The Benefits and Challenges of Inclusion

A number of different terms have been used in the description of the practice of including students with disabilities in general education classrooms. Although none of these terms actually appear in the federal law, all have been used to express varying beliefs about what the law means-or should mean. Inclusion, mainstreaming, full inclusion, and reintegration are but a few of the terms that educators use interchangeably to describe the practice of including students with disabilities in the general education classroom. According to Rogers (1993), inclusion is defined as "the commitment to educate each child, to the maximum extent appropriate, in the school and classroom he or she would otherwise attend." It involves bringing the services, supports and supplemental aids needed to the child with disabilities, instead of moving the child to the services.

It is important to consider: the benefits and challenges of inclusion for each of the parties involved; and to reflect upon questions asked repeatedly by teachers and administrators.

Clearly there are both benefits and challenges to inclusion for both students and teachers. Students with disabilities have opportunity for:

- Forming a wider circle of friends;
- Finding they can master activities they may not have tried in special education classes;
- Taking new risks;
- Realizing that teasing happens to everyone;
- Serving as a role model;
- Experiencing academic challenges;
- Enjoying the satisfaction of achievement;
- Learning to rely more on peers than teachers; and,
- Experiencing full citizenship in school and the community.

Students without disabilities have opportunity for:

- Appreciating the similarities and differences among all people;
- Learning to move beyond their stereotypes of people with disabilities;
- Increasing their level of comfort around people with disabilities;
- Serving as role models;
- Working on sense of their own shortcomings; and,
- Developing a better understanding of citizenship of all people.

Students are challenged to:

- Overcome feelings of loneliness, insecurity, defensiveness and inadequacy;
- Avoid using shortcomings as excuses for not doing well;
- Make adjustments to accommodate differences;
- Find new ways to feel good about themselves; and,
- Reach out to new friends.

Teachers have the opportunity for:

- Feeling successful in meeting new challenges as a teacher;
- Setting an example for nondiscrimination and acceptance of people's differences;
- Using creativity in their teaching;
- Working closely with parents to understand students' strength and needs;
- Cooperating with a wider circle of teachers and specialists;
- Building cooperative relationships with students;
- Eliminating preconceived ideas about special education students;
- Learning about new resources which benefit all students;
- Adopting fresh approaches to teaching;
- Individualizing instruction for all students;
- Adapting to the different learning styles of students; and,

- Making significant change in the life of a student with disabilities as well as others in the class.

Teachers will be faced with:

- Learning to ask for help from a variety of people;
- Team teaching with consulting special education teachers;
- Attending more meetings;
- Spending more time working with parents;
- Needing to find more time to prepare for teaching;
- Using new equipment and materials;
- Accounting to greater number of people;
- Learning new ways of teaching; and,
- Dealing with fears of lack of experience, of lowering standards for all to accommodate a few, of challenging behaviors, of failure with a student, or not knowing what to do in a particular situation.

McLeskey and Waldron (1996), posed a number of questions teachers and administrators frequently ask about inclusion. The following are some selected questions and answers from their work.

- ***Should the goal of our program be "full inclusion"?***
  It is recommended that normalization be the guiding theme for developing inclusive school programs. Normalization refers to the notion that students with disabilities be given the opportunity to live their lives in a manner that is as typical or normal as possible. We have long been aware that "one size does not fit all". With this in mind careful analysis of the presenting data will guide us in selecting the most appropriate placements for all students.

- ***Who should be included and who should not?***
  Students who benefit academically and socially from the education they receive in general education classrooms should be included in those settings. The general education classroom can meet the needs of the vast majority of students with disabilities. Again, it is important to consider the benefits and challenges that each student presents and decisions must be individualized rather than students being categorically denied access.

- ***What are elements of a good inclusion program?***
  Four criteria have been used to judge inclusive programs. First, students with disabilities make at least as much academic and social progress as they would in a separate classroom. Second, nondisabled students progress at a rate that is consistent with their peers. Third, teachers receive the support they need to provide effective instruction for all students. Finally, the program reflects the concept of normalization to the maximum extent appropriate.

