

WHOLE SCHOOLING

*The Journey Towards Schools Where
Diverse Students Learn Together Well*

J. Michael Peterson
Wayne State University

Mishael Marie Hittie
Eisenhower Elementary School, Southfield Public Schools

WHOLE SCHOOLING:

The Journey Towards Schools Where Diverse Students Learn Together Well

© 2025 Jay Michael Peterson and Mishael Hittie

All rights reserved.

This book presents a framework for education and teaching known as **Whole Schooling**.

The Whole Schooling approach integrates best practices in progressive education with a strong commitment to justice and inclusive education, supporting the learning of a wide range of diverse students in shared educational settings.

This book was previously published in 2010 by Pearson under the title:
Inclusive Teaching: The Journey Towards Effective Schools for All Learners.

Currently Published December 2025 by:

Forum Multimedia Publisher, LLC.

Website: https://www.wholeschooling.net/journal/IJWS/page/book_info

ISBN 979-8-218-90177-6



To Georgie Ellen Peterson and Todd A. Hittie

without whose love and support this book would not have been possible

Preface

Throughout the world, educators and policymakers talk about their commitment to educating all children well. Yet, at the same time, it's hardly a secret that children in schools are segregated from one another on the basis of many characteristics, particularly race, wealth, and disability. Our read of the evidence, the research, is that this arrangement is harmful to children and does not teach them how to function in a healthy society. The good news, however, is that committed, courageous, creative people throughout the world are working very hard to create different types of schools: schools where all children learn well together, where separate schools and classrooms for students with various special needs are relegated to a painful past, where children learn how to function as an inclusive, caring community and where real learning and thinking rises to new heights.

In this book, we invite you to join this worldwide movement, to journey towards becoming a teacher who values and celebrates all children, not just some. We use the metaphor of a *journey* because it fits the experience of those who have sought to become inclusive teachers. Few of us had experiences of inclusive teaching growing up, so learning about inclusive teaching truly *is* a journey.

We will also challenge you to think in new ways about teaching children with differences. Rather than accepting the way schools are as a given and “including” a few students, we will explore strategies by which you will seek to design your teaching from the beginning so that truly diverse children learn well together, are challenged at their own levels of ability, and receive the support they need within a community of learners to which they know they belong. You will find that inclusive teaching improves learning and growth for *all* students, including students with special needs. By the end of our quest together, we think you will find that this perspective makes a great deal of sense—and we hope that you will never think about teaching in the same way again.

Much of the information we share in *Whole Schooling* derives from our own teaching and action research in schools. We have particularly drawn from an intensive qualitative study of fifteen inclusive schools that was conducted through the Whole Schooling Research Project, a three-year study funded by the U.S. Department of Education that explored inclusive teaching on a daily basis (Peterson, Tamor, Feen, & Silagy, 2002). Our understandings have been further deepened as we have worked to connect schools in urban, suburban, and rural areas to promote effective learning for all students as part of the Whole Schooling Consortium. Finally, your two co-authors have collaborated in this work and have also spent much time talking and learning together in Mishael Hittie’s elementary classroom where she has set out, over the last 20 years, to be an effective whole schooling teacher.

Each chapter includes a mix of (1) theory and research; (2) concrete stories that help you visualize and feel the emotional impacts of issues and approaches; and (3) practice—applied strategies that can be used in the classroom. Each chapter also seeks to paint a picture of the

sometimes painful realities we see in schools, realities that often sharply contrast with best practices. Our hope is that the mix of vision, theory, research, story, and practice will help you learn at a deeper level, to understand the why and how, and ultimately to link emotional and cognitive intuition with systematic, practical action. Each chapter contains some or all of the following special features:

- *Back Pack*: Key online and print resources related to each chapter.
- *Sights to See*: Links to online videos that illustrate information and strategies in each chapter.
- *Schools to Visit*: *Brief profiles of real schools—with contact information provided—that are seeking to include all children in learning together Journey into the Classroom*: Detailed peek into a classroom to explore key strategies being implemented for inclusive teaching.
- *Bumps in the Road*: Exploration of problems and challenges that hinder effective inclusive teaching from becoming a reality and discussion of strategies regarding how to deal with these issues.
- *Traveling Notes*: A summary of the key ideas at the end of each chapter.
- *Stepping Stones*: Ideas for activities to extend your understanding and moving towards putting ideas into practice.

About the Authors

For us, writing this book has also been a journey. We are a father–daughter, university professor–teacher team.

Michael Peterson was a professor in the College of Education at Wayne State University in Detroit when this book was first published, where he has taught courses in inclusive education since 1994; before this he directed the Developmental Disabilities Institute. He has more than thirty years of experience working with children and adults with disabilities and teachers and service providers. In 1997 Michael and colleagues organized the Whole Schooling Consortium, a school renewal network based on Whole Schooling.

Mishael Hittie began her teaching career in 1997 as a support teacher in an elementary school. She has taught third, fourth and fifth grade, often looping with her children, and a grade 3–5 multiage class. In her classes she’s had children with a variety of disabilities (cognitive, emotional, learning, blindness), children of different ethnic groups, and children from low- and high-income backgrounds all learning together. She participated in the Whole Schooling Research Project, in which the researchers studied her school and classroom to understand and document effective whole schooling teaching practices.

We’ve been excited about our own journey—about learning, writing, thinking, and exploring together. Our goal is to share our discoveries with you and to help prepare you for your own trek of development and growth. We hope you find the path enjoyable, rewarding, and valuable as you seek to be an effective teacher of highly diverse children learning *together*.

