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Inclusive Education: Myths and Reality

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Abstract

There is a great debate over including students with disabilities, in particular students with learning disabilities, in inclusive classrooms. Several strategies are available to support educating students with learning disabilities in inclusive classrooms including: co-teaching, differentiated instruction and peer-mediated instruction and interventions. Theory suggests the practice of inclusion is congruent with social justice, but evidence suggests mixed results regarding academic achievement typically occur. However, results of providing separate pullout instructional services are not necessarily more likely to achieve desired results. Therefore, educators will need to make placement decisions considering the resources available in their school, in addition to the skill level of the students they work with, in order to make proper decisions regarding least restrictive environment.

Keywords: *Inclusion, Learning Disabilities, Understanding, Differentiated Instruction*

Introduction

Inclusive education happens when children with and without disabilities participate and learn together in the same classes. Research shows that when a child with disabilities attends classes alongside peers who do not have disabilities, good things happen. For a long time, children with disabilities were educated in separate classes or in separate schools. People got used to the idea that special education meant separate education. But we now know that when children are educated together, positive academic and social outcomes occur for all the children involved. We also know that simply placing children with and without disabilities together does not produce positive outcomes. Inclusive education occurs when there is ongoing advocacy, planning, support and commitment.

Principles of guide quality inclusive education:

- **All children belong:** Inclusive education is based on the simple idea that every child and family is valued equally and deserves the same opportunities and experiences. Inclusive education is about children with disabilities - whether the disability is mild or severe, hidden or obvious - participating in everyday activities, just like they would if their disability were not present. It's about building friendships, membership and having opportunities just like everyone else.
- **All children learn in different ways:** Sometimes, help from friends or teachers works best. Other times, specially designed materials or technology can help. The key is to give only as



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much help as needed. Inclusion is about providing the help children need to learn and participate in meaningful ways.

- **It is every child's right to be included:** Inclusive education is a child's right, not a privilege. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act clearly states that all children with disabilities should be educated with non-disabled children their own age and have access to the general education curriculum.

The Benefits of Inclusive Education

Here are key findings about the benefits of inclusion for children and families:

- **Families' visions of a typical life for their children can come true:** All parents want their children to be accepted by their peers, have friends and lead "regular" lives. Inclusive settings can make this vision a reality for many children with disabilities.
- **Children develop a positive understanding of themselves and others:** When children attend classes that reflect the similarities and differences of people in the real world, they learn to appreciate diversity. Respect and understanding grow when children of differing abilities and cultures play and learn together.
- **Friendships develop:** Schools are important places for children to develop friendships and learn social skills. Children with and without disabilities learn with and from each other in inclusive classes.
- **Children learn important academic skills:** In inclusive classrooms, children with and without disabilities are expected to learn to read, write and do math. With higher expectations and good instruction children with disabilities learn academic skills.
- **All children learn by being together:** Because the philosophy of inclusive education is aimed at helping all children learn, everyone in the class benefits. Children learn at their own pace and style within a nurturing learning environment.

Common Misconceptions about Inclusive Education

Some opinions about inclusive education are based on unsound information. Three common myths about inclusion are:

Myth 1: Separate is better

Reality, Segregation doesn't work. Whether children are separated based on race, ability, or any other characteristic, a separate education is not an equal education. Research shows that typical children and children with disabilities learn as much or more in inclusive classes.

Myth 2: Children must be "Ready" to be included

Reality, all children have to the right to be with other children their own age. A child with disabilities does not have to perform at a certain grade level or act exactly like the other children in their class to benefit from being a full-time member in general education.



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Myth 3: Parents don't support inclusive education

Reality, Parents have been and continue to be the driving force for inclusive education. The best outcomes occur when parents of children with disabilities and professionals work together. Effective partnerships happen when there is collaboration, communication and, most of all, **TRUST** between parents and professionals.

MAKING INCLUSION A REALITY

What you can do to promote inclusion for your child:

1. **Share your goals and expectations for your child:** Before you meet with the school and decide upon your child's Individualized Education Plan (IEP), meet with his teachers, therapists and others to discuss your goals, expectations, and future placement preferences for him.
2. **Know the rights you and your child have to an inclusive education:** For more information on your rights, visit the article – “Family Rights: The Educational Rights of Children with Disabilities”.
3. **Help your child develop friendships with classmates or other neighbourhood children:** Set up opportunities for your child to be with children he likes or children who show an interest in him. Teach your child how to make and keep friends. For other recommendations, visit the article “Let's Play Together: Fostering Friendships Between Children with and Without Disabilities”.
4. **Encourage your child to participate in activities where she/he can meet children her/his same age with different abilities:** When looking for activities, consider your child's interests. The local school, library, and recreation or community centers are good places to check out. You also may want to consider national organizations that encourage diversity, such as 4-H Clubs OR Girl Scouts of America.
5. **Search the Internet for activities or organizations that your child may want to join:** Two community Web sites with numerous resources are- The Family Village and Kids Together, Information for Children and Adults with Disabilities.

Schools can do to promote successful inclusive education:

1. **Support each child's learning:** Teachers support learning in inclusive classrooms in three ways. First, they teach so that students with differing abilities and learning styles can understand and participate. Second, they modify assignments when they are too difficult. Third, they model respect and encourage friendships.
2. **Consider inclusive education first:** Special education services can be provided in many different settings. Schools are required to consider the general education class before considering any other setting for your child to receive special education services.



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Conclusion

Some schools do not support a family's desire for inclusion, because they are used to providing special education services to students in separate classes. Or they may not understand how to make inclusion work for all children. Visit general education classes and separate classes for students with disabilities. Carefully explain to your child's teachers, principal or IEP team why you believe inclusive education would be best for your child. Share information with your child's school about the benefits of inclusive education.

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