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ЗАСТОСУВАННЯ МЕТОДИКИ «КРАЩІ ПРАКТИКИ ДЛЯ ІНКЛЮЗИВНОЇ ОСВІТИ» (КПІО) НА РІВНІ ШКОЛИ: ДОСВІД ФЛОРИДИ

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У статті представлено погляди команди, до якої увійшли представники різних категорій шкільної спільноти для проведення оцінки наявних організаційних умов та практики інклюзивного навчання і викладання в даному навчальному закладі. Для оцінки було використано методику КПІО (Кращі практики для інклюзивної освіти – англ. Best Practices for Inclusive Education, BRIE), що передбачає обговорення під керівництвом зовнішнього фасилітатора. Відповідно до зазначеної методики в школі було проведено низку обговорень за тематикою, визначеною відповідними індикаторами. Метою кожного такого обговорення було вироблення спільної позиції учасників щодо оцінки роботи школи за певним індикатором. Після цього на підставі їхніх висновків розроблялися плани для впровадження заходів в межах усієї школи. Аналіз продемонстрував цінність загальношкільного процесу самооцінки за участю зовнішнього фасилітатора, засвідчив важливість застосування методики КПІО для шкільної практики та допоміг виявити труднощі, що виникають у процесі такої самооцінки.

Ключові слова: інклюзивна освіта, фасилітатор, шкільна практика.

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ПРИМЕНЕНИЕ МЕТОДИКИ «ЛУЧШИЕ ПРАКТИКИ ДЛЯ ИНКЛЮЗИВНОГО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ» (ЛПИО) НА УРОВНЕ ШКОЛЫ: ОПЫТ ФЛОРИДЫ

В статье представлены взгляды членов широкой команды, в которую вошли представители различных категорий школьного сообщества для проведения оценки существующих организационных условий и практики инклюзивного обучения и преподавания в данном учебном заведении. Для оценки была использована методика КПИО (Лучшие практики для инклюзивного образования – англ. Best Practices for Inclusive Education, BRIE).

Ключевые слова: инклюзивное образование, фасилитатор, школьная практика.

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SUPPORTING SCHOOL LEVEL CONVERSATIONS ABOUT INCLUSION THROUGH THE FACILITATED BEST PRACTICES FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION (BPIE) PROCESS: A FLORIDIAN STORY

This article discusses the views of members of a school wide team who came together to participate in an externally facilitated review of the systems and practices for inclusive teaching and learning practices enacted in their school. The Best Practices for Inclusive Education (BPIE) is a school wide reflection tool that was adopted for this review. The process of review involved consensus building conversations around indicators of the BPIE tool, scoring of each indicator and leading to school wide action planning. Views of team members were collected after the action planning stage. Analysis highlighted the value of an externally facilitated school wide review process, the importance of applicability of the BPIE tool to school practice, and the challenges of a school wide process of review. Team members shared their thoughts about the value of engaging in conversations with each other about inclusive practices and what inclusion means in their school and for their students.

Keywords: inclusive education, facilitator, school practice.

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Introduction

This article explores part of a journey one elementary school in southwest Florida embarked upon to continue to develop greater inclusive practices. It examines the contribution of a school wide professional development review tool, the Best Practices for Inclusive Education (BPIE). The BPIE is a facilitated audit process that supports the identification of strengths and areas for further development in school wide inclusive policies and practices; through consensus focused discussions (Barnitt, Ryndak, Benner, Hayes, & Weser, 2007). Perspectives of the school based BPIE multi disciplinary review team were collected and analysed. The views of this school wide review team offers a small but important insight into what helps and hinders school level review, planning and implementation for greater inclusive practices. More specifically how the process of the BPIE review tool contributes to the creation of challenging, safe, intellectual and emotional conversational spaces between staff. These conversations are referred to as courageous as they are intended to be honest, respectful and challenging. This is in the spirit of facilitated leadership for change in school where the focus is upon developing shared vision across the school (Sharma & Desai, 2008; Fauske, 2011).