Michael: I would like to thank the first teachers who taught me about inclusive community, my parents, J. W. and Juanita Peterson. Together they have modeled inclusion, support, and care. My wife, Georgie, taught me about good teaching as she taught our children and about community as we built a family. My son, Shawn, has helped me understand the importance of critical reflection, perseverance, and caring relationships. Joyful has been the chance to learn with and from my colleague and daughter, Mishael, who has become a passionate leader towards whole schooling.

Mishael: I would like to thank my parents for their demonstration of how to live in and create inclusive communities wherever they go. My mother, Georgie, taught me how to love with my whole heart and soul and that learning is a joyous part of daily life, not confined to school. I get my love of learning and reading from her. My father, Michael, taught me to persevere and to always strive to improve. From him I get my passion for teaching. He has become a friend and confidant who has challenged me in my teaching.

My husband, Todd, has been supportive and loving throughout countless dinners discussing teaching and writing. I love him for his loving patience, willingness to give of his time, and ideas for making learning interesting. He knows more about teaching than he realizes. Shawn Peterson, my brother, is a wonderful example of courage and creativity. I love his laughter and his willingness to always try something new. My long-time friends Jim Ford and Sarah Melamed have always been there for me. My friend, Jessica, is a great example of a caring loving heart. We have been through a lot together and she continues to amaze me with her strength. Vivienne Collinson and Jim Gallagher of Michigan State University have also helped me learn more about teaching.

From both of us: We both have many colleagues who have influenced and supported us in learning about inclusive teaching. These include:

Students: For both of us, students have been key to our learning. In some cases, these have been children and students in school classrooms. Mishael has taught children and Michael has visited her class and the classes of many other teachers. They've helped us to understand how to make learning fun, to leave our comfort zones, to encourage them to think and grow, to give of ourselves, and to always keep their best interests in mind. They have touched our hearts, and the lessons we have learned from them grace this book in many ways. We particularly note: Kareem Allen, Katie Basford, Micah Fialka-Feldman, Sydney Jones, Katie Loviska, Cassy McKay, Erin McKenzie, Shawnacy Parham, Christina Robinson, and Kyle Smith.

Parents of children with disabilities including: We've had the opportunity to know and learn from and with many parents of children with special needs. We've been amazed at their courage, insight, and caring. They particularly include: Katie Basford, Bev Crider, Carolyn Das, Janice Fialka and Rich Feldman, Marta Hampel, Caryn Ivey, Barb McKenzie, Joanne Murphy, Sharon Murphy, Orah Raia, and Lynne Tamor.

Teachers: We've also learned much from many wonderful, amazing master teachers: Jim Anderson, Deb Badrak, Nancy Barth, Karen, Sharon Berke, Chiapella, Jon Chisek, Tricia Coger, Nancy Creech, Sue Grady, Dodie Harris, Chris Horrocks, Holly Koscielniak, Halina Leary, Sasha Roberts-Levi, Tanya Sharon, Melissa Silagy, Brenda Vaughn, Sandy Widmer, Denise White, and Vitas Underys.

Administrators: We've been blessed to see administrators providing exemplary leadership moving towards whole schooling. They include: Jan Colliton, Assistant Superintendent of the Farmington Public Schools; Carla Harting, Special Education Director of Wyandotte Public Schools; Norma Hernandez, Principal, Detroit Public Schools; Jennifer McFarlane, Principal, Warren Woods Public Schools; Barbara Mick, Principal of Ausable Primary; Mark Morawski, Principal, Farmington Public Schools; and Terry Patterson, former Principal, Southfield Public Schools.

Educators from around the world who've provided leadership towards whole schooling: Sigamoney Naicker, South Africa; Jen Snape, Australia; Umesh Sharma, Australia; Naadia Momberg, Egypt.

Members of the Rouge Forum who taught us much about democracy in the classroom: Rich Gibson, Greg Queen, Katy Landless, Amber Goslee, Wayne Ross, and many more.

Colleagues: Gerry Oglan, Marshall Zumberg, Mark Larson, Karen Feathers, Kathi Tarrant-Parks, Greg Zvric, Sharon Elliot, and Dean Paula Wood.

Change agents and leaders: Over the years we have learned from and been inspired and challenged by many people who've led the way in working to include all children in effective schools and communities: Kim Beloin, Doug Fisher, Bill Henderson, Cheryl



Jorgensen, Norm Kunc, Barbara LeRoy, Diane Ryndak, Jacqueline Thousand, and Rich Villa. We particularly honor the memory of Marsha Forrest, an international heroine and model extraordinaire of inclusion, courage, and care, and her amazing circle of friends that included Jack Pearpoint, Shafik Asante, John O'Brien, John McKnight, and Judith Snow.

To our reviewers: We also owe a great deal to the thoughtful reviewers who helped us shape the revisions of this text. All provided very useful feedback and insight which were very valuable in our writing. They include:

Our editor and staff: The first version of this book was published by Pearson Publishers. We owe a great debt to our editors and staff in developing this book. We began this book in its first edition with Allyn and Bacon with the support and direction of Virginia Lanigan. We have further valued greatly working with Ann Davis and her assistant Penny Burleson in this second edition. We also are grateful and appreciative of the staff of Forum Multimedia Publishing, particularly Luna Li, who have been supportive as the book is being published along with the International Journal of Whole Schooling.