

2008 UF COE Writing Contest Entry

(This is one of 27 entries submitted in the College's recent writing contest on the topic of "What's Good in Education?". Visit the [Writing Contest home page](#) for links to other entries, including the winner.)

WHAT'S GOOD IN EDUCATION?

Inclusion works. Just ask David.

By **CAROLYN BELLOTTI**

BAE '08, MEd '09, elementary education (children's literature)

As I arrive at the third grade classroom where I intern, I am greeted by a group of smiling 8-year-olds. Annalisa hurries over to give me a hug before returning to her assignment. Then Kacey excitedly tells me about how far she got reading her Harry Potter book the night before. In one corner of the room, David, a fully included student with cerebral palsy and sensory disorders, strolls in with his mother. The students greet him as his mother helps him set up his laptop at his desk and he begins typing his answers onto the worksheet that the class is doing for morning work.

After the morning announcements the students gather in a circle for morning meeting. We go around the circle and the students greet each other by doing their special class handshake. David has been practicing the handshake with students in the class for the past week. When it is time for him to shake hands with Hunter, he does the complicated handshake nearly perfect as his classmates murmur words of encouragement. Next we go around the circle as each student shares some headline news. When it is David's turn to share, the class waits patiently as he forms the words to tell us that he went over to Jack's house the day before.

Later, when it is time for math, the class gathers around the Smart Board as the teacher begins to guide the students in their lesson about fractions. When it comes to David's turn to answer a question, the class waits patiently as he counts in his head for what seems like forever. Suddenly he proudly calls out the correct answer. The class bursts into applause and David smiles proudly as he looks around at the faces of his classmates.

I have to admit that before I became a part of this amazing classroom, I was reluctant about the possibilities that inclusion offered. The idea of inclusion seemed idealistic and I wasn't sure that it could actually work in a classroom. After seeing inclusion in action, I have seen that it can and does work. David participates in all

of the same activities that all the other students do, with accommodations and modifications when necessary. The class respects and values his contributions and they offer him nothing but support and encouragement. As one student explained, students like David are kind of like Rudolph the red nose reindeer. Even though others may not be able to accept him at first because he is different, once they get to know him they learn that being different makes him one of the best reindeer of all.

* * *

[Back to Writing Contest home page](#)