

2nd Ed.

INCLUSION STRATEGIES & INTERVENTIONS

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Introduction

Inclusion is an evolutionary process, whether it is a teacher's first or last year of his or her career. Just like students, teachers require more than access to the classroom. Attitudes, preparation, and supports matter for preservice and veteran general and special education teachers. There is always more to know and to learn and ways for teachers to accomplish things differently, but effectively.

Inclusion is impacted by prior experiences, professional training, and the supports provided. Teachers' responsive actions are influenced by preconceived thoughts, more or less preparation, knowledge of the subject matter they are assigned to teach, grade-level experiences, and knowledge of how to adapt and align instruction to students' skill sets. Inclusion is implemented successfully with administrative supports, professional development, resources, and ongoing collaboration to develop and refine teachers' and students' behaviors and actions. The goal of an inclusion classroom placement is to respectfully and collaboratively raise learner outcomes.

As I participate in professional development and inclusion coaching across the United States and around the world, I often hear the following comments, questions, and concerns.

- "I won't do inclusion."
- "I don't know how to do inclusion."
- "Who's included?"
- "How can I better train and support my staff?"
- "What is the role of an inclusion coach?"
- "My co-teacher and I need more time to plan."
- "I don't have a co-teacher!"
- "It's not working."
- "Can someone explain what SDI is?"
- "We need more direct skill instruction."
- "What is differentiated instruction?"
- "Are MTSS and RTI the same thing?"
- "What does UDL look like in an algebra, a biology, or a Spanish class?"
- "What do we do about students who get it quicker than those with IEPs?"

Not all staff, students, or families share the same thoughts about inclusion based on their prior experiences, training, preparation, classroom and school dynamics, and support systems. The conceptual framework of inclusion values the meshing of general education and special education with benefits to all learners and professionals (Villa & Thousand, 2016).

Sometimes an *inclusion* classroom is viewed differently than an *inclusive* classroom. It's more than semantics, because the former indicates that the general education classroom is the preferred classroom environment, but not the sole option for placement. An inclusive classroom often has the connotation that rejects all other placements and can be referenced as full inclusion. At times, the words *inclusion* and *inclusive* are used interchangeably, but the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) recognizes a continuum of services, with the regular education classroom viewed as the least restrictive environment on the continuum (Ratcliff, 2009).

I never like to use the legislative term *regular education classroom*; I prefer to say *general education classroom*, because if there is a *regular* classroom, one might place a negative connotation on any other placement as being *irregular*. Either way, inclusion is at its best when it transforms challenges into solutions (Jung, Frey, Fisher, & Kroener, 2019). However, unlike combining the elements on the periodic table, inclusion has no set formula because each learner is unique, whether he or she shares the same difference or disability label (Karten, 2017a). *Inclusion* considers each student's diverse characteristics for planning responsive and appropriate interventions, services, and classroom placements.

Inclusion has been a unifying concept for special and general education, with students benefiting from the supports when teachers adapt and gain new strategies to reach a broader range of learning profiles (Ford, 2013; Jung et al., 2019; Karten, 2017c). For example, when special education practices enter the classroom, general education teachers can see the benefits of differentiated instruction (DI). When general and special education teachers collaborate, they view all learners as worthy of achieving solid educational foundations in the inclusion environment.

General and special educators have collaborative eyes, hands, and minds on how to provide responsive instructional methods, materials, interventions, and supports. General and special educators working together use screening, progress monitoring, and assessments to plan for and support advancements. If schools place students with disabilities in general education classes without the appropriate structure and learner-specific adaptations, then teachers cannot support their individualized learning goals. An inclusion setting with specific, individualized organization; adapted curriculum; and differentiated teaching and learning strategies with embedded supports provides not only access to learners but also a path to their achievement. For example, a student in fifth grade who is reading two grade levels lower than his or her peers cannot independently read and solve mathematics word problems if the teacher doesn't read the problems aloud or if the student can't access text-speech digital tools. If a high school student with autism has difficulties transitioning from one class to the next, he or she may require a peer mentor,

modeling, increased time, a social script, or a visual schedule. In addition, students who are academically advanced also need differentiated instruction and appropriately leveled, multitiered supports to honor their academic needs and skill sets. Therefore, the teaching and learning in inclusion classrooms is intentional and explicit for students of *all* skill sets.

Inclusion interventions honor the belief that *all* students are capable of meeting high expectations when teachers offer them the appropriate and individualized supports to achieve their highest potential. Neuroscience supports multiple types of engagements, representation, and actions and expressions for learners (CAST, 2018). Inclusion interventions, therefore, must connect instruction to each student's unique needs. This often requires the teacher to use differentiated instruction to provide diverse ways to deliver the content, instruct, and assess. The teacher does not offer identical instruction to the whole class; instead, he or she attends to the learning needs of small groups and individual learners (Tomlinson, 2014). *Differentiated instruction* uses each learner's prior knowledge, interests, strengths, and abilities to help the teacher determine how to prepare an inclusion classroom for student success.

