It is clearly important to me to get this message out to people. I am so honored you have heard it and want more people to hear it.

Introduction

General education and special education are in a constant state of evolution and change. School districts can no longer refer all students with nonstandard learning needs for special education services, and that's as it should be. While our learning population becomes more diverse in ability and need for support, state boards and departments of education are clearly communicating that we need to keep learners who need special education services to 10 percent or 12 percent of the school population (Fisher, Frey, and Rothenberg 2010).

This is a difficult (and sometimes unattainable) goal in schools and districts with the traditional approach to diverse learners: *let special education take care of them*. In addition, scientific methods for determining who does and does not receive special education services can knock the wind out of many teachers' sails, obstructing educational innovation (Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde 2012).

In the years since *From Disability to Possibility: The Power of Inclusive Classrooms* was published, teaching has become more a science, less an art:

- There is a greater focus on standards-based education, requiring additions and revisions in federal, state, and professional group methods and curriculums.
- Expectations regarding response to intervention (RtI) continue to increase.
- Tests scores are scrutinized ever more closely.
- Comparisons of school district test scores create a culture of competition.
- Educators opt to teach to the test.
- More and more teachers depend on ability groupings.

In addition, learning diversity continues to increase throughout our country and world. One in every sixty-one children now has some degree of autism (Fein 2011). Many students lack interest and engagement. Many have been up most of the night playing video and computer games, fast-paced activities derived from someone else's creativity.

What does the reality that 97 percent of teenage males and 94 percent of teenage females report gaming as a pastime (McCall 2011) and parents are best able to contact their teenage sons or daughters by texting them say about teaching and assessment?

I am not the king of gloom and doom. In *From Disability to Possibility*, I hypothesized that there is a way out, a better manner to proceed. I still believe that. Successful teachers who embrace the art of their profession can make learning work for all. The key questions are:

- How do we make all the changes taking place in education work for rather than against what we know is good for learners?
- How do we keep the art of teaching intact while meeting its requirements as a science?
- How do we get teachers and leaders to embrace rather than begrudge meeting the needs of all learners?
- How do we learn from the ways students experience and use technology in their daily lives?
- How do we focus on best and promising practices and successful learning for all students during their entire school career, learning that will enhance their quality of life?

This book, *From Possibility to Success: Achieving Positive Student Outcomes in Inclusive Classrooms*, proposes educational resuscitation: practices, processes, and tools that address the scientific requirements of teaching diverse learners while bringing back the art of teaching all learners. Each chapter introduces a new tool for success, provides the rationale for using it, and shares compelling stories of how it has helped real students in real classrooms. The tools are:

1. Universal Design for Learning/Differentiated Instruction/Individual Accommodation Lesson Plan Template (Chapter 1).
2. Interests/Favorites Inventory (Chapter 2).
3. Student Dream Inventory (Chapter 3).
4. Teacher/Family/Counselor Talking Points for Identifying Student Dreams (Chapter 4).
5. Promoting Student Leadership, Self-Advocacy, Decision Making, and Self-Determination (Chapter 5).
6. Effective Group-Work Options to Achieve a Collaborative and Cooperative Classroom Community (Chapter 6).
7. Supporting Student Needs Within the Classroom Community (Chapter 7).

Successful teachers who embrace the art of their profession can make learning work for all.

8. Developing Student Presence Map in the School and Wider Communities (Chapter 8).
9. Three-Day Unit on Understanding and Embracing Learner Diversity (Chapter 9).
10. Student Priorities/Action Plan at a Glance (Chapter 10).

This book is intended to give hope, direction, and inspiration. The goal is learner success and achievement in the classroom and beyond. If you are a general educator, a special educator, a provider of related services, a para-educator, or an administrator who has lost the art of and passion for what you are doing and want to bring it back, read on. If you are a parent, share it with a teacher for ideas and support to address the greater learning diversity in her or his classroom.

This book is intended to give hope, direction, and inspiration. The goal is learner success and achievement in the classroom and beyond.

