

'MAPS'

Educators, parents, young people and their friends planning together

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Summary

The philosophy and practice of inclusive education in many parts of Canada and North America has been supported by the development of 'inclusive tools' to help translate the rhetoric of inclusion into reality. This is achieved by building and enriching friendship networks within the community of children and young people. A number of these tools are now a central part of inclusive schools' strategies to ensure that all students belong, including those with special needs and other potentially vulnerable groups. In this paper we describe in detail MAPS, a creative action planning technique that we have developed and used to help individuals or organisations create more effective futures.

(Grenot-Scheyer et al, 1989; Stainback and Stainback, 1990).

Unfortunately, frequent opportunities and close proximity are not always sufficient enough for children and adolescents to feel connected to each other and to build a network of friends. Several tools have been used successfully to facilitate such connections and eventual friendships. These tools are designed to tap into the creative energy of students and educators. Circles of friends, MAPs (formerly McGill Action Planning System), and Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope (PATH) are three person-centred tools that assume that everyone is valued. These tools are based on hope for the future and begin with the assumptions that all people belong, all people can learn, everyone benefits from being together, and diversity is one of our most critical strengths. (PATH will be the subject of a paper for a later issue of this journal.)

Introduction

We are delighted to respond to the invitation to provide a detailed account of the Making Action Plans/ MAPS process as part of this themed issue. We will start with a brief account of the core philosophy and principles of MAPS, before outlining the process in some detail. As a description of a 'Circles' process is provided elsewhere in the journal, we will conclude with some brief remarks about links between that technique and MAPS.

One of the basic components for building connections and friendships is that people are in close proximity and have frequent opportunities to interact with each other. Research has demonstrated that in order for children and adults to form the bonds necessary for friendships, they must have frequent access to one another. So, it follows that students who attend the same schools and classes as their neighborhood peers are more likely to form bonds that are strong enough to result in friendship

MAPS beliefs

The following constitute the core beliefs upon which MAPS is based:

- All students belong in regular classrooms – no ifs, ands, or buts.
- General education teachers can teach all children.
- Necessary supports will be provided when necessary.
- Quality education is a right, not a privilege.
- Outcomes must be success, literacy, and graduation for all.
- Creative alternatives will be available for populations who do not succeed in typical ways.

What is MAPS?

MAPS is a collaborative planning process for action that brings together the key actors in a child's life.

The student, his or her family and teachers, and other significant persons in the student's life gather to discuss the student's and family's personal dreams and goals and to brainstorm ways of making them a reality. In the spirit of co-operation, this team creates a plan of action to be implemented in a general education classroom setting. It is a *not* a case conference or an individualised education programme (IEP), but the results can certainly be used on any IEP form.

A MAP is facilitated by two people: one person is the MAPS recorder who makes a record (preferably using graphics) on a large piece of chart paper. This is an essential element of a MAP. The other person is the process facilitator, who welcomes the group, explains the process, and facilitates the MAP.

MAPS – Part I

Essential elements of a MAP. The following are essential elements of a MAP. Without these eight essential elements, the plan is not a MAP. It may be something similar, but a MAP must have the above eight elements, or there must be a good reason to eliminate an element.

1. Cofacilitation (MAPS recorder and process facilitator) (can be interchanged).
2. Graphic recording with coloured markers on chart paper.
3. Hospitality – a personal and informal atmosphere (snacks, beverages, tokens of thanks).
4. All key factors in the child's life present and participating.
5. Focus person and their siblings and friends present and participating.
6. Key issue addressed: *What does the child and/or family want?*
7. Decision to meet again (with a date).
8. Concreted plan of action with actual things to do right away – First Steps.

A MAP is made up of questions, each of which can be conceptualised as a circle. The MAP questions are shown in Figure 1. Each question must be used but there is not a prescribed order to follow. The facilitators decide on the direction depending on the needs of the group.

Setting the tone and introductions. Before the MAP begins, the facilitators set up the room with comfortable chairs in an informal semicircle. Chart paper and clean markers are ready for use. Snacks are available for people before the session begins. colorful

name tags have been prepared. The facilitators invite the group to be seated, introduce themselves, and then the facilitator asks everyone, 'Please tell us who you are and explain your relationship to Mark [the focus person].'

