

Effective Teaching Practices for Students in Inclusive Classrooms

We define an inclusive classroom as a place where all students learn together under the guidance of a teacher who believes in equity among all students. We know that Inclusive Education for all works. We have worked with many school systems where all students with disabilities are educated in inclusive classes.

Land (2004) reminds us that:

School teams spend precious time creating the foundations of inclusive programs for students with disabilities. However, even with well-planned inclusive services, general education teachers and co-teaching teams often struggle with how to effectively teach students with disabilities in general education classrooms.

This does not mean that classroom teachers cannot be successful in teaching inclusively. Experience with inclusion has led to productive ways in which teachers and students can align their teaching with the need to work with all students in a class to involve them in the daily process of inclusion. How can teachers lead all students to involvement in the learning process? The process begins with teachers setting a positive class tone encompassing all students.

What Works for Teachers in Setting a Positive Class Tone?

A positive class tone set by the teacher is a basic requirement for success in teaching inclusively. All students must be comfortable with what is happening in their class. All students must accept all other students. All share in learning. The teacher must ensure that no

students believe they are better than others just because some students may be different in some way. Teachers must ensure that no student thinks that another student is an object of charity.

Here are some ways for teachers to set a positive class tone for everyone. Charity from one group to another group must not be part of a classroom ethic. The teacher must model acceptance of all and that all can contribute to the class.

- Be friendly. Recognize all your students as people with outside lives and interests.
- Discuss with your class the ideas of equality and equity among students. Equality suggests that all students are treated in the same way and that the teacher has the same expectations for all students. Equity suggests that teachers treat all students fairly according to their abilities.
- Let your students know you enjoy your work and enjoy being with everyone in the class.
- Model cooperation in working together with others by interacting evenly with all students.
- Understand that being in a regular class can be scary for students who have been educated separately from other students under the segregation-based Special Education Model.
- Underline for all your students, parents, and others that all levels of learning have value and that all learning is challenging depending on individual abilities and needs.
- Work with your class on the concept that working with diverse others is a valuable social skill that will help everyone throughout life.

- Discuss the ideas of individual differences and learning styles.
- Ask your students how they learn best. You have ways you prefer to learn. So do your students. Do not expect your students to be able to learn your way. You, as teacher, must allow for this in your teaching.

Support Networking Among Teachers

The teacher is one of many with the desire to be fair to all of her/his students. Too often school Principals forget to encourage teachers to support each other, to share their ideas and their worries. We have learned that strong leadership at all levels of education is a valuable support. Here are a few ideas on how teachers can network.

- Support networking is based on the premise that everyone has the capabilities, strength, gifts and talents which will support them in teaching all students, including those who are labeled as having disabilities. Colleagues can be called on to provide support and assistance to their fellow teachers. Just discussing problems and solutions with them can work wonders.
- Support networking where all people are involved in helping and supporting one another in both formal and informal support arrangements. Relationships are reciprocal, rather than some people always being helpers for others and these others always being helped.
- Natural supportive relationships in which individuals support one another as peers, friends and colleagues are as important in providing professional support as are outside “experts’ called in to help solve problems. A focus on natural supports helps connect

people together in classrooms and school communities, and, therefore, foster successful communities.

Questions to Ask Yourself While Teaching

- What are the most important points in a lesson for all students? Which are minor points which add to a lesson, but are not necessarily needed for all students? Some points are central. Others are elaborations around the main points and are not necessarily learned by all.
- How do my students learn best? Does the student have an individual learning style? Learning styles are one of the first things teachers learn when entering teacher preparation programs. Most students can learn from your usual style of presenting, but at times, some teachers need to make adjustments to meet the student's style of learning.
- Teachers are always making adjustments to meet learning styles. Consider the student who depends on visual information, or needs more auditory teaching, or on repetition, or teaming on some task with another student. The above are suggestions for you to question yourself about how to support learning. A teacher must go toward the students as much as students need to go toward the teacher's manner of instruction.
- Parents can be wonderful supports in this. In various ways parents know more about how their children learn than does anyone else. The parents are there morning, noon and night interacting with their children in many ways. They see their children in different light than does a teacher. Talk to the parents.

There is another question you must ask yourself. It is the most important question of all when teaching all children in your inclusive class.

Is the curriculum the master in your classroom, or is the master how you and your students respond to and manipulate the curriculum to promote learning for everyone?

ONLY YOU CAN ANSWER THIS QUESTION

Land, S. (2004). *Effective Teaching Practices for Students in Inclusive Classrooms*. William and Mary University, Virginia, U. S.

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