

**THE PRISM PROJECT: A COLLABORATIVE
SPECIAL NEEDS FIELD EXPERIENCE FOR PRESERVICE
MUSIC, THEATRE, DANCE, AND SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS**

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The Ball State Prism Project is a Saturday afternoon program using the performing arts as a medium to explore and develop social skills for children ages 6-14 who are challenged with special needs. The Prism Project is a collaboration between the Ball State School of Music, the Ball State Department of Theatre and Dance as well as community organizations such as Interlock: The East Central Indiana Autism Society of America, Sibshops (a programs for siblings of children with special needs), and the Society for Exceptional Children. On April 29th, 2009, the Prism Project presented a capstone performance of the music, theatre, and dance scenes that were created during the semester by the performers with special needs who are enrolled in the project tailored by the Ball State students and the directors.

Twenty children with such disabilities as autism, ADHD, behavioral disorders, and down syndrome are a part of this project. Parents have expressed that this program not only provides a purpose for these children, but also provides a small respite service to their families and allows them some time away from the challenge of caring for a child with special needs. Many of the performers do not have another after school or weekend activity like many of their peers. This program serves to fill a “gap” in services in our community.

Over 50 Ball State University students have been directly involved in the creation, implementation, organization, administration, and production of this project within an authentic teaching and learning environment. This project has given each Ball State student a unique opportunity to test his or her skills as an educator within an authentic setting while teaching children with disabilities. Ball State students have also been directly involved in choreographing, writing music, and writing scripts based on each child’s individual strengths and weaknesses.