



A New Path: Helping Regular Classrooms Support Lasting Change in Students with Behavioural Challenges

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After teaching five years in Structured Learning Classrooms in Regina, Moffatt had many questions and few answers about the future of the students she taught. Her school division had numerous programs that provided therapeutic learning environments for students whose physically and verbally abusive behaviour put teachers and other students at risk. These programs offered a low student-teacher ratio, individualized academic programs, a regular school setting away from the student's home school, and instruction by staff trained in non-violent crisis intervention. Unfortunately, the success students experienced in structured learning classrooms was often short-lived.

The SLC classrooms have had a great deal of success with violent and aggressive students and have provided an excellent demonstration of the progress these children can make. However, when many of these students are returned to a regular classroom, they are unable to transfer their new skills to the new setting and they regress to old behaviours within the first year. Should the deterioration in their behaviour continue, the students may be re-referred. The result is a dependency on the low-ratio environment, or worse, a complete rejection by the student of all programs and an escalation in violent and at-risk behaviours.

A new Integrated Structured Learning Classroom was set up in 1998 to address this issue of transition to the student's home school. As a teacher in I-SLC, Moffatt understood that the biggest challenge in making the new program work was the need to construct a bridge between structured learning and the regular classroom. She developed a research project to help identify and overcome the obstacles and then put her learning into action.

Moffatt began by reflecting on her beliefs about Structured Learning Classrooms and the issues she saw in their relationship to regular classrooms and teachers. She searched her own records (observation sheets, communication book, and problem logs) to come up with concrete information on the factors at play when students with behavioural challenges succeeded in the program. She then surveyed the administrators and teachers with which she worked in nine Regina schools to understand what they needed to help these students succeed. She received 18 responses from seven schools that provided helpful information and suggestions. The respondents consistently identified time and community issues as the most important factors in students success, with administrative support and board office support as significant secondary factors.

From her research and discussions with colleagues, Moffatt gained insight into the level of staff awareness and the kind of processes and resources that are needed to receive students from Structured Learning Classrooms. She noted important differences between the learning environments provided by regular and specialized classrooms (see table), and she

concluded, “Many deal with these students with little or no support and are unaware of the ideas and training available”. With this in mind, Moffatt developed recommendations and a list of resources for schools and school divisions to use in supporting lasting change in students with behavioural challenges.

Differences between Specialized and Regular Classrooms

I-SLC	Regular Classroom
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 teacher/2 associates to 9 students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 teacher/possibly 1 associate to 20-35 students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time one on one with students experiencing difficulty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited time to spend one on one with any student
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily teaching of pro-social skills (e.g., problem-solving, goal-setting and anger management) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pro-social teachings limited to health curriculum and subject to individual teaching styles
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on social skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on academic skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behaviour problems dealt with by focussing on what the student needs to learn and how to teach it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behaviour problems dealt with by focusing on the consequences of misbehaviour and disciplinary action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff with specialized training in crisis intervention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff have training in crisis intervention only if they have chosen to pursue it
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High awareness of the reasons and conditions for negative behaviour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of the reasons and conditions for negative behaviour only if staff have chosen to pursue it
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Space and supervision provided for time-out procedures and in-school suspensions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If available at all, space and supervision for time-outs and in-school suspensions usually provided by administrator

Dust and Dreams

When the system has fallen...what do we do?

*What happens to the child
What happens to the Child we
once knew
Does anyone know where the
little one goes*

*What are we doing to save the
dream
to keep the promise
to keep the vision in their yes*

*Some are lost and some are
saved
some of them find their way
some of them make it through
some of them never do*

*When the system has
fallen...what do we do?*

*Could you believe only once
could make the difference
Could you believe you could
make it through*

*Be the one to save the dream
to keep the promise
to keep the vision in their eyes
When the system has
fallen...Ask, what must I do?*

Doug Smith (1961-2001)