Supporting Courageous Conversations about Inclusion in Schools

March 1, 2011

2011 Leadership for Equity and Excellence Forum Beyond the Sidelines, Let’s Get to Work!
Phoenix, AZ
Introduction

• Kozleski (2010) discusses leadership for greater inclusion as one that demands attention to improving the present with a mindful eye on planning for the future.

• This presentation focuses upon a facilitated review process using the (BPIE) Best Practices in Inclusive Education tool (FLDOE, 2007).
  – We share insights from the perspective of a systems level process that encourages courageous conversations around inclusive practices in schools.
“Process of transforming a system from one paradigm to another through the application of systems theory and systems thinking” (Moore, 2006, p. 24).

– achieved when the parts of the system, the whole system, the relationships in between and the people involved throughout the system are analyzed
Systems Theory

- most things, beings, relationships and processes exist and operate within a system
- most systems interact and are interdependent with other systems (i.e., subsystems, sister systems and larger systems)
- a system is an evolutionary process rather than a tool or product
- ignoring these systems could limit our perception, reaction or interaction with our things, people, relationships and/or processes of interest

(Pascoe, 2006)

Systems Thinking

allows one to examine the variety of components associated with the teaching and learning environment

(Wriddle, 2006)
“When considering systemic change efforts related to building inclusive schools, a common vision of services should incorporate inclusive education, services for all students, and roles of adults at various levels (e.g., classroom, school, district) that facilitate those services” (Ryndak, 2007, p. 230).
What are Inclusive Schools?

Students with disabilities are included as valued members of the school community

- belong to the school community and accepted by others
- actively participate in the academic and social community of the school
- receive supports as described by IEP that offer opportunities for success

(McLesky, Rosenberg, & Westling, 2009)
“Systems design is the process of determining what characteristics a new or transformed system should have” (Watson, 2006, p. 24).
Courageous Conversations
Dialogue that engages, sustains, and deepens dialogue in order to examine schooling and improve student outcomes.

(Adapted from Singleton & Linton, 2006)

“Human conversation is the most ancient and easiest way to cultivate the conditions for change – personal change, community, and organizational change”

(Wheatley, 2002, p.3)
Four Agreements for Courageous Conversations

- Stay engaged
- Expect to experience discomfort
- Speak your truth
- Expect and accept lack of closure - view as ongoing process

(Singleton, & Hayes, 2006)
Why do we need courageous conversations?

Courageous conversations support systems development by....

Promoting dissonance that leads to transformation proportional to the depth one is able to uncover and bring alive his or her inner essence of the organization’s core purpose/vision

(Davidovich, Laugeman, Commodore, & Nikolay, 2009)
How can we facilitate courageous conversations?
What is BPIE?
Who created BPIE?
How is BPIE unique from other assessments?

• BPIE addresses issues specific to Florida school districts, schools, and families (e.g., Sunshine State Standards, statewide assessments).

• Intentionally designed to look at how district/school practices and policies impact the effective inclusion of all students, including those with the most significant disabilities.
What domains does BPIE embrace?

Values and Climate

Access to General Education

Policies and Support
- Leadership
- Program Development and Evaluation
- Instructional Support and Pedagogy
Logistics of BPIE

- Facilitated process for identifying areas of strength, and prioritizing areas of need according to ‘Best Practices’ for inclusive education indicators.
- An action plan is developed to address those needs.
- Process is completed with interdisciplinary team.
- Team score various indicators.
BPIE Process

1. Series of facilitated meetings.
2. Best Practice Indicators are read and scored in each domain.
3. Consensus is reached in relation to score of indicator.
4. Indicator score sheet is prepared and used as the basis for action planning.
5. Minimum 4-5 meetings.
Survey

Series of questions:
• Likert scale – 1-5
• Qualitative comments
Survey Questions
- Role in school
- How valuable was the BPIE Process?
- Please note down the most valuable part of the BPIE process and explain why.
- How challenging was the BPIE process?
- How were you helped to engage in courageous conversations?
- Please note down the most challenging parts of the BPIE process – why?
- Please note down the affirming parts of the process?
- How valuable is the BPIE in supporting change in school?
- How applicable to practice is the BPIE process?
- How would you change the BPIE process?
School District