  These are but a few of the questions typically asked by teachers and administrators. Certainly there are many others and much the same as each child has their own specific needs, so to does each program. We are reminded by other authors, Villa & Thousands (1995); Villa, Thousands, Stainback, & Stainback (1992), that inclusion is not a placement but rather a philosophic perspective that all children belong and should be educated together in their community schools. As each school addresses the challenges of meeting the unique needs of all children the truest measures of are the outcomes experienced by the participants.

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Focus on Early Childhood

Perspectives on Strategies for Successful Inclusive Settings

There are many structures that may contribute to successful inclusion. These structures will vary according to the needs of the individual students in an inclusive setting and the character of the general environment. In early childhood education, attention has recently focused on the importance of several components found within successful programs. For example, a consistent system of family involvement must be developed and implemented. This reflects the understanding that families are the steadfast and key forces in the child's life. Another necessary structure for effective service delivery is a scheme for team planning with systematically shared roles. Additionally, team planned, individualized education programs (IFSPs/IEPs) including functional goals that can be reached within the natural learning setting and embedded in activity-based routines are vital structures in the inclusive setting. Children's interests, preferences, and initiations should dominate in the delivery of ECSE education and related services. As well, the most effective inclusive settings have ongoing, well-developed training and staff development programs and a comprehensive system for program evaluation.

The roles of families in inclusive learning communities have been undergoing an evolution. Family members are important members of their child's education team and can develop meaningful relationships with professionals through regular meetings and shared responsibilities. The structure of a successful inclusive environment allows families to set and pursue their objectives and agendas for their child's education rather than the system exclusively setting the program for them. The professional's role is becoming more of a support to families, helping to develop the necessary skills for and providing information to assist in decision-making. The family can be given a lead in the system, resulting in more self-improvement, self-determination, self-creation, advocacy, and systemic improvement. One means of achieving this is to assist families in developing a long-range future plan. This might include the family, the child with disabilities (as much as possible), and friends of the family. The process involves defining what the family's life could be like in the future. This circle of support addresses the individual's future based on his or her strengths, gifts, and capacities in a projection of how their dreams can be sought. The professionals involved assist in shaping steps (correspondent short-range objectives) to achieve the long range goals or dreams.

Team member's role release is important in the effective inclusive setting. A inclusive setting's instructional team is "an organizational and instructional arrangement of two or more members of the school and greater community who distribute among themselves planning, instructional, and evaluation responsibilities for the same students on a regular basis for an extended period of time" (Thousand & Villa, 1990). The roles of instruction team members must be clearly delineated as to responsibilities and accountability. This must incorporate positive support, a sense of interrelatedness, much like that of a purposefully planned family structure. Bauer and Shea (1999) state that "teams wrap around the student, with individual team members providing each other with the support needed for success throughout the school day. Teachers working with the support of other team members generally demonstrate strong self-efficacy; they know that they can make a difference in the child's life."

The inclusive program requires IEPs that consider the child's future settings. What skills will be necessary for this child to be able to function to their full learning potential? All children in the inclusive setting will be striving to achieve certain key 'survival' skills. Student's requiring extra support need to achieve these same objectives, perhaps with accommodations. The IEP serves as an instructional guide, developed by the whole team, outlining and suggesting the means of achieving the objectives through prescribed instructional methods. One important component of IEP planning should include a transition plan, portraying these objectives and beginning construction of this transition plan with ample time to reach the necessary steps. This will guide the team to help the child toward a smoother move to a new program, equipped with the skills needed for ongoing learning.

The education plan in ECSE is most effective in equipping the child to learn if it incorporates the child's interests, preferences, and initiations. The instructional team provides individuals the means of exploring within their natural environments, expressing interests and receiving acknowledgement regarding those interests, and additional

opportunities to seek further information about those interests. The child learns from this approach that she or he can make choices, take risks, assume responsibility, and build a foundation for self-advocacy. These skills provide the child with self-determination rather than allow learned-helplessness to grow. The team, family, and student must deliberately seek to implant the student's interests in the instructional format. In the   ECSE classroom, this may be achieved with extensive periods of child-directed activities accompanied with appropriate instructional support.

Inclusive settings require family involvement, team role release, well-built individualized plans, and active learning environments. It is critical to maintain a systematic means of evaluating and determining necessary adjustments and additional structures, as a team. A well-developed staff development program addresses the dynamic needs of the team members and the student population and updates the instruction process regularly in order to provide the program with the tools necessary to continue to promote individual achievement.