This book focuses on helping educators maximize learning for an array of student differences in their inclusion classrooms. Interventions are meaningless unless teachers connect them to the individual profiles of unique students. Education is never exclusively about the subjects that educators teach; it is also about who is in the classroom. Each individual classroom, with its own diverse and unique student population, defines the lesson delivery, depth of concepts, intervention strategies, and types of collaborative structures, pacing, and curricular decisions teachers must make. Savvy inclusion educators always remember that inclusion classrooms consist of individual learners.

In This Second Edition

When the first edition of this book was published in 2011, inclusion was not as prevalent. Thankfully, diverse learner levels are now the norm in general education classrooms. This edition emphasizes how educators can collaboratively increase student engagement and performance in inclusion environments, minus the stigmatization. The strategies and interventions in this second edition include how teachers can implement *pecially designed instruction* (SDI) in their inclusion classrooms without diluting the instruction for learners with and without exceptionalities, nor frustrating or inundating the general or special educators, students, and families.

The ultimate objective is to view inclusion as a collaborative way to better leverage and ultimately achieve higher learner outcomes in school and beyond. This second edition highlights best professional practices, while still honoring the curriculum demands that correspond to learners with and without exceptionalities. This includes partnerships between general and special educators; academic and behavioral supports and interventions; defined roles and responsibilities; and the division of tasks for co-teachers,

Understanding the Inclusion Classroom

“I hate when the teacher talks so fast. He makes us read these stupid stories and write so much stuff. My hand and head start to hurt. Sometimes I don’t pay attention. Being in a regular class though is better than when I was in that shorter line in the class way down the hallway. When we went to lunch and specials, I felt different and not in a good way. My class then only had twelve kids in it with a teacher and another person who helped out. The other classes with the ‘regular kids’ were better. I just knew that everyone was looking at me and thinking, ‘Boy, is he stupid or what?’ Now, because I did OK in that other class, I am back in the bigger classroom with kids who ride the bus with me and live in my neighborhood. I get extra reading and mathematics help three days a week, but I’m not the only one! Before this, I always had lots of reasons not to go to school. Now, I have more friends. School isn’t so bad—most of the time, anyway.”

It is tough for some students to fit in when others view them as “different.” This affects their self-esteem, which in turn influences their academic performance and social interactions. Special education classes that divide students and flag them as “different” still exist, but inclusion classrooms that offer increased academic and behavioral supports are rapidly replacing them. Differences are becoming the norm in heterogeneous inclusion classrooms that value teachers who differentiate instruction to teach learners of diverse levels as all students learn side by side.

The federal government has enacted laws that outline how individuals with disabilities are educated and included in society. Inclusion classrooms are impacted by these laws. Debates continue on how these laws have “leveled the playing field” for the unique needs of students with disabilities in schools and in the work place, and if additional legislation is required (Black, 2017; UCPLA, 2019). It’s important to understand what the laws state to be certain that inclusion practices are correctly implemented with fidelity to not only provide access but also advancements.

Inclusion by Law

The Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (2004b) is influential in inclusion programs. IDEA (2004b) stems from the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (PL 94–142) of 1975, which allows students with disabilities access to the general education curriculum in their least restrictive environment. The act identifies specially designed instruction in a student’s individualized education program to ensure teachers adapt, customize, and individualize the content, methodology, and delivery for each learner’s unique needs (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Exceptional Children Division, 2018). An IEP outlines:

1. Present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP)
2. Annual goals and progress targeted
3. The general education classroom as the first option of placement and as the least restrictive environment if it appropriately meets students’ needs; reasoning if the general education classroom is determined not to be an appropriate placement
4. Related supports (for example, transportation; speech, occupational, and physical therapies; mobility training)
5. Accommodations or modifications with specially designed instructional plans
6. Short-term benchmarks that are required only for children with disabilities who take alternate assessments aligned to alternate achievement standards (Karten, 2019a)

The National Professional Resources website offers a collaborative IEP planner (www.nprinc.com/content/IEP-Collaborative-Planner.pdf), and the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education offers a sample IEP teachers can use (https://sites.ed.gov/idea/files/modelform1_IEP.pdf). *Specially designed instruction* has the general education academic and functional supports to ensure each student is meaningfully and appropriately included, setting him or her on a path to achieve successful outcomes. Specially designed instruction includes, but is not limited to, modeling, environmental adaptations, multisensory teaching strategies, literacy and mathematics adaptations, different delivery and complexity, assistive technology, step-by-step directions, visual cueing, teaching and monitoring social-emotional skills, and other individualized IEP adaptations.

If it is determined that a student meets eligibility requirements, a team of school staff and a student’s family develop an IEP. The IEP has measurable annual goals written for each student’s unique needs. It includes the provision of supplementary aids and services and the reasonable accommodations required. The IEP states the student’s involvement and participation in the general education curriculum, extracurricular activities, and nonacademic activities (Center for Parent Information and Resources, 2017b).

In the United States, the general education or “regular” classroom is the first placement option unless it is determined that the nature or severity of a student’s disability is such