

MOVING FORWARD

*News and information about the education of special
needs students for teachers and parents*

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The KEY Components of INCLUSION

Inclusive education means that all children, with and without disabilities, have the same opportunities to participate in school activities and learn together, in the same classrooms. It's not just about handicapped children being integrated into general education, it's a complete cultural shift that embraces the premise that ALL children can learn.



The approach to teaching is constantly evolving, contingent upon student needs, not disability labels or program criteria.

This means that all school staff have to be trained to vary or modify instruction because all children, not just those receiving special education, learn differently. Differentiated instruction and co-teaching are two key service delivery models that make inclusion work for everyone. The educational goals for all students are independence and empowerment.

Years ago, children with special needs were either not allowed in school or put in secluded settings. Their exposure to the curriculum was limited, which meant that their outcomes were very poor and certainly did not optimize a child's potential. An adult who had severe cerebral palsy and was segregated from his peers as a child once said, **"You can't teach a child to swim in the parking lot."**

In addition to support systems, the principles of inclusion are built upon a school climate of unconditional acceptance. This means that teachers, parents, paraprofessionals and students build meaningful relationships that foster respect and tolerance for diversity.

Research not only highlights the many positive merits of including all children in the classroom, it's **the right thing to do**. Inclusion does not happen without support. Some children may need a little guidance, while others may require more intensive interventions.

The days of special education being a "place" for those with disabilities is over. Children need to be educated in the least restrictive environment. The law states that **inclusive education is a child's right, not a privilege**.

THE KEYS TO INCLUSION

DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

CO-TEACHING

UNIVERSAL DESIGN

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

SCHOOL CLIMATE

"Fairness is not giving everyone the same thing.

Fairness is giving each person what they need to succeed."



DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION: A Study In Organized Chaos

Every person
is a new door to a
different world.

“Every child is unique. Although we may rejoice in this fact, it poses a dilemma for educators. When students are diverse, teachers can either ‘teach to the middle’ and hope for the best, or

they can face the challenge of diversifying their instruction” (Scott Willis & Larry Mann, ASCD 2000).

One thing every educator knows is that “**one size does not fit all.**” What works with one class may be a complete disappointment in another. Some children learn best visually, while others absorb information best when listening. Some children embrace the abstract, while others require a more concrete approach. Some children don’t have mobility and they may need a special chair, while others can’t sit still and need a constant outlet for their boundless energy.

The true art of teaching is the **orchestration** of the classroom to accommodate a variety of needs. The antiquated concept of “teaching to the middle” tends to leave the groups on both ends frustrated. The gifted students are bored, and the struggling learners get lost.

The differentiated classroom is a study in organized chaos. At any given time, the classroom may utilize rotating learning stations, alternative projects, small groups, flexible groupings or assistive technology. Keeping classrooms engaging and exciting require movement and constantly diversifying instruction.

Differentiated instruction is hard work. It’s about understanding the learning styles of all students, and tailoring the instructional delivery to compliment them. It involves the creative deviation from scripted material in an effort to capture the attention of curious minds. This may involve having several alternative lesson plans to teaching a single concept. It’s also about having a clear understanding of the difference between modifications and accommodations for various student needs.

The role of differentiated instruction in the inclusive classroom is critical. Both disabled and nondisabled students benefit from a diverse approach to learning. The question of “**What works?**” is answered by the amount of progress each student makes in the classroom.

Creating classrooms built on differentiated instructional practices may be an exhaustive process, but that is what makes education so challenging and rewarding.

The Logical Benefits of CO-TEACHING

Co-teaching is the professional marriage of two teachers who work together in one classroom. The beauty of co-teaching is the teamwork and the blending of two distinct styles of instruction. The strengths of each teacher is elevated to maximize the delivery of information. There are many models of co-teaching to choose from (as defined by Friend and Cook, 2004).

One teacher **delivers** instruction, while the other **observes** learning and consistently assesses student understanding and academic functioning.

One teacher will **take the lead** in providing instruction, while the other moves around the classroom and **assists** students who may be struggling.



With **parallel teaching**, the class is divided in half, and the same material is presented at the same time by both teachers. This makes the teacher to student ratio more manageable. This also means that the modality for the presentations can be altered for each group.

Station teaching involves staff that are actively involved in instruction, and the students rotate from one station to the next, learning new material. Each station can involve a different approach to target specific skills.

Alternative teaching means that one teacher takes a small group of students and provides instruction that is different than what the large group is receiving. The content is typically preserved, but the particular delivery method may be altered.

BUILDING THE SCHOOL CLIMATE FOR INCLUSION



There are so many layers of preparation that have to accompany a shift to inclusion. The school has to take a real hard look at the strengths, weaknesses and biases of the staff. There also has to be consistent collaboration with parents so that they can be

part of the development process. The building blocks for inclusion involve the following concepts:

SAFETY QUESTIONS

Is the school accessible to everyone? Are there set rules and procedures put in place that are consistent throughout the school? Are the expectations for behavior clear and enforced? Are there mechanisms put in place to address issues such as bullying and other parent concerns?

TOLERANCE

The school environment has to be one of support and acceptance. To think that inclusion is just going to work out without the solid foundation of tolerance is a misjudgment that can cause many setbacks. Sure teachers can say that they welcome all children into their classroom, but when things get tough, they have to keep their commitment to change and persevere.

Tolerance is not limited to the acceptance of handicapped children. It embraces the diversity of culture, language, race, and gender preference. The staff has to look at the school climate from the eyes of the children by asking the critical question: **“Does everyone in this school feel respected and feel that they belong here?”**

TEACHER TRAINING

In order for inclusion to work, the first line of defense will always be teachers who feel that they are not prepared or trained to deal with the array of children with disabilities now sitting in their classrooms. The staff is not only being asked to learn new skills, but also to shift mindsets. Not only do instructional skills have to be enhanced, but sometimes teachers need a little boost of confidence to gently push them in the right direction.

MAXIMIZING STAFF RESOURCES

The shift to inclusion is also a shift in support systems. Paraprofessionals and other auxiliary staff have to be involved in building tiers of student assistance for academics and behavior. In order for teachers to instruct a diverse population, the support system around them has to be very strong and effective.

MAKING MISTAKES

Change is never easy. School staff can't believe that the best laid plans will deter mistakes. Inclusion is a constantly evolving process that often takes on a trial and error approach. The parents and staff have to understand that taking risks involves making errors, and that is a crucial part of the learning process. You go back to the chalkboard, roll up your sleeves and address issues as they surface. The message should be that it is “ok to make a mistake, we will work it all out as a team.”

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

The school staff, community, parents, and students have to be open to consistent communication and a shared vision. Part of that dialogue may involve some really hard questions and glimpses in the mirror that most would rather avoid. Building open relationships that foster collaboration toward a mutual goal is essential.

In addition, nurturing positive relationships with students will help to identify needs more effectively and ward off potential setbacks proactively. The key is to always solicit students' perspective so that adults have a clear understanding of what is and is not working.

GOOD INSTRUCTION

The needs of all children should dictate the direction of instruction, not labels or a rigid curriculum. Instead of matching students to programs, programs should be constantly adapted to address student needs.



Moving Forward

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