Chapter **Two**

Promote Passion

Everyone has passions, interests, and areas of fascination that make life interesting, engaging, and worthwhile. Paula Kluth and I recently wrote two books about this: *Just Give Him the Whale* (for educators and families) and *Pedro's Whale* (for children). While these books focus on learners with autism, the practice of embracing student passions, interests, and areas of fascination applies to all students. Alfie Kohn states that the most important thing teachers do is to develop a relationship with their students (Kohn 2006). Embracing learner interests and passions is an outstanding way to make connections and establish relationships. It also helps students build trust and make academic gains and can prevent disruptive behavior in the classroom.

Embracing learner interests and passions is an outstanding way to make connections and establish relationships.

My brother and his wife, Tim and Sarah, live in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, a famous destination for skiing, mountain climbing, hiking, and whitewater rafting. My brother works on construction crews and is a photographer and my sister-in-law is a dental hygienist. They like their jobs well enough, but their passion is extreme sports: they work so that they have the money to go helicopter skiing and participate in other exhilarating outdoor activities. I'm one of only a few of their visitors who will attempt these activities with them. On my last visit they took me on an extreme hike at very high altitude as soon as I got off the plane. That's quick altitude adjustment! Engaging in extreme sports makes life worth living for my brother and sister-in-law. If the ability and opportunity to play extreme sports were taken away from them, their lives would be miserable. They are happy with the degree to which they have embraced their passions. It's why they married each other!

Someone else who truly embraces his passions, interests, and fascinations is the highly respected actor Jack Nicholson. He is a fixture at Lakers home games, has the most desirable floor seats, and often strays into the players' area of the basketball court. (Probably no one tells him to move because they remember him from *The Shining* and are scared of him!) If someone stopped him from cheering on the Lakers, his life would be miserable.

Think about your own passions, interests, and areas of fascination and how they make your life worth living. Then remember that the same is true for the students in your classroom.

While embracing student passions and interests may seem an obvious practice for teachers to undertake, the opposite is often true. When learners seem overfocused on their interests, are “obsessed” with a topic, many educators try to divert them and take the passion or interest away. In our research, Paula Kluth and I found that if an educator takes away a student’s favorite interest or passion, learning is compromised, the student-teacher relationship deteriorates, and school is no longer a positive place for the learner. Teachers need to motivate all learners with the passions and fascinations that make life worth living! We can use students’ interests as springboards to other topics. If we don’t, we are creating potential dropouts.

Teachers need to motivate all learners with the passions and fascinations that make life worth living!

Pedro: Give Him the Whale!

Pedro is a second-grader with autism whose passion is whales. One of his learning goals is to initiate and engage in communication with others. His teacher, Ms. Bardet, uses the whale topic as a springboard to get him communicating about other areas in school:

Ms. Bardet: Pedro, please choose a topic you wish to talk about today.

Pedro: I choose blue whales.

Ms. Bardet: Okay, now look on the discussion board for the areas you need to talk about.

Pedro: The first area is *give facts about the topic*. I need to give facts about the blue whale.

The second area is *how is the topic used in the classroom?* Whales are used to help me finish my work. When I finish my work, I get a whale stamp on my paper. I like getting the whale stamp, it makes me happy! The third area is *what are other things I am doing in school?* In language arts, I’m in a literature circle. In writing, I’m working on my journal. In math, I’m learning fractions. In music, I’m playing drums.

In the past, Pedro’s teaching team had deliberately avoided talking about whales, afraid that he would dwell on the topic, and Pedro had made no progress toward his learning goal of initiating and engaging in communication. Now Pedro is meeting the goal because his teachers have embraced his interest in and passion for whales and use it as a springboard to communicate about other topics and areas.

Becca: It’s a Wonderful Life!

Becca is a high school learner who has been passionate about all aspects of theatre (acting, directing, stage lighting, sound effects, set design, costuming) ever since elementary school. She “lives for the stage.” She begins each day—well before the starting bell—in

either the main auditorium or the black box theatre and typically leaves for home after 9 p.m., getting her homework done during rehearsal breaks. Her commitment to theatre arts is exemplary. Honest and caring educators, particularly Mr. Sinclair, the school's theatre teacher/director, have given her opportunities to be an actor, a dancer, an assistant director, a stage manager, a lighting director, a sound technician, a set designer, and a costumer. She has executed each of these roles and responsibilities with competence and excels in some of them.