<u>References</u> (* available at T-TAC ODU):

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Assistive Technology

Using Technology in Inclusive Setting

The road to successful inclusion has admittedly been a challenging one for teachers, students and parents alike. Those who have successfully negotiated their way agree that it requires strategic planning, ongoing school restructuring, administrative support, and cooperation and sharing between parents and professionals. Literature reveals that assistive technology has facilitated this process and enabled many students with special needs to achieve skills that were not anticipated in a special education setting. Teachers and therapists who have experienced success with incorporating the use of technology in an inclusive classroom agree that the first critical step to successful integration is creating a vision of how technology can be used to increase the quality of the educational experience. Once a vision has been created, tasks can be broken down into incremental steps that will allow children to actively participate in classroom activities at various levels regardless of the technological resources available.

In creating a vision for using technology as a support in an inclusive environment, here are several questions to think about:

* How would your students be engaged in learning opportunities if you had appropriate technology to support their participation in classroom activities?
* What types of technological tools and accommodations are necessary for optimum participation?
* Who would be needed to support these learning opportunities?
* How can you identify the broad categories of equipment, software, and peripheral devices available that will be most appropriate for the student's learning need?
* How will hands-on training be provided to teach use of the equipment and software.

Inclusion options for children with cognitive and physical disabilities are virtually unlimited in a classroom that allows students to learn and demonstrate their skill acquisition through the use of technology. Lewis (1993) describes the ABC model of what technology can do for learners with special needs:

Augment abilities
 Students without speech, for example, can express their thoughts using a speech synthesizer; students with low vision can use magnification devices to have access to print.

Bypass disabilities
 Students can use switches or voices commands to bypass the lack of motor control over hands and arms. Using e-mail can facilitate communication for students who have difficulty with transportation.

Compensate for disabilities
 Students can use talking work processors to have their written work read aloud, or spelling and grammar checkers to assist with composition. Students who have difficulty organizing their ideas can benefit from using mind-mapping or outlining programs.

The following is a list of sample activities that teachers have used to provided access to literacy instruction in inclusive settings:

- In sequencing and retelling a story, or asking/answering questions, students can sequence/respond by touching the picture/message of the requested event. This skill can be demonstrated using a cheap talk, picture board, IntelliKeys, or similar types of aug com device. In some classes, the computer is linked to a large TV monitor, so all of the students in the class see and hear the words when a child is using   IntelliKeys or other peripheral devices.
- On field days, a class can take pictures of the event using a digital camera. When they go back to school, they can view the pictures on the large monitor and select the pictures they want to include in an electronic book. For early literacy development, predictable text can be used such as, "We saw a pumpkin." An   IntelliKeys overlay can be created so that the class book can be read and re-read.
- Off- the- shelf software, such as the Living Books series, can be accessed by switch use, or   IntelliKeys, enabling a student to read along in class or build his vocabulary skills as he "plays" the games inside the pages of the book. Extension objectives can include receptive vocabulary development, following directions, giving directions, answering questions, sequencing, and picture discrimination.
- The common thread running through most successful inclusion programs has been a shared sense of personal commitment and a willingness to share knowledge, ideas, and activities. This commitment has allowed children with special needs the opportunity to improve their academic performance and classroom behavior. Technology can provide the vehicle for learning to occur, but it takes a committed team to turn this vision into a reality.

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Focus on Severe Disabilities

Including Students with Severe Disabilities:
Ensuring Student Participation by Scheduling, Planning, and Supporting

Some of the most difficult tasks in including students with severe disabilities are instructional planning, lesson planning and modifying instructional activities to meet the individual needs of the included student. The balance between planning and teaching two forms of instruction to meet multiple objectives can be time consuming. The teacher does not have to consistently plan two consecutive lessons, rather an educator can learn to become creative in adapting the current lesson to meet the included student's goals and objectives.

One step in planning for instruction for a student with severe disabilities is to complete an instructional matrix. An instructional matrix is a list of a student's   IEP objectives, a list of the activities in the daily general education classroom and the approximate time devoted to the activity (see below). This matrix assists the educational team in identifying times throughout the day a child can practice and learn skills during the general classroom schedule. This matrix can help the team develop accommodations and supports in order to participate to the maximum extent possible. While completing the matrix it is important to think in terms of what is currently possible as a team and what   *could* be possible with accommodations and supports. The schedule matrix should be filled out as a team for the maximum benefit of knowledge and skills of the many people who know the child.