- This County School District is situated in South West Florida. It services 42,000 students and over 5,300 full time employees.
- 34 Elementary Schools, 11 Middle Schools and 8 High Schools, the Manatee School District is one of the largest districts in the state.
- Status of ‘Corrective Action’ due to not making one or more AYP goals over 4 consecutive years.
School District

- 24 elementary schools – 22 have school grades
  A – none
  B – two
  C – two
  D – nine
  F – nine
The Elementary School serves 679 preschool and elementary school students and has 48 teachers.

- 41% free/reduced lunch
- D+ grade school
BPIE Team

Multidisciplinary – teachers from ESE and general education, teaching assistants, assistant principal, chair of ESE, parent, district ESE specialist

Facilitators – Florida Inclusion Network representative and university professor
Participant Demographics

- ESE Teachers (36%)
- General Education Teachers (29%)
- Administration (14%)
- Support Staff (21%)
Insights from the participants?
Value of BPIE

- Value of BPIE
  - Identify areas of need/strength; process for evaluation
  - Collaboration; listening to perspectives of others; process; engagement
  - Increased understanding; change awareness/challenging previous assumptions
  - Action plan; structure; specific

Comprehensive approach for evaluation and development.
How valuable is the BPIE process?

- Administration (5)
- Support Staff (4.67)
- General Edu (4.75)
- ESE Teachers (4.75)
How BPIE helps courageous conversations

- Sense of community 3
- Confidentiality - safe environment 5
- Facilitation process; collaborative nature and consensus building process 7
- Valuing all voices 4
How challenging was the BPIE process?

- Administration (3.0)
- Support Staff (4.0)
- General Edu Teachers (4.0)
- ESE Teachers (3.75)
Challenging Part of BPIE Project

- Participation - lack of 2
- Greater context - state; picture of task 2
- Awareness and understanding; knowledge 4
- Consensus building and voting 4
- Logistics 4
Affirming Elements of BPIE

1. Self reflection; awareness/evaluate
2. Understanding perspective of others
3. Pride/identifying current good
4. Mutual respect; valuing voices; shared values
5. Collaborative process including positive dialogue around shared goals

Each element is connected in a circular flow, indicating a continuous process.
How valuable is BPIE to school change?

- Administration: 4.0
- Support Staff: 5.0
- ESE Teachers: 5.0
- Gen Edu Teachers: 4.75
Contribution to Supporting School Change

- Action planning for all students; support for action plan 4
- Situation specific-context; systemic perspective 2
- Realizing the value of inclusion 2
- Membership buy in 4
- Process, structure, collaboration, communication; Safe environment; Self evaluation 5
- Short/long term change-specific 5

Realizing the value of inclusion 2
How applicable is the BPIE to practice?
Applicability of BPIE to School Practice

- Action planning for all students; support for action plan 4
- Situation specific context; systemic perspective 2
- Realizing the value of inclusion 2
- Membership buy in 4
- Process, structure, collaboration, communication; Safe environment; Self evaluation 5
- Short/long term change-specific 5
How can BPIE be improved?

- Membership buy in/support - particularly administration/district 2
- Streamline indicators/voting, time/logistics, follow up 9
Overarching Themes
Building Knowledge/Understandings

“seeing how we view inclusion differently” (14)

30 comments across survey

“seeing how little was right” (5)

“It educates on different aspects of inclusive thinking” (8)
Importance of Sophisticated Process Facilitation

“Others in the process listening and me listening to them”

“Helped us become aware and create the conversation about how to serve, support, and respect all our students.”

“Helped a varied group look as one”

61 responses across survey
Value of Pragmatics

“Action plan will help us focus on where we need to go.”

“Very productive procedure in identifying opportunities…”

“it’s a step by step process…”

28 responses across survey
Holistic ‘System’ Perspectives

“realizing how large (system wide) the change is to have inclusion school-wide”

10 responses across survey

“administration buy in and staff staff resistance”

“working to comply with state and district regulations”
References


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