When she enrolled in high school Becca wanted to experience everything related to theatre. Her family encouraged her to articulate what she would like to accomplish and why. Then she made an appointment with the theatre teacher/director and shared her ideas. He listened, discussed roles she might audition for, and recommended backstage areas for her to explore. They continued their communication over the four-year period, establishing a strong, ongoing collaboration. As she gained more experience Becca became more focused and developed stronger preferences. Her theatre teacher/director honestly assessed what Becca did well and where she faced challenges. Becca's determination and self-advocacy made her theatre experiences very meaningful.

Her eyes on the prize, she has decided to study stage management in college. She feels stage management is a profession that encompasses all areas of theatre. Since she is passionate about all aspects of theatre, stage management seems the right match for her. It is also practical: stage management is one area of theatre in which people tend to be more continually employed, and can consistently practice their art. Becca is excited about applying for college, and her impressive résumé and portfolio clearly demonstrate significant background and meaningful participation in all aspects of theatre. She acknowledges Mr. Sinclair gratefully and often for helping her embrace her passions; she feels "super prepared" to study theatre in college and ultimately work in theatre professionally.

The outcome? Becca has been admitted as one of four candidates (out of over seventy applicants) in her chosen university's stage management program. It's a major feat that speaks to the benefits of Becca's impressive commitment to her passion.

If we understand our learners and the driving forces that motivate them—their interests, passions, and fascinations—we can promote their participation and collaboration in their education.

FIND THE PASSION: STUDENT INTERESTS/ FAVORITES INVENTORY

I developed the Student Interests/Favorites Inventory because of my strong belief that if we understand our learners and the driving forces that motivate them—their interests, passions, and fascinations—we can promote their participation and collaboration in

their education. Since today's young learners have been exposed to technology since birth, technology and multimedia are aspects of the inventory as well. It can be used with anyone and everyone.

So that all interested parties have a voice, copies of the inventory should be filled out by the student; one or more family members; and the student's prior teachers, service professionals, and para-educators. The resulting composite picture of student interests and favorite activities can be used in any and all teaching situations to improve student learning and make school a positive and meaningful place.

Interests/Favorites Inventory

Interests/Favorites Inventory for _____

Literature

____ Books

Favorite Books:

____ e-book

____ Book Club

Other:

Mathematics

____ Math Games

Favorite Games:

____ Calculators

____ Experiential Applications

Other:

Science

____ Animals/Zoology

Favorite Animals/Areas:

Pets:

____ Biology

____ Chemistry

____ Physics

Other:

Social Studies/History

____ World History

____ World Religions

____ Politics

____ Debate

Other:

Music

____ Instruments

Favorite Instruments:

Types of Music

____ Rock-Pop

____ Country

____ Soul

____ Classical

____ Rap-Hip Hop

____ Blues

____ House

____ Gospel

____ Jazz

____ Folk

Other:

____ Musical Artists/Bands

Favorite Musical Artists/Bands:

____ Singing

____ Drum Circles

Other:

Physical Activity

____ Fitness

____ Wrestling

____ Dance

____ Tennis

____ Baseball

____ Volleyball

____ Basketball

____ Badminton

____ Football

____ Martial Arts

Other:

Art

____ Drawing

____ Ceramics

____ Painting

____ Photography

Other:

(continues)

Interests/Favorites Inventory *(continued)*

Theatre & Acting

____ Charades ____ Film/Movies

Favorite Movies:

____ Animation

____ Magic & Entertainment Shows

____ Stage Plays/Musicals

Favorite Stage Plays/Musicals:

____ Acting

____ Sound

____ Directing

____ Costumes

____ Costumes

____ Lights

____ Stage Management

Other:

Technology & Multimedia

____ Software & Computer Programs

Favorite Programs:

____ Video & Computer Games

Favorite Games:

____ iPod & iPad

Other:

Interpersonal Pursuits

____ Going Out with Friends

Favorite Activities:

Favorite Places:

____ Telling Stories

____ Telling Jokes

Other:

Architecture

____ Building

Favorite Things to Build:

____ Buildings

____ Architectural Periods

____ Architects

____ Drawing, Drafting &
Designing

Other:

Machinery

____ Planes

____ Boats

____ Trains

____ Bicycles

____ Autos/Race Cars

____ Motorcycles &
Scooters

Other:

Fashion/Beauty

____ Clothing

____ Hair

____ Accessories

____ Make-up

Other:

Hobbies & Collections

Favorite Hobbies:

Favorite Collections:

Other:

Games

____ Chess

____ Cards

____ Checkers

Favorite Card Games:

Interests/Favorites Inventory *(continued)*

Board Games

Favorite Board Games:

Other:

Culinary Arts

Cooking

Favorite Dishes:

Cooking Shows

Favorite Shows:

Restaurants

Favorite Restaurants:

Other:

Helping People

Babysitting

Charity/Charitable Causes

Other:

Stock Market

Watching the Stock Market

Investing

Other:

Specific Professions

Teacher

Specific Teaching Area:

Professor

Specific Teaching Area:

Doctor

Type of Doctor:

Lawyer

Type of Lawyer:

Mathematician

Scientist

Specific Area:

Business Owner

Type of Business Owner:

Artist

Type of Artist:

Writer

Musician

Politician

Chef

Business Worker

Pilot

Technology Specialist

Flight Attendant

Software Designer

Air Traffic Controller

Video Game Designer

Driver

Actor/Actress

Mechanic

Other Movie/Theatre Occupations

Fashion Designer Beautician

Other:

How I would like to see my interests and favorites used in school:

A school club I would like to join is:

My dreams in life are:

I would like to do this for a job someday:

My recreational interests are:

Example

Interests/Favorites Inventory

Interests/Favorites Inventory for Alex is a fifth-grader who enjoys computers, video games, movies, martial arts, and his dog. He is strong in math. Someday he would like to own a video game store and has done research about having a business. Alex has Asperger syndrome.

Literature

☒ Books

Favorite Books: *Harry Potter series, Maniac McGee, any books about computer and video games*

☐ e-book

☐ Book Club

Other: *Sticky Ninja Academy, Papa's Burgeria*

Mathematics

☐ Math Games

Favorite Games:

☐ Calculators

☐ Experiential Applications

Other: *Likes working on business math concepts. Alex would love to have his own video and computer game store one day.*

Science

☐ Animals/Zoology

Favorite Animals/Areas:

Pets: *Alex enjoys his dog Jake and loves to play games with Jake such as fetch with dog toys.*

☐ Biology

☐ Chemistry

☐ Physics

Other:

Social Studies/History

☐ World History

☐ World Religions

☐ Politics

☒ Debate

Other: *Alex has shown interest in units about inventions and innovations. He has shown leadership in debate when it has taken place in the classroom.*

Music

☐ Instruments

Favorite Instruments: *Guitar: Alex takes interest in the guitar while playing the games Guitar Hero and Rock Band.*

Types of Music

☐ Rock-Pop

☐ Country

☐ Soul

☐ Classical

☐ Rap-Hip Hop

☐ Blues

☐ House

☐ Gospel

☐ Jazz

☐ Folk

Other:

☐ Musical Artists/Bands

Favorite Musical Artists/Bands: *ACDC, Aerosmith, LL Cool J, Beastie Boys*

☐ Singing

☐ Drum Circles

Other: *Alex takes martial arts classes in the community.*

Physical Activity

☐ Fitness

☐ Wrestling

☐ Dance

☐ Tennis

☐ Baseball

☐ Volleyball

☐ Basketball

☐ Badminton

☐ Football

☐ Martial Arts

Other: *Alex takes martial arts classes in the community.*

Art

☒ Drawing

☐ Ceramics

☐ Painting

☐ Photography

Other: *Alex sketches for fun and relaxation.*

Interests/Favorites Inventory *(continued)*

Theatre & Acting

___ Charades

 X Film/Movies

Favorite Movies: *Loves the Phantom and Dark Knight series*

___ Animation

___ Magic & Entertainment Shows

___ Stage Plays/Musicals

Favorite Stage Plays/Musicals:

___ Acting

___ Sound

___ Directing

___ Costumes

___ Costumes

___ Lights

___ Stage Management

Other:

Technology & Multimedia

 X Software & Computer Programs

Favorite Programs: *Likes any presentation software*

 X Video & Computer Games

Favorite Games: *Currently likes the Halo video game series*

 X iPod & iPad

Other:

Interpersonal Pursuits

 X Going Out with Friends

Favorite Activities: *Gaming*

Favorite Places: *Gaming Arcades*

___ Telling Stories

___ Telling Jokes

Other:

Architecture

___ Building

Favorite Things to Build:

___ Buildings

___ Architectural Periods

___ Architects

___ Drawing, Drafting & Designing

Other:

Machinery

___ Planes

___ Boats

___ Trains

___ Bicycles

 X Autos/Race Cars

___ Motorcycles & Scooters

Other: *Likes Audi brand cars*

Fashion/Beauty

___ Clothing

___ Hair

___ Accessories

___ Make-up

Other:

Hobbies & Collections

Favorite Hobbies:

Favorite Collections:

Other:

Games

___ Chess

 X Cards

___ Checkers

Favorite Card Games: *Enjoys Magic: The Gathering card game*

___ Board Games

Favorite Board Games:

Other:

(continues)

Interests/Favorites Inventory *(continued)*

Culinary Arts

___ Cooking

Favorite Dishes:

___ Cooking Shows

Favorite Shows:

X Restaurants

Favorite Restaurants:

Enjoys most local pizza restaurants

Other:

Helping People

___ Babysitting

___ Charity/Charitable Causes

Other:

Stock Market

___ Watching the Stock Market

___ Investing

Other:

Specific Professions

___ Teacher

Specific Teaching Area:

___ Professor

Specific Teaching Area:

___ Doctor

Type of Doctor:

___ Lawyer

Type of Lawyer:

___ Mathematician

___ Scientist

Specific Area:

X Business Owner

Type of Business Owner: *Video/computer game business owner*

___ Artist

Type of Artist:

___ Writer

___ Musician

___ Politician

___ Chef

___ Business Worker

___ Pilot

___ Technology Specialist

___ Flight Attendant

___ Software Designer

___ Air Traffic Controller

X Video Game Designer

___ Driver

___ Actor/Actress

___ Mechanic

___ Other Movie/Theatre
Occupations

___ Fashion Designer
___ Beautician

Other:

How I would like to see my interests and favorites used in school: *Video games allow for free time, breaks, and rewards.*

A school club I would like to join is: *Debate team*

My dreams in life are: *To have the best and most respected local video game store where kids hang out and have gaming nights on weekends*

I would like to do this for a job someday: *Video/computer game store owner and game designer*

My recreational interests are: *Video/computer games, pizza restaurants, movies*

Chapter **Three**

Think Big to Get Big

It is easy to feel hopeless in the face of statistics indicating that students with disabilities have fewer educational successes and greater quality-of-life issues than their classmates without disabilities. Yet every week I meet students, teachers, and families who transcend these statistics and are making exciting educational progress, *from disability to possibility*. This book takes this concept a step further, *from possibility to success*!

I have yet to meet a successful person who did not dream about the future and take active steps to make those dreams reality. Often these people were encouraged to dream their dreams. However, many educators draw a line in the sand regarding the dreams of students with disabilities; they suggest that these individuals are not intelligent or capable enough to achieve their dreams. Sometimes this message is so strongly communicated that the student believes he or she is not worthy to dream in the first place. This is wrong!