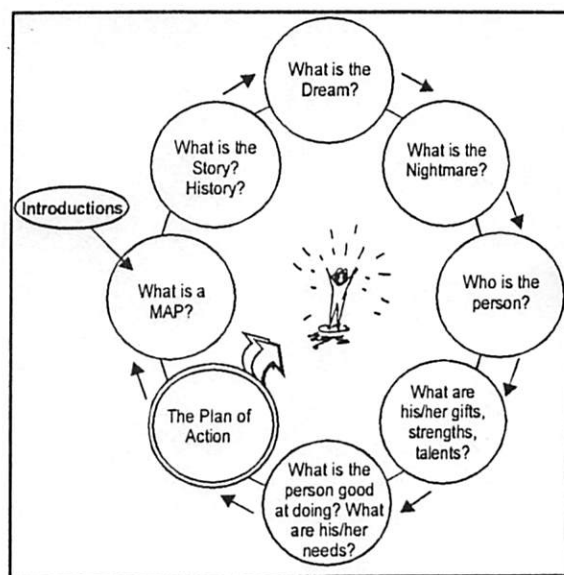





Figure 1. The MAP questions – a mandala

Question 1: What is a map? The facilitator asks the participants to think of a map and asks, 'What is a map?' Participants in one group provided these answers: 'A map shows directions.' 'It tells you how to get from one place to another.' 'It shows you how to find stuff.' 'A map tells you where to go.'

The facilitator answered: 'That's exactly what we're here to do. To show direction for Mark's life, to help him and his family get from one place (the segregated class) to another place (the general education class). The MAP will also help us figure out how to find what Mark needs. If we all work together, we can decide where to go next. Together we can create a plan of action that we can put into practice for Mark starting right away.'

Question 2: What is the story? Can also merge with **Question 3.** For example, the facilitator asked, 'Please tell us your story. What are the most important things that have happened since Mark was born? I know you can go on and on with this, so I'll limit you to five to seven minutes. Tell us what you feel is really important for all of us to hear and to know about Mark's story'.



The MAPs Facilitator must be careful not to let this be a case history. He or she must listen with his or her heart, soul, and body. The MAPs Recorder writes the story in words, pictures, and images. The Process Facilitator asks the participants also to listen with their hearts: 'Don't listen just with your ears. Listen with your whole body. Don't be judgemental. This is not a trial. Try to feel, hear what the person is telling you from inside – as if it were your own story.'

We often ask this question before the question 'What is the dream?' depending on the tone and mood of the group. The recorder summarises the story after the family or person has completed stating their thoughts and ensures that all facts are correct and the essential elements of the story are recorded. The recorder requests the assistance of the MAPs team in this process. Making simple errors (especially with people's names) can be very upsetting, so it is important to make corrections and request assistance. This increases group participation and ownership.

Question 3: What is your dream? This is really the heart and soul of the MAP. The MAPs Facilitator must create an atmosphere in which the family feels comfortable to say what their dreams, hopes, and wants really are.

For example, the facilitator asked: 'If you could dream the dream you really want, if you could have anything with no holds barred, what do you really and truly want for yourselves and for Mark? Money is no object. Don't hold back. Let yourselves be free to really say what you want. Don't ask for what you think you can get. This is different. This is what you really want and dream about or pray for.'

There is often a deathly silence at this moment – it is essential to the process. Do not interrupt; wait; allow the family time to build up their courage to express their real feelings and hopes. If this is rushed, the entire MAP may be a futile exercise.

When a facilitator asks this question about people's dreams with a full heart so that people gain the confidence to risk stating their buried dreams, profound things often happen. A pattern has emerged after years of asking this question. Parents all over North America have told us that the MAPs process enabled them to dream again. As one Colorado parent stated, 'A MAP is a way of restoring the dream to a family'. With older teenagers or adults, the focus person states his or her own dream. The MAP restores a dream to the individual.

But what about? 'But what about the person who

can't speak?' We have done many MAPs with children who are labelled non-verbal. Although these children do not speak with their voices, they certainly communicate. And if the group knows a child well, someone will be able to articulate his or her own dreams for the child and also the dreams he or she thinks the child might have. For example, the facilitator might ask, 'If Mark could speak, what do you think his dream would be?'

Families often weep openly as a participant tells us, 'My dream is that my child be happy, be included in school, walk or ride to school with his sister, be invited to birthday parties, have a hamburger with a friend, and have the phone ring just for him'.

One 12-year-old girl told us, 'I want a trip to Hawaii and a job with computers. Also a pet dog'. She was clear as a bell!

One parent of a child with major medical issues told us, 'I want my child to have one real friend before she dies. My nightmare is that my child will never know friendship'. This little girl did die soon after the MAPs meeting, but, because she had moved into a school district that welcomed her, the mother did get her wish. The entire third-grade class attended her daughter's funeral. The family knew that their daughter had made real friends in her all-too-short life.

Question 4: What is my/our nightmare? Many facilitators consider this question the hardest to ask. We believe it is important because the MAP must identify the nightmare in order to avoid it. Unless the MAP prevents the nightmare, it is a waste. Unless the *outcome* of the plan of action is to prevent the worst from happening, all we are doing is merely busy-work.

In 10 years of MAPs, the following are examples of the most consistent responses to this question: 'My nightmare is that my child will end up in an institution with no one to love him/her'. 'We will die and my child will be alone and put in a group home'. 'My child will never have a friend'.