Lesson planning for an inclusive classroom can also be challenging to a teacher. A teacher can create opportunities and supports within the existing curriculum to teach and practice skills that may or may not be within the same curriculum area (Giangreco & Putnam, 1991). For example; if the teacher is teaching a lesson on transportation he/she can require the student to use a communication device to communicate important information such as a bus number and the driver's name.

Providing supports or adaptations to ensure participation usually means changing something in the student's environment, instruction, or materials to ensure success of a task (Westling & Fox, 1995). For example, a student may lack the physical capability to walk across the classroom to ask his best friend for help. Initially, a teacher may feel this is impossible. But, with supports, the child would be able to use a walker to move across the room and sign to his friend "help." Determining appropriate supports are decisions made by a multidisciplinary team and includes the parents. Because students with severe disabilities typically have multiple disabilities, supports are required for many daily tasks. Special education teachers and therapists with experience serving students with disabilities have experience developing these supports for students. The general education teacher should collaborate with these professionals to ensure a successful inclusive experience for the student and staff. Supports and adaptations should become part of the classroom routine. For example, children requiring positioning should be placed into the equipment during a time that could assist in participation of a task. Positioning should not be an activity in itself. Related services personnel should integrate therapy sessions into the natural routine of the classroom day and avoid pull out of the child.

Finally, inclusion of students with severe disabilities is most successful when the classroom instruction is activity based and interactive. Despite preconceived notions of the benefits of mass trials in self-contained instruction, students with severe disabilities can learn in included environments that provide distributed trial training (Mulligan, Guess, Volvoet, & Brown, 1980). While self-contained settings have benefits, inclusive settings provide increased opportunities in stimulation, social interaction and communicative interaction that may never be possible in a self-contained classroom (Downing, 1996).

Schedule Matrix										
Activity	Opening	Bathroom	Journals	Lang. Arts	P.E.	Lunch	computer	Math	Health/Science Social Studies	Closing
Approx. Time minutes	15	45	30	45	45	45	45	45	45	15
Make Choices Given option	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Responds to yes/no question	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Offers Assistance to Others	X				X	X	X			X
Engages in Leisure Activity				X				X	X	X
Travels Safely in school	X	X			X	X	X			X
Communicates information Using augmentative device	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

☐ = IEP Objectives	Schedule Matrix adapted from Choosing Outcomes and Accommodations for Children (COACH),Giangreco, Cloninger& Iverson

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TAC IT UP

Correlations Between PreK Curriculum & the Virginia SOLs
THEME: Toys

Related Science SOL:	K.1, K.2, K.4, K.5, K.9, 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 2.1, 2.3
Selected Activities:	_Homemade play "goop":_

Have children measure and mix two parts cornstarch with one part water at the sensory table. Combine mixture with blue and yellow food coloring to make green. Allow children to add too much water or more cornstarch to explore what happens. When children squeeze and handle the different textures (water, cornstarch, and combinations) have them describe the changes that occur under different circumstances. Have them keep a journal with their writing, dictation, and/or photos or drawings about the experience of playing with this material. List other homemade toys they may have. Record measurements of ingredients that work best. Send the recipe home.
Source: _Complete Early Childhood Curriculum Resource, by Mary A. Sobut and Bonnie Neuman Bogen_

Related English SOL:	K.1, K.2, K.3, K.4, K.5, K.6, K.7, K.8, K.8, 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 1.8, 1.10, 1.11, 1.12, 1.13
Selected Activities:	_Toy Stories_

Have children dictate (or write themselves), and draw pictures about their favorite toy. Post the work. Pass out a different toy to each child. Have children list different qualities of the toy. Make words into cards with both a symbol and a word (red circle/ "red", soft cloth/ "soft", etc.) from the qualities. Have children match qualities of different toys (those posted and those handed out), copying words on cards, sorting alphabetically. Extension: make up riddles for a variety of toys in the classroom environment. Let students guess what toy was described. Let them find the toy in the classroom after they have guessed it. Send home a toy (Teddy bears work well) and have parents help child keep a diary about the toy.