The Value of a School Wide Review

Historically, human and civil rights form an important and persistent heritage to the global school inclusion debate. Barton & Armstrong (2007) locate school inclusion as a social and political issue related to the health of society as a whole, thus broadening the scope of school inclusion to wider social improvement issues that can be seen to transcend disability to include the many different groups of people who are marginalized and under-represented in society. Reflecting this more multidimensional intent of inclusion, Jones & White (2011) offer a working definition of inclusion as a system of 'school policy and practices that embrace diversity as a strength, creates a sense of belonging, equal membership, acceptance, being valued, and involves fundamental civil rights' (p. 21). This demands that schools continue to develop systems that undergird successful inclusive practices by paying attention to instructional supports in natural settings. Such systems call for collaborative and integrated services across the school. Inclusion is then viewed as a whole school initiative (Ainscow & Miles, 2008). Indeed.

Indeed, this perspective of inclusion aligns well with the tenets of the Whole Schooling Consortium that aims to create schools that combine equity and excellence for all students. Peterson (2004) presents the principles of the Whole Schooling as the fostering of school cultures that prepare children to be «active shapers of inclusive, democratic communities where people of different colors, culture, ability and wealth live together as partners» (p. 5). Something that is also evident in a school striving to be more inclusive of students with diverse learning needs.

However, an enduring problematic issue is the translation of philosophical and political policy initiatives to actual school and classroom practices. This tension is not new. Professor Peter Mittler, back in 2000, reminded everyone that amid all of the academic and policy rhetoric, the reality of inclusion occurs in the classroom (Mittler, 2000). The classroom, the school, the teachers, the resources, the environment, the other students, the other professionals, and the parents combine to become the enactors of inclusion. It follows that a systematic review of school policies and practices is helpful in identifying strengths, areas for development and barriers to greater inclusive practices.

Supporting Change in School

The process of school change is complex and requires sustained commitment over an extended period of time. Ryndak, Reardon, Benner, & Ward, (2007) offer seven essential variables that facilitate sustainable change in districts and schools over time: 1) shared common vision of the outcomes desired and what they should look like in schools, 2) shared common understanding of the change process, 3) «own» change efforts, 4) con-



current and varied efforts are required at multiple levels, 5) include of all types of constituents (e.g., parents; instructional, related services, administrative personnel, and support staff) and constituents in each type of constituency (e.g., related services providers at the school level and their supervisors at the district level), 6) establish a process for communication among the constituents, and 7) rely on critical friends (e.g., university faculty) for feedback. These variables are represented in the BPIE review tool (Barnitt et al 2007).

Systemic change requires meticulous planning in order to achieve shared goals. Two tools for systematic review and planning for greater inclusive school practices inform whole school development are currently in use. Firstly, the Index for Inclusion (Booth & Ainscow, 2007) developed in the UK but applied internationally as a tool that can be used for school wide review. The review consists of a five-phase process that begins with establishing a coordinating group that informs the rest of the staff about the key concepts of the Index for Inclusion and develops a review process that gathers perspectives about the concepts from all members of the school community. Priorities for development are identified and changes are made to the school development plan to reflect inclusive aims and particular priorities. Secondly, a Florida initiative employed mainly in the state of Florida is the BPIE Review Tool. It is an externally facilitated process where an interdisciplinary team reviews areas of strength and prioritizes area need according to a set of best practice inclusive education indicators. The review leads to the development of a school wide action plan, which informs short- and long-range planning and implementation of improvement efforts. It involves ongoing collaboration between district and school personnel, and critical external facilitators who act as critical friends. The implementation and review of both tools are intended to be ongoing. This article focuses upon a school wide teams' experiences of the BPIE tool.

What is the BPIE?

The BPIE was developed by a group of educators across Florida that included school district representatives, university faculty, and Florida Inclusion Network (FIN) (Barnitt et. al., 2007). FIN is a state funded technical assistant project developed to support inclusive school initiatives. It is a self-assessment instrument led by an external facilitator that leads to the improvement of inclusive educational practices at district, school, and classroom levels (Barnitt, et al, 2007). Analysis of information gathered for and through the BPIE process leads to the development of an action plan including timelines and persons responsible for implementation and evaluation of specific goals. The BPIE addresses the following broad areas:

- Values and Climate
- Access to General Education
- Policies and Support
- Leadership
- Program Development and Evaluation
- Instructional Support and Pedagogy

Each area includes a number of audit indicators that the team reflects upon in relation to the policies and practices of the school. These indicators are different for the district, school and classroom audit, this article focuses upon the school wide indicators. The process of a BPIE review is illustrated in Figure 1 and shows how the school team is supported to review each indicator by an external facilitator, experienced in managing consensus building meetings. Priorities for action planning are also identified thorough consensus and team members are assigned responsibility for leading specific developments across the school. A three month review meeting provides a first level of accountability for the action plan.