No one has ever said, 'I'm afraid my child will not get an A in math or learn phonics'.

No one has ever said, 'I'm afraid there won't be a proper history curriculum'.

This question often provides common ground between warring factions. When school staff see that these parents want what every other parent wants for his or her children, barriers break down. We have seen wars resolve into peace treaties. A Kentucky woman broke down when describing how her 18-year-old son was currently living out his nightmare,

institutionalised after having blinded himself. 'Our family is in the nightmare', she wept, 'All we wanted, all we want now, is some sort of human kindness and friendship to our son'. We had to stop for coffee as all participants, both factions, were in tears. For the first time, they were meeting as human beings rather than combatants on opposing sides of a placement review table.

Facilitators do not have to be familiar with the person or the family, but they must know the MAPS process inside-out. The facilitators must first and foremost believe 100 per cent in the fact that inclusion is possible for all! The facilitators must be good listeners who are able to hear expressions of great pain without jumping to provide immediate advice and solutions.

The facilitators can be school personnel or an external team. The facilitator's role is to pull information from the group and shape it into an action plan. The recorder creates a picture of what the group says through colour and graphics and also summarises what has been said before the group goes to the next step. Questions 1–4 constitute Part I of a MAP. It is often necessary to take a break at this point. The second part is lighter in tone and faster paced and moves toward the action plan itself.

MAPS – Part II

We consciously try to change the mood and the motion of the MAPs process in Part II.

Question 5: Who is Mark? To begin to think about this question, we draw an outline of a person on the chart paper and hand out self-stick notes. We need to brainstorm to come up with the answers to this question. Each participant writes a word or phrase (one per self-stick note) and posts it on the outline. These give us a snapshot of the person. For example, an outline of a 12-year-old boy had these words and phrases posted: curious, handsome, determined, likes good snacks, always hungry, potential, my son, dimples, pretty ordinary, my brother, very active, pest, a little brat, somebody's great friend someday, an interesting boy, lively, likes to play with drums, great family.

The MAPs Recorder grouped the words in an attempt to get a picture of Mark. We sometimes ask, 'What have other people said about Mark in the past? What words have been used before in other meetings?' For example, these words were previously used to describe Mark: retarded, developmentally delayed, autistic, severely autistic. These should be

posted separately, but the recorder may want to highlight the dramatic differences between the two portraits of the same person. See Figure 2 for an illustration of this outline.

Question 6: What are Mark's strengths and unique gifts? To answer this question, another list of phrases and words was generated: happy, beautiful boy, loving, friendly, he can look you in the eye and smile, gives a lot, he has a 'look', helps to put things in perspective, makes you feel good.

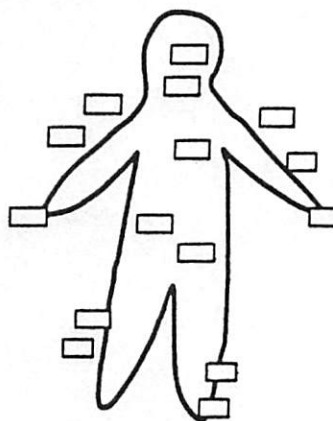


Figure 2. The outline of the focus paper with self-stick notes used to answer Question 5

Question 7: What does Mark like to do? What is Mark good at? What are his needs? Participants again brainstorm to generate this list, which is important as it gives the group many ideas for the curriculum and daily programme. For example, these answers to Question 7 were provided for Mark: 'Mark likes to throw balls, play with ropes and strings, climb in parks, eat, relax, swim laps in the pool, play in water puddles, go skating, play in clothes closets, be with people'

By this point in the process, we have generated an enormous volume of information on Mark. The facilitator then asks, for example, 'First and foremost, what do we all need to make this [the dream] happen? What does Mark need? What does Martha [his teacher] need? What does the family need?'

At this MAP, the participants were Mark's mother, father, teenage sister, and a dedicated teacher/friend. There was a real consensus that Mark needed to be involved and to meet people his own age. The family needed him to meet other children and spend time

with them so that his mother could begin to build a life of her own. The family agreed that a 'worker' to help with community integration would be a god-send. The family wanted that person to take Mark to local places where he could get involved with other kids. The job description for that person was developed from what was said at the MAP: to find places where Mark can meet kids; to find kids to spend time with him; to go to the youth centre with Mark; to get Mark involved in trips, swimming, and other activities; and to help Mark develop more communication skills.

Question 8: The plan of action. When the question, 'What does this person need?' is framed carefully, the answers flow directly into a plan of action. In some circumstances, such as planning a curriculum, we might draw the timetable and have the other students brainstorm about all the activities that Mark likes and can do. Then, we explore the logistics. If Mark is going to get from history to gym and be dressed in 10 minutes, he will need help – a guide. Who is willing to help? We link people to specific times, places, class, and activities.

