Chapter 3
Together but Apart:
Strategies to Improve Inclusive Classrooms

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In recent years, there has been more support and push for full inclusion in general education classrooms for all students. This push for inclusion is seen in both mainstream and residential schools. This push has left many teachers feeling overwhelmed and under-supported. A crucial component of inclusive education is teachers' attitudes toward including students with disabilities; how educators generally feel about inclusion will greatly influence how successful the students with disabilities are. The effectiveness of inclusion depends on educators' willingness and acceptance to teach all students, and it also depends on eradicating any attitudinal impediments. A single book chapter will not alleviate the lack of specialized training, but perhaps it will contribute to the very thin bookshelves of teachers working with this population. With support and knowledge, the authors hope that teachers may feel more competent and receptive to having a wide variety of students in their classrooms.

INTRODUCTION

Roughly 3 of every 1,000 infants born in the U.S. will eventually be identified as deaf, and that number doubles by the time the children reach school-age (NCHAM, 2020). Assuming that approximately 3.8 million babies are born in the United States each year (CDC, 2016), this statistic means that a little more than 11,000 of these babies will fail the newborn hearing screening, and by Kindergarten, close to 23,000 children each year will have been identified as having some degree of hearing loss (NCHAM, 2020). Of those 23,000 children each year, 95% of them will have hearing parents who have never previously met a deaf person (Benedict, 2013; Mitchell & Karchmer, 2004). These parents will often find that their skill set, or all the parenting books they have read, has not prepared them to navigate a world with a deaf child.

An additional challenge that many of these parents face is the fact that 38.9% of deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) children in the United States have comorbid diagnoses (GRI, 2013). Using the 23,000 per year estimate (NCHAM, 2020), we can assume that 10,892 children each year are identified as deaf with additional disabilities. This number leads to the field of deaf education having a higher incidence of students with multiple disabilities than other student populations (Leppo et al., 2013). These additional disabilities range widely from mental health as listed on their IEPs to learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities to physical and/or motor disabilities (Shaver et al., 2011). For some of these students, the presence of multiple disabilities may indicate that the child has etiologies that the teacher must be aware of in order to effectively work with the student. For instance, if a teacher has a student who is DHH with autism, there are four strategies that will best support the student as well as others in the class: routine explanations, video modeling, peer-to-peer social interaction, and differentiated instruction (Graham et al., 2020). However, the strategies used for a DHH child with CHARGE syndrome would look different. Furthermore, the language needs of these two particular students will also look different depending on the child's communication abilities. Not only do teachers of this population need to understand basic pedagogy, but they must also understand medical terminology, etiologies, and specific strategies for each exceptionalities (Wenzel & Graham, 2019). Furthermore, having a DHH student with additional disabilities in the classroom also introduces other professionals and required resources, such as various therapists (e.g., occupational, physical, and/or speech), personal educational aides, interpreters, and/or nurses. For a teacher, especially one that has a classroom with a wide range of students, this creates the feeling of "so much to do and manage, so little time." This is also an issue for new teachers that have not had much independent experience in an instructional setting, which could be extremely overwhelming and stressful. New teachers that are at

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