Many people have given us great insight into their disabilities or challenges and how they used their strengths to achieve (see Grandin 2011, for example). Many of these important people had rough beginnings. (They're sometimes referred to as *late bloomers*.) The following high-achieving, highly successful people had learning challenges along the way:

- Beethoven's music teacher said, "As a composer, he is hopeless."
- Isaac Newton's work in elementary school was reported as poor.
- Einstein couldn't speak until age four; he couldn't read until age seven.
- Edison's teacher told him he was unable to learn.
- Leo Tolstoy flunked out of college.
- Louisa May Alcott was told by an editor that her writings would never appeal to the public.
- Louis Pasteur was given a rating of "mediocre" in chemistry at Royal College.
- Winston Churchill failed sixth grade.
- Henry Ford was evaluated in school as "showing no promise." (Rickets et al. 2010)

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- Tom Cruise, Cher, and Drew Barrymore have dyslexia, which greatly affected their learning and how they felt about themselves as students.
- Walt Disney was fired by a newspaper editor because “he had no good ideas”!

It’s wonderful that these people didn’t let others stand in their way and persevered. Perhaps they would have “bloomed” earlier if they had been encouraged to dream and take the steps necessary to make their dreams a reality. Better yet, wouldn’t it be wonderful if an educator had recognized their talents and supported them with meaningful school experiences? The next person with a disability to achieve greatness may be in your own family or classroom!

Brian: My First Step in Developing the Student Dream Inventory

I first told Brian’s story in *From Disability to Possibility: The Power of Inclusive Classrooms*. At the time he was in middle school. Working with Brian then, I used a version of the MAPS process (O’Brien, Pearpoint, and Kahn 2010), examining his strengths, challenges, needs, and dreams as I planned his current and future learning. I particularly zeroed in on school experiences that would help Brian achieve his dream of becoming an entrepreneur. The student dream inventory at the end of this chapter is an extension of the MAPS process. Some of Brian’s teachers and I used out-of-the-box thinking and hands-on learning to maximize his strengths and abilities. He benefited greatly from sensory integration experiences, activities that helped him feel more comfortable physically, thereby allowing him to focus and learn.

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Educational teams that think big about educational outcomes within inclusive environments and plan effectively are able to achieve outstanding results. Although team members may have different ideas about how a student should be supported, everyone needs to be headed in the same direction. The student dream inventory helps get everyone on the same page, zeroing in on what could and should be taking place in school to help the student achieve her or his dreams. Because some students are not sure of their dreams, I’ve also developed teacher/family/counselor talking points for identifying student dreams (discussed in the next chapter). The focus of both tools is planning for the future: all teachers should design school experiences that not only promote academic learning but also help students achieve their dreams.

As I began writing this book, I checked in with Brian and his mother, Brenda, to see how things were going. Brian was excited and optimistic about his future, acknowledging that there had been stumbling blocks along the way but that overcoming them had been very much worth the time and effort.

In high school Brian became involved in sports. Mr. W., an inspirational teacher and assistant basketball coach, greatly influenced Brian’s demeanor, his belief in himself, and his problem-solving abilities. In many ways Mr. W. was not only Brian’s basketball

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coach but also his dream coach. He taught Brian to help others and modeled how to be humble, character traits that helped Brian take new steps toward fulfilling his dreams.

Brian hurt his knee quite badly during his senior year. This was a significant setback, but the things he had learned from Mr. W. helped him carry on. The new Brian believed things would get better and that he himself could make it happen. Even though one of Brian's teachers told him he would never amount to anything, Brian won a scholarship, began attending college, became captain of the cheer-leading squad (he is an accomplished gymnast), and organized a dance marathon.

Brian's mother, Brenda, continues to be a great advocate for Brian, as well as teaching and modeling two very important messages: *Everything is possible* and *If you think small you get small*. Brian has been helped by other inspirational forces as well: a dynamic, interesting, thought-provoking, organized law professor and a professor who meets with Brian every week to be sure Brian is learning and understanding the course content. Both professors use visual elements in their instruction, an important way in which Brian learns and understands. Brian has also worked for the Chicago Cubs and is holding a marketing job. His journey toward achieving his dream continues. He values learning, and each day is a step forward.

