

Chapter 9

Inclusion Is a High Impact Practice for All Students

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ABSTRACT

This chapter promotes the ethical and practical importance of inclusion, teaches about specific strategies that will assist teachers in practicing inclusion, and provides practical examples that can be applied in the inclusive classroom. The concerns of the chapter are to advocate for inclusion in the public school, to make clear the positive impacts of inclusion on all students (not just students with disabilities), and to ensure that teachers have specific, research-based strategies and tools to practice effective inclusion.

A new teacher has many, many adjustments to make and things to learn. No one, no matter how excellent a student, comes out of their teacher preparation program a master student. The process of becoming a master teacher takes years and requires effort and curiosity. There are many, many things a teacher in this position must learn, such as the culture of the building, the rhythms of a school year, their own work-life balance... the list goes on. One thing that teachers may realize as they become more and more professionally acclimated is that they aren't as expert in being an inclusive teacher as they would like to be. In this chapter we will consider one such case, of how a teacher could realize the importance of inclusion and pursue becoming the best teacher for all students that they can be.

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AN INTRODUCTORY VIGNETTE

The stack was deceptively slim. Amalie Aya regarded it with a sigh. She'd been putting it off for a few August days now, but there was no avoiding it any longer: it was time to read the IEPs.

Ms. Aya was entering her third year of teaching. The first two had been the usual combination of exhilarating and grueling that comes with a new profession, especially one that involves nine-year-old children. With this experience under her belt, Ms. Aya was feeling more and more competent, controlled, and optimistic, with one exception: those students who were represented by the stack of paperwork on her desk: the students with disabilities.

She'd taken the course. Back when she was just Amalie, a teacher education undergraduate with a dream of a classroom of her own, she'd taken Intro to Exceptional Children (or something like that) with the rest of her graduating class, first semester of her sophomore year. It was the one piece of required special education coursework that her program had required. That was five years ago now - three months of concentrated information, faded in memory. It wasn't enough.

In her first two years she'd been so focused on survival that she hadn't focused that much on the students in special education in her classroom. They had their own special education teacher, after all, who came and took them for instruction somewhere else. And besides, Ms. Aya had often been baffled as to how to teach her students with disabilities. The one who smiled and loved school, but never knew what the class was doing. The one who was told to wait five minutes to use the bathroom, and then threw the Gatorade bottle that barely missed her head. The student who had left the room every time the class read a book, since they could not functionally access print. It went on – students for whom, Amalie Aya's conscience told her, she had not been the best teacher. These students had made it through the grade, but by spending hours of the day in resource rooms had never really been part of the class. Ms. Aya had never known them, understood them, like she had the other students she'd taught these past few years. They had been, in some way that truly bothered her, guests in her classroom rather than members of the community.

The stack was still there. Ms. Aya picked it up and made a silent pledge – she'd read these now, and then start the real work. She would learn how to work with each of these students, and have her whole class succeed. The time was now. She would remember why inclusive education is important and focus on these students in front of her for this coming school year.

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