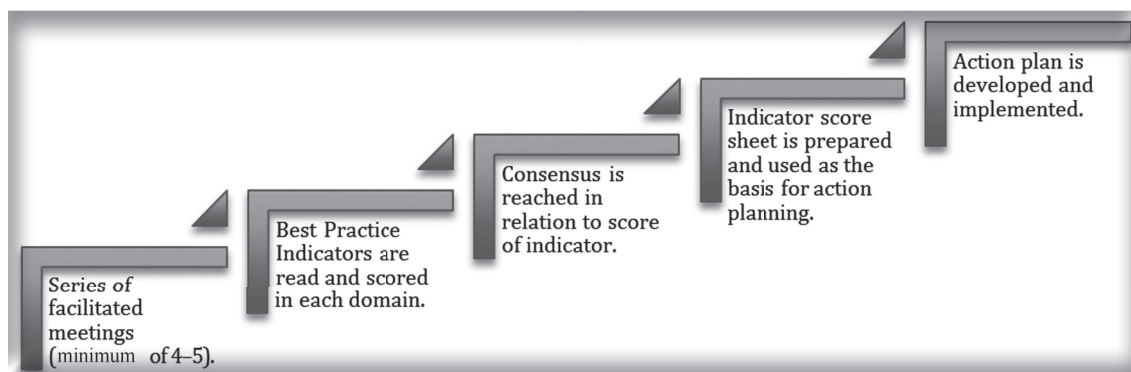


Figure 1: The BPIE process

The school

The elementary school is located in South West Florida. It serves 679 students of which 41 % receive free and reduced lunches. The school has 48 teachers and offers a range of service provision for students with disabilities along the continuum of Least Restrictive Environment. These include self-contained classrooms, one classroom made up of students with and without disabilities that are co-taught by a general and a special education teacher, resource (pull out and push in), and consultant support for mainstream. The school has a history of partnership with the Florida Inclusion Network (FIN). This partnership spanned over five years prior to the BPIE review. The school also has an established relationship with a faculty member from a local university who has been working with the school and FIN to build capacity across the school for greater inclusive practices that benefit all students. The decision by the school to participate in the BPIE review was a result of these partnerships and reflect the school administrators commitment to developing policies and practices related to inclusion with facilitators known to the school (FIN representative and university faculty).

The school based BPIE team of fourteen participants was multidisciplinary and made up of teachers from ESE and general education, teaching assistants, assistant principal, chair of ESE, parent, and a district ESE specialist. Table 1 represents the BPIE team demographics.

Table 1

BPIE Team Demographics

Role in school	% of BPIE team representation
Special Education teachers	36
General Education teachers	29
Administration	14
Support personnel and community representation (teaching assistants, parents, speech and language therapist, guidance counselor and district representative)	21

In addition to the two known facilitators, a FIN representative from another district joined the facilitation team. This representative was on the original BPIE development team and was present to support fidelity of the facilitation process.



The BPIE process

The BPIE team met on the school campus for four half-day meetings. FIN was able to support school staff participation by offering funding for substitutes. The first three meetings focused upon discussion of each audit indicator and then rating the indicator with a choice of 5 voting cards. The cards, based on a likert scale, represented if the indicator was not evident to being very evident in all aspects of school life. The rating process was facilitated to reach agreement across the team, and a number of BPIE indicator items were tabled to be revisited in the third session (a total of five) as agreement in rating was not achieved. In the third session, agreement reached for these indicators after further discussion across the group. At the end of the third session the facilitators were able to create a collated table of the schools voting results for each indicator. This was presented in the fourth meeting and items for consideration in the school action plan were voted upon. Each team member had four stickers to vote for their choice of action plan items. Once voting had occurred, the prioritizing of items for the action plan was a natural progression. The items with the most votes were discussed and agreed upon first. Then items that received equal votes were discussed and negotiated. At the end there were a number of items on the action plan. The team spent the rest of the fourth meeting building a plan of action around each item; including discussion of implementation, responsibilities, resources and key points of evaluation. It was at the end of the fourth meeting that the evaluation survey was distributed to all members of the team.