Dante: Make the Dream Make Sense

Dante is a student with a cognitive challenge who attends a big-city high school. He is social, friendly, and kind to everyone he meets. He has been included in many general education classes over the years, and he and his family have had discussions about his dreams and what he wants to do with his life. Dante's dream is to become a doctor. Some of his teachers told me that this dream was entirely unrealistic and I needed to help Dante and his family get down to earth! However, I promote dreaming, I don't discourage it: *if you don't think big, you don't get big*. What I needed to do was discover the source of his dream.

Dante told me that he did indeed want to become a doctor. I dug a little deeper: "What is it that makes you want to be a doctor?" He replied, "I like what doctors wear, and I also like the tools and machines they use." We chatted some more about school and his life, a conversation in which he eagerly took part.

Then I had Dante and his parents, teachers, and related service providers complete a student dream inventory. Since I'm a big believer in person-centered planning, I readily agreed when Dante's family requested that Dante's uncle, with whom Dante was very close, attend the meeting. Dante, his team of educators, and his uncle discussed the seven guiding questions on the student dream inventory.

The great things that happened during this meeting confirmed my belief in this type of planning and in bringing all the people who have a stake in a student's life into the process. When Dante voiced his dream of becoming a doctor, I again asked him his reasons. He responded as he had earlier: "I like what doctors wear and the tools and machines

they use.” Dante’s uncle, who worked at a local hospital, suggested Dante might be able to get a work-study job in the hospital’s central supply division, helping package sterilized medical instruments in heat-sealed envelopes. These workers wear scrubs, hairnets, and medical gloves, just as doctors do. Dante loved the idea of learning to operate the autoclave in which the medical instruments were sterilized and the machine that heat-sealed the envelopes. The school had a work-study program that included supervised apprenticeships during the school day for which students received an evaluation and a grade. Dante’s teachers thought the uncle’s hospital idea was great. They felt that Dante would be a nice candidate for this program and said they would help make the necessary arrangements if the work-study experience became a reality. Dante’s uncle set up the work-study position through the hospital’s volunteer program, and Dante’s school changed his schedule to accommodate it. Dante was able to continue in the position, with a salary, after high school.

Even though the main experience supporting Dante’s dream was undertaken in the community, his dream was born, encouraged, and supported in the classroom. His dream inventory; a committed educational team that included a valued family member; and a work-study experience available as an extension of the classroom and treated as a school course with an evaluation and a grade helped turn his dream into a reality. Dante’s dream became a possibility and then a success!

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Josh: Respect the Dream

Josh is a positive, engaging young man with significant learning disabilities. As a young boy, Josh’s dreams were to be a pilot, an architect, a train engineer, or the color yellow! Josh’s parents have always been positive about his potential, supporting him in numerous ways over the years and encouraging him to follow his dreams. Josh’s family members are great role models, focusing on his capacities, providing learning support, and believing in him.

Although Josh has strong visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, and logical-mathematical intelligence, school was hard for him and he struggled. One of his early inspirations was an elementary school special educator, Ms. Hinsey, who was helpful, caring, and insightful and created a great support system. Ms. Hinsey knew how to design hands-on experiences for Josh that promoted visual and investigative learning. She also knew that the best way for him to write was by using a keyboard.

Josh chooses to forget middle school, where he had neither a strong support system nor a pivotal teacher who understood how he learned best. His case managers switched every year, so there was no continuity. At one point, he was put into a segregated classroom for students with learning disabilities and behavior challenges and his progress slowed to a crawl.

Redemption came in high school in the form of Ms. Zavell, his case manager, whom he calls a *partner of support*. Josh’s dream of being a pilot also came to the fore in high school. Josh’s father, Harv, had had a passion for shortwave radio when he was growing up and understood the importance of supporting a child’s passions, interests, and

fascinations. Josh's family supported him by listening to air traffic control transmissions with him, making weekly trips to the local airport, practicing pilot call signals with him, and taking frequent plane trips to see family members living at a distance.

