Chapter 3
Effective and Efficient Practices for Successful Inclusion in Public School Settings

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ABSTRACT

Given the increasing diversity of students included in general education classrooms in public schools, the field must establish a clearer definition of what successful inclusion entails. This endeavor involves an analysis of best practices for inclusion, taking into account the knowledge and skillset required of teachers in their roles as instructional experts. With limited time and resources, teachers are challenged to maximize opportunities for individualized learning without creating the need for additional teacher-directed instruction. Teachers must therefore enact classroom practices in which students and their peers serve as mediating agents in their own learning. In addition, special and general education teachers must collaborate with one another, as well as with all members of the larger school community, in order to provide students with the least restrictive classroom placement along a continuum of options. All those involved must believe in, and advocate for, successful inclusion practices to support an increasingly diverse and accepting public sector.

INTRODUCTION

Defining Successful Inclusion in the Classroom

Lipsky and Gartner (1994) defined inclusion as "the provision of service to students with disabilities, including those with severe disabilities, in their neighborhood schools, in age-appropriate regular education classes, with the necessary support service and supplementary aids–for both children and teachers" (p. 36). Inclusive pedagogy more broadly involves the meaningful participation of students with a range of individual differences, including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, language, or socioeconomic status (Polat, 2011), as well as gifted learners (Callahan et al., 2020). That is, inclusive practices are those that address the needs of all learners (Loreman, 2017).

The primary goals of inclusion are (a) merging special and regular education to create one cohesive system; (b) increasing access to general education classrooms for students with diverse learning needs via a full-scale approach; and (c) enhancing the academic achievement of all students (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994). The aims of inclusion extend to typically-developing students as well: educators within an inclusive model are responsible for supporting children with disabilities in the development of critical social skills, as well as facilitating changes in attitudes amongst nondisabled students (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2000). At least some degree of placement in general education classrooms is necessary for the fulfillment of these goals, primarily due to the presence of age-appropriate, typically-developing peers (Lipsky & Gartner, 1991; Stainback & Stainback, 1992).

However, inclusion must be interpreted in a broader context than the physical placement of a student with disability in a general education setting (Love & Horn, 2021); as proposed in the Regular Education Initiative (REI) of 1985, mere physical presence in the general education classroom is not enough, replacing the 1960s and 1970s push for increased access to the mainstream classroom via a reformed, unified system of inclusion (Davis, 1989; Skrtie, 1987). That is, it is insufficient for students to simply exist in the general education classroom; rather, children in inclusive classrooms must be actively primed for success by the entire school community within a unitary public school system (Fisher & Frey, 2001). Critical elements of meaningful inclusion involve participation in the general education classroom; a sense of belonging in the classroom and school community; and shared responsibility among faculty in educating all students (Stainback & Stainback, 1992; Voltz et al., 2001). School constituents must persistently work to advance the principles of inclusion, and should continuously measure the outcomes of their efforts to ensure that students are both actively participating in and benefitting from their classroom setting (Fisher & Frey, 2001; Fisher et al., 2003).

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