

MAXIMIZING LEARNING FOR ALL

INCLUSION PRACTICES FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS AND



When I was a child one of my favorite days was the first day of school. In our school all the students sat on the floor of the gym and listened as each teacher called the name of the students on their list. Once your name was called you waited with a mixture of anxiety and excitement to see if your friends would be in the same class. Now I am on the other side of the table and am the one welcoming my new group of students each year.



Our school is a small Catholic school outside of Philadelphia. This year my fourth graders entered the year knowing each other well

and were sure they would be in the same class with their friends because we have one of each grade. They have been together for many years and they know each other well. I have watched them and gotten to know some of them a little because we have a small school. One thing was very different for me this year, and one student was a bit more anxious about this new year than some of his classmates. His name is Logan.



Everyone in our school knows Logan and he has been in our school since Pre-K3. He has been with many of his classmates for all of these years and Logan knows me a bit from CARES and our summer camp. But this year was different because he and I would be a team full time.

*This year
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and I
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full time!*

Logan has diagnoses of autism, anxiety, and ADHD. I had tried to ease his anxiety for the transition into fourth grade by making time to build on our connection toward the end of third grade, and I met with all those who knew Logan to learn things that would help me help Logan

have a successful year. I have taught many children with ADHD and have a bag of tools

But this is not the most important part of the story. The amazing part of the story

because “I love sharing a birthday with Logan!” She had even brought him a

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Each edition of MAXIMIZING LEARNING FOR ALL STUDENTS explores inclusion practices that minimize barriers and maximize learning for all students. Email margaretlanger50@gmail.com if you would like to share your inclusion efforts or stories.

to help them. However, I was a little nervous because I knew very little about teaching children with autism and wondered how I would figure out how to meet his needs. Little did I know how much we would both grow over the year!



One of the things I learned was that Logan would teach me how to help him if I paid attention. As we worked together, I learned what helped, what didn't, when Logan was telling me he was anxious, and I learned to see the early signs. I learned where to get help when I didn't know what to do. We learned together how we would do fourth grade.

is how much Logan and his classmates have impacted each other. Logan succeeds in our school because he is known, loved, and feels secure. His classmates are the most important part of this equation. As I said, many of them have been together for years. Logan's classmates celebrate his successes with him and accept when he struggles. They find ways for him to participate in group work in ways that work for him. They try to gently help him when he struggles and can see when it is better to let him be. These children are such compassionate, caring, and loving classmates, and Logan is a big part of why they have learned to be like this. He has brought this out in them, and he thrives because they have responded. I heard one of his classmates say they missed him when he did not join us on our class trip. Another classmate shares a birthday with Logan and was disappointed when he was not there on their birthday

present! They really care about him, and he knows it.



I have also grown from this experience. When I look back at my nervous “beginning of the year” self, I have to chuckle at myself. I learned that what I don't know I can learn and figure out. I was reminded that what matters most is that we all grow from accepting and loving each person – student, classmate, parent, teacher, colleague, even ourselves – where they are, with the love we are all called to proclaim – the love of God. We think we are helping them, and we are, but we are really growing together. ***And the gift of Logan's presence in this class and in our school is helping us all grow to be more of who God calls us to be.***