Perspectives of the BPIE process

A survey gathering the perspectives of the BPIE school team consisted of using both closed (likert scale) and open (qualitative written response) response opportunities. The survey collected data about the characteristics, knowledge, experiences, and opinions of the participants (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). The survey was developed using the typical evaluation survey that is usually completed after a BPIE review. Additional items were included related to how the school review team were introduced to the concept and process of courageous conversations. Conversations that support their engagement in sustained dialogue to examine their own school policies and practices to ultimately improve student outcomes (Singleton & Linton, 2006). The survey collected information about participant demographics, challenges associated with the BPIE, value of the BPIE to school change, applicability of BPIE to practice, how BPIE supports courageous conversation, and how the BPIE could be improved. The participants responded to the survey items using a 1 – 5 likert scale with 1 being least and 5 being most representative of the participants' perception of the BPIE process. In addition, participants were encouraged to add qualitative comments to offer further explanation of their ratings. Table 2 illustrates the range of items on the survey.

Table 2

Survey
Survey Items
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?



Fourteen surveys were handed out in hard copy and one of the special education teachers volunteered to collect the completed surveys at the end of a week. There was 100% response rate.

Findings

All survey data was analyzed using open-coding procedures (Saldana, 2013) to identify tentative themes. Thematic analyses of these tentative themes then occurred across the whole data set. Table 3 shows the likert scale responses to the survey items. For three of the four items the responses are four and above, demonstrating that value of BPIE as perceived by the team members. The item relating to how challenging the process is was scored positively, however, three scored below four suggesting that the process was not too challenging for those particular team members. This may be explained by a number of the school team being involved in initiatives for greater inclusive practices for the past couple of years. All other survey items scored four and above.

Table 3

Likert scale responses to survey items

Item	Likert Scale # of responses (1 least – 5 most)				
	1	2	3	4	5
How valuable was the BPIE Process?					14
How challenging was the BPIE process?			3	11	
How valuable is the BPIE in supporting change in school?				1	13
How applicable to practice is the BPIE process				13	1

An examination of the comments team members made following their scoring offers a further insight into their perspectives of the BPIE process in supporting the development of greater inclusive policies and practices in their school.

Reflections of the value of the BPIE process

All fourteen team members scored this item very high. Four themes emerged from the comments made. Table 4 highlights these four themes with an indication of how many comments were made that related to each theme accompanied by an example of a team member comment.

Table 4

Team member responses about value of BPIE process

Theme	Number of Responses Mentioning Theme (out of 14)	Illustrative Data
Collaboration and engaging with other perspectives.	9	«The interaction and shared experiences among faculty (general ed and ESE), parents, administration, USF/BPIE personnel» ESE Teacher
Increased understanding: challenging previous assumptions	7	«Discussion, awareness of others' opinions». Gen Ed Teacher
Identify areas of need/strength and process for evaluation	4	«It helped to see where we are and helped us document that and then set goals to further our practices.». Administrator
Action planning: specific and structured	4	«Prioritizing goals to improve our inclusive practice school-wide and identifying strategies to achieve those goals was most valuable from my viewpoint» Gen Ed Teacher



Reflections on the challenging parts of the BPIE process

Team member responses to this item were the lowest across all items. The voting process appeared challenging to eight of the team members. Each team member was given five cards with numerals 1 – 5 on. Shared understandings of what each numeral represents was discussed and confirmed at the outset. Team members were asked to vote with their numerals in relation to how they believed the school scored in relation to the best practice items. This voting offered a challenge for some in relation to their own perceived knowledge base, *«I didn't know enough about ESE. Sometimes, I felt like I was just guessing when I voted»*. For items where there was a disparity of voting, the group was supported to share reasons for voting and a revote occurred after such discussions. For some team members, this consensus process proved to be *«Grueling and frustrating at times, but wonderful when we finally scored well»* as described by an administrator and supported by an ESE teacher, who commented, *«Coming to consensus was challenging for some indicators.»* For a general education teacher, the voting process, although tough, offered a perspective of reality that was challenging, *«Giving ourselves a fair grade and then not feeling great about the score»*.

Reflections on how the BPIE process supports change in school

This item scored the second highest in the likert scale scoring suggesting that team members acknowledge that the BPIE process does support school change. The nature of this influence is illustrated in Table 5, which illustrates three themes that emerged from the team member comments, along with the number of comments that relate to the theme as well as an example of such a comment.