Josh participated in an "explorer's experience" with United Airlines in which he was flown to a university campus that offered a flying program. He also joined a high school aviation club in which he and his faculty sponsor were the only members. Josh conducted Google searches for information about flying and university aviation programs, and used flight simulators and other online programs related to aviation. He even started flying real planes in high school! Through web searches and a university fair, Josh found an aviation program at Western Michigan University. He went on to excel in college and is now a licensed commercial pilot!

The important message in both instances is to see beyond the label!

Josh asked me to pass along some advice: in addition to the support his teachers gave him, their *respect* was a pivotal factor in helping him succeed. His parents, Andrea and Harv, feel that general educators need meaningful training in order to be able to educate diverse learners effectively, and that one special education course is not enough. The important message in both instances is to *see beyond the label!* The planning and support Josh's family and educators provided embody the planning triggered by the student dream inventory. Many of us have had naysayers in our lives. Josh had yea-sayers who made him stronger!

ABOUT THE STUDENT DREAM INVENTORY

The inventory below is a tool for using a student's dream for what she or he would like to do in life as the basis for creating educational opportunities and action plans that will help turn that dream into reality. (If the student has not identified his or her dream, use the teacher/family/counselor talking points for identifying student dreams in Chapter 4 to help do so.)

Ideally, the educational team members should answer the inventory questions during a real-time meeting. Anyone with an important stake in educating and supporting the student (the student, family members, educators, related service personnel, friends) should be encouraged to participate. The meeting should be recorded, either on audio- or videotape or by a stenographer. Questions and responses could be displayed on chart paper, one question per page. Alternatively, the facilitator (or another person designated to take notes) could create and project a PowerPoint page for each inventory question and enter the responses using a keyboard.

The completed form should become part of the student's file so future educators can also use the information. (Student Priorities/Action Plan at a Glance, a form introduced in Chapter 10, also uses this information.)

Learner Profile:

- (continues)

Student Dream Inventory *(continued)*

5. What school/classroom experiences would help _____ develop the skills and abilities he/she needs to make the dream a reality?
6. How do we incorporate these classroom experiences into _____'s school day?
7. Are any changes in _____'s school schedule needed to accommodate current or new priorities?

Example

Student Dream Inventory

Learner Profile: Angela is a personable and fashionable tenth-grader with significant learning disabilities. Her dream is to become a fashion designer, and her educational team is meeting to explore possibilities and plans that support her being able to do so. Angela is becoming a good self-advocate for not letting her disabilities stand in her way.

1. What is Angela's dream (consider higher education, work, relationships, geographical location, community)?

Angela would love to be a fashion designer. She would also like to live in an apartment with a roommate in a large city. She would like to be able to take a train to work. For recreation, she enjoys shopping and going to restaurants.

2. Why does Angela desire this dream?

From a very young age, Angela loved clothes and would draw women wearing various outfits. This passion has continued over the years. She enjoys anything to do with fashion; it is an integral part of who she is. She watches fashion-related television shows whenever she can. She is adamant about making a career out of her top interest.

3. What current skills/abilities could help Angela make the dream a reality?

Angela has wonderful natural drawing skills. She is constantly designing and drawing dresses in a sketchbook she carries with her.

4. What additional skills/abilities does Angela need to make the dream a reality?

The biggest need is for Angela to get formal training in design to refine her skills and understand the profession's requirements and responsibilities. Training from and experience with a professional fashion designer would be helpful. Learning how to use the train is also essential, and her family has agreed to teach her.

5. What school/classroom experiences would help Angela develop the skills and abilities she needs to make the dream a reality?

In sophomore math, students are learning about budgets; as her project Angela could create a budget for a design business. A design class her school offers will help her develop her design skills; her counselor will work this into her schedule the following year. A design apprenticeship in the local community would help her advance her skills and open up possible opportunities in the field.

6. How do we incorporate these classroom experiences into Angela's school day?

A design class is recommended next year. A partial-day community apprenticeship during her senior year is being explored.

7. Are any changes in Angela's school schedule needed to accommodate current or new priorities?

Not this year. Next year she will take the school's design course. If a community apprenticeship can be arranged, her classes during her senior year will be scheduled to accommodate the time she spends away from school.