Related Math SOL:	K.13, K.19,1.17, 1.20, 2.19
Suggested Activities:	_Shape It_

Give children various sizes of attribute blocks and flannel pieces cut into three shapes: circles, triangles, and squares. The children can use the shapes to copy and make pictures of their favorite toys.

Related History and Social Sciences SOL:	K.5, K.7,1.10, 2.7
Suggested Activiites:	_Share A Toy Day_

Have each child bring his/her favorite toy to school in a bag or box. Children can give clues about the toy with or without prompting, while the other children attempt to guess the toy. The children can then share toys and enjoy each other's favorite toy. Take this opportunity to role-play some situations about sharing, cooperation, and turn-taking and encourage children to talk about what they saw.

Para Graphs
(for paraprofessionals serving students with disabilities)

Common Barriers/Common Solutions

Including students with disabilities can be a challenge for paraeducators who have little experience and training with students with disabilities. Often, teachers find it difficult and confusing when attempting to encourage participation of students. Providing an environment that is conducive to learning can be easier if you know what difficulties you may encounter and strategies to accommodate the student and his/her needs.

Sensory Difficulties: Many students with disabilities have difficulty taking in and reacting to sensory information. This problem can cause difficulties in the area of behavior, motivation, and awareness. Some children will be over stimulated and begin to react by hand flapping, biting themselves or other behaviors. A possible solution to this problem is to, look for the initial cause of the over stimulation and remove it. If this is not possible, the team could brain storm ways to adapt or accommodate. For example, Jon was having difficulty walking through the halls at school because the noise from all the classrooms was bothersome. It was not an option to avoid walking through the halls. Instead, the team gave Jon a set of headphones with a tape and played the tape while he walked through the halls. The tape played a series of auditory cues that help him transition through the halls ("I walk through the hall and keep my hands and feet to myself"). Some children have difficulty staying awake during large portions of the school day. As stated earlier, the team should determine the possible source of the problem. A team should consider many possible causes and understand that there are typically multiple causes. Some of the possible causes could be medications, nutrition (too much or too little), or environmental variables (too noisy, too cold/hot, too many people). Because the sleep patterns may be beyond your control, consider scheduling activities around the child's sleep pattern, or find positions that encourage the child to stay awake and alert.

Positioning and placement: Positioning of a student is a form of support for students with severe disabilities. Positioning should be done during the normal course of the classroom day to support a child's participation into an activity. The occupational therapist and physical therapist should work with the staff to help determine appropriate positions, equipment and appropriate forms of lifting. The staff should encourage the therapists to visit the classroom frequently to ensure proper positioning and safety. Another issue teachers face is where students should sit. Often, paraeducators and the included student sit in the back or in a separate portion of the classroom. This arrangement may be easy due to scheduling or environmental concerns but it does not assist the teacher in fully including the student. Find a sitting arrangement that facilitates socialization and participation into the classroom community and activities.

Communication: In order to prevent possible behavior problems, the educational team should ensure that the child has a form of communication. A child can have many forms of communication based on the environment, needs and the abilities of the child. Some children will have an elaborate communication system while others will communicate using simple forms. Frequently, a student with significant disabilities will communicate by way of simple vocalizations, gestures and body language. When a child uses these forms of communication, it is very important that the staff identifies these communication attempts, inform other staff members and fellow students and reciprocate with the child as much as possible It is also important to have a systematic form of communicating to the child. Using key words or touch cues to communicate is vital to provide meaning to an activity. For example, Sara is a student who has significant physical challenges. She is included in a third grade classroom and has little verbal communication skills. However, according to Sarah's father, she indicates that she wants to do something by her eye gaze, displeasure is indicated by squirming or a moaning sound, happiness is indicated by squeals and smiles. A description of Sarah's communication attempts as well as how others communicate to her were placed on the tray of her wheel chair and on all positioning equipment.

Currently, many paraeducators are working in inclusive settings as a member of an educational team. Paraeducators are an important part of the educational process in an inclusive setting. Many paraeducators are the team member designated to implement and support portions of the child's instruction. Therefor, it is vital for paraeducators to be knowledgeable in finding ways to accommodate and support the student to ensure skill acquisition. Also, the paraeducator should look at her/his role as a facilitator. This may mean interpreting communication between students.

If you would like additional information in including students with disabilities, please call our office for additional resources.