Table 5

How BPIE Supports School Change

Theme	Number of Responses Mentioning Theme (out of 14)	Illustrative Data
Action planning process based on best practice indicators that are specific	9	<i>«The indicators for best practice for inclusion were enlightening and prioritizing our specific areas of need for improvement were most valuable»</i> ESE teacher
Realizing and sharing need for shared vision to include ALL students	6	<i>«It is my hope that BPIE will serve to cement inclusion in the school culture»</i> . ESE teacher <i>«I found out how much I didn't know about ESE. Things such as the mission statement sounded correct to me, like it included everyone in the learning process. However, it doesn't include ESE»</i> Support Personnel
Supports self evaluation in collaborative way	7	<i>«BPIE made us look at ourselves and in a non-threatening environment and was a very productive procedure in identifying opportunities for us to improve service for our ESE students»</i> Support Staff



Reflections on applicability of BPIE process to school practice

When members scored this item the majority scored a 4, which suggests a strong applicability to school practice. The comments offered by participants help to show how the BPIE process applies to school and reflects how the process supports action planning, situation specific goals and a shared vision etc.. However, concerns emerged about the nature of continued support to translate the BPIE emerging goals into school practice, as explained by a general education teacher, *«It is only as powerful as the school implementing it»*. Affirmed by an ESE colleague who called for ongoing follow up to the BPIE, suggesting the need for, *«funds, training and support»*. Indeed, a more hopeful response given by a member of the support staff, *«I believe that with the right amount of support the BPIE process would be invaluable to our school»*.

Courageous Conversations

Team members were specifically asked to comment on how the BPIE process helped them to engage in courageous conversations. The majority of responses were related to the process of the facilitated meetings that were based on consensus building across the team. Ten responses were related to this and demonstrate how members felt that they were able to share their thoughts and be listened to, as stated by a general education teacher, *«Other teachers around me – they listened if I had a different opinion and we rallied as a group»*. The importance of listening to all was established right at the beginning of the BPIE process as illustrated by a member of the support staff, as she discussed how she was encouraged to participate in conversations, with the group, *«The first vote and explanations as to why you felt you needed to vote that way»*. The idea that members could have different opinions but all were equally valued and respected was supported when a special education teacher commented, *«We understood that what was said, stayed in that room. All opinions were valuable», and supported by a support personnel who mentioned, «Everyone was free to express themselves w/o criticism. There was a lot of explanation when someone didn't understand»*.

Team members found the support of the outside facilitators (or 'critical friend' in the language of Ryndak et al, (2007) instrumental the creation of spaces where they can engage in courageous conversations with each other. This is illustrated in the team member reflections, *«Because there was understanding and respect among committee members, I was comfortable asking questions. Others who were more familiar w/ ESE were helpful to me, The BPIE made us look at ourselves and in a non-threatening environment and was a very productive procedure in identifying opportunities for us to improve service for our ESE students.»* The outside facilitators supported the creation of a safe emotional and intellectual space: *«The [facilitator] people were very helpful in leading us towards productive conversations»*. (General Education Teacher). The notion of productive conversations is explained further by one of the school administrators, *«It helped us become aware and create the conversation about how to serve, support, and respect all our students.»* As well as the emotional space that the facilitated process developed that allowed team members to feel they can contribute, the intellectual process was also talked about as being important. The intellectual process involves the guidance that the BPIE process offers to team members to be informed in the decisions they make. This is centered upon the indicators of best practices for inclusion that frame the discussions *«Everyone felt free to engage in the conversation because we were in a small group and had information in front of us.»* (Special Education Teacher) and *«I liked how the whole process to identify the indicators was set up. I found it very helpful to have all information in a binder. I also liked how the meetings were run.»* (General Education Teacher).



Conclusion

This story of one elementary school in South West Florida highlights the power of a careful and facilitated process of whole school review. Survey responses confirm the value of the variables for sustained change in school highlighted by Ryndak et al (2007). The first and most fundamental being the development of a shared common vision and what this looks like in a school. The team members from this elementary school report that through participating in the BPIE review they believe they share a much clearer shared vision. This offers an example of how school members can co- create the future of their school (Scharmer, 2009). Indeed, one teacher stated «*prioritizing goals to improve our inclusive practice school-wide and identifying strategies to achieve those goals was most valuable from my viewpoint*» (Special Education Teacher). Team members from this elementary school affirm a facilitated process that supports their participation in courageous conversations about their school inclusive policies and practices is a worthwhile endeavor. They also stated that being co-creators of school level planning is helpful on their school journey towards greater inclusive policies and practices.

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