In this example, the family enthusiastically agreed to plan a pizza party at their home and invite some neighbourhood kids that weekend. Together with Greg, Mark's teacher/friend, they started to look for a community integration facilitator. Greg agreed to facilitate another MAP with a wider group in one month, and a date was set.

Concluding a MAP




A MAP meeting must be concluded. The MAPS recorder guides the group through a summary of the charts and presents the charts to the family as a gift along with other gifts such as a plant and a cake – something that grows, something sweet. Before the MAP meeting ends, the facilitator asks each participant one more process question: 'Will you give me one word or a phrase to sum up your experience of this MAP? Off the top of your head, the first word that springs to mind.'

The participants in this group answered: 'I'm relieved. Great session' [Mother]. 'Very positive. Thanks' [Father]. 'Awesome' [Sister]. A very big smile [Mark]. 'Fabulous and positive' [Greg].


A MAP is not/a MAP is ...

It is important at the outset of the process to state clearly what a MAP is and what a MAP is not:

1. A MAP is not a trick, gimmick or quick solution to complex human problems. It is *not* a one-shot session that will provide the magic bullet that blasts a vulnerable person into the life of the community. MAPS is a problem-solving approach to complex human issues. It can and must be done as often as needed. At its core it is *personal, common sense* and *from the heart*.
2. A MAP is not a replacement for an individual Education Programme (IEP). A MAP session may provide information for an IEP or some other needed documentation, but it must not be treated as a substitute for these. In a MAP, the people who give input are personally and/or professionally involved in the person's life. The MAPS participants must be people who know the person or organisation intimately, not simply people who have tested or provided occasional intervention for a person.
3. A MAP is not controlled by experts in order to design a neat programme package. The outcome of a MAP session is a *personalised plan of action* that has three criteria: (i) the plan is tailored to the person or organisation. It is a one-of-a-kind MAP; (ii) the person is at the heart of the MAP; and (iii) the plan assists in bringing the person or organisation more and more into the daily life of the school or community.
4. A MAP is not a tool to make segregated settings better. MAPS was designed to liberate people from institutional care. It is for people and organisations trying to figure out together how to get a person included fully in the life of the community.
5. A MAP is not an academic exercise. A MAP is a genuine personal approach to problem solving. A MAP is for people who are vulnerable, and the outcome decisions of a MAP session have life and death implications for how the person will live his or her life. It is not a professionally controlled, expert-model, top-down management tool. A MAP is a group, problem solving, co-operative, collaborative team approach to planning.
6. A MAP is not a neutral tool. The Process Facilitator must be skilled in group process, have leadership ability, have a problem-solving orientation, and most of all, have values that clearly favour inclusive education and living. MAPS make the value-judgement that it is better for all of us to figure out how to live together than to put people into little (or big) segregated boxes. MAPS facilitators must have clear visions and share beliefs favouring the path of inclusion in all aspects of life.

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7. MAPS is not talk – it is talk and action. A MAP gives clear direction and takes active steps that move in the direction of inclusion. Most of all, MAPS is ongoing. It is a life-long process of figuring out how to prevent the nightmare of segregation and how to enter into relationships that will lead to physical, mental and spiritual well-being.
 8. The metaphor for the MAP is a *kaleidoscope*. The kaleidoscope is a magical toy; a mysterious and beautiful tool that changes images constantly. Through the eye-piece we see little bits of colour turning together in an ever-changing luminous melody of colour and light. We see the kaleidoscope as a metaphor for the outcome of each MAP. A MAP is a medley of people working together to make something unique and better happen. A MAP is more than any one person can do alone.

Conclusion



MAPS is a process that can be used by the key people in a student's life (eg parents, friends, teachers) to consider carefully the life of a student – who he or she is and what the student and their family and friends dream for the future. It culminates in a concrete plan for helping the student reach a dream. However, sometimes this is not enough and the student needs a circle of friends to help him or her work toward realisation of the dream. With the help of the team and/or other school personnel and friends, often a circle of friends can be formed around the student to facilitate realisation of the dream and to help ensure he or she is included in school and outside school activities and provide support and encouragement when needed. To us, MAPS and Circles are like building a good founda-

tion for a house. What good is a castle if it is made on sand? What good are communication skills if you have no-one to *talk* to? What good is physical mobility if you have nowhere to *go*? What good is life itself if you have no-one to *share* it with?

We believe communities of diversity are richer, better, and more productive places in which to live, learn and grow. We believe that inclusive school communities have to create the future. We want a better life for everyone. We want inclusion! We believe that MAPS and the other tools referred to in this article can help you in your efforts to create caring networks of pupils, friends, teachers and parents.

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