

CORNELL

Policy and Practice Brief:

Establishing a New Standard for Inclusion in the Classroom

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adapted in part from
Setting the Standard for Inclusion in the Classroom
(Blessing,2003)

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Inclusion Programs, Special Ed and the Collateral Damage of Good Intentions

- *"Vicki is in special education"*
- *"There are 20 students in this year's Inclusion class"*
- *"She has received her certification as a special education teacher"*

The term *special education* originally was used to describe a specific set of services and supports a student might receive so that they might join to participate and contribute in the classroom activities embedded within the curriculum of general education. Somewhere along the line the term has evolved to that of a description of some place students with unique approaches to learning spend their time or some program that takes place outside the general learning community of a particular class or grade level. Rather than being a process or a means to an end, (a way in which to insure that all students have maximum opportunity learn and grow with and from one another in school), special education has become an end in and of itself, an outcome.

The authors believe that the principle of the least restrictive environment (LRE) contributes significantly to the perpetuation of special education being thought of as an entity versus as a process.

The concept of a least restricted environment gives credence to segregated, self-contained class rooms and serves as the basis for justifying the need for a continuum of services that require students with disabilities to achieve mastery in skill areas before they will be considered "appropriate" for inclusion into the general education classrooms, (Kunc, 1992).

In its day, the principle of the least restricted environment seemed a progressive approach to creating alternatives to individuals with disabilities. At its heart, the LRE principle was intended to facilitate the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general classroom. Unfortunately, it has had the reverse effect and creates a vehicle for holding students away from the mainstream of the academic and social life of school for students who are classified with disability labels. The principle of the LRE carries the built-in assumption that there are circumstances under which a segregated environment is appropriate, thereby perpetuating a belief system that there are certain conditions that create the criteria for placing people in restrictive or segregated environments.

Creating the Conditions for Inclusion

Inclusion of a student who has challenges to learning in a general education classroom may mean that the student receives his or her special education program of instruction at the same time his or her non-disabled peers are learning about or working on something else. Often this brand of special education also carries with it the presence of a special education teaching assistant or aide.

Presence in classrooms is not enough. It is not about receiving instruction in the regular classroom. It is about membership in the student body of a classroom. It's about opportunities to make a friend and to be a friend to others and to share in the learning process, (Bunch, 1999)

Placement in a general education classroom is only a portion of the equation leading to inclusion. Real inclusion focuses on celebrating diversity and dealing with difference. Anything less leads to exclusion. Research has shown that inclusion is academically and socially stronger for all students than are other educational responses to disability, (Bunch & Valeo, 1997).

Making All Education Special!

Diversity when celebrated and embedded within the classroom curriculum across all subject areas creates the ideal environment in which inclusive classrooms thrive. The elements of inclusive classroom communities include: *peer tutoring, focus areas of interest, complementary group composition, meaningful content, and a focus on student abilities and talents.* Good teaching methods incorporate all of these elements into the exchange of information and experiential learning to maximize the opportunity for student success while simultaneously weaving the content of the lesson into the fabric of the academic learning standard(s) the lesson reinforces.

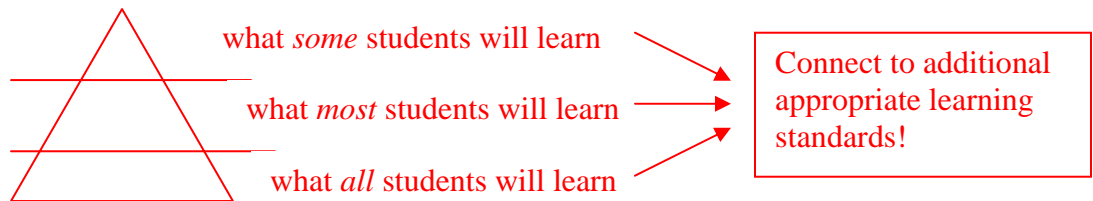
Schumm, Vaughn and Leavell, (1994) provide a framework to facilitate the development of lesson planning that identifies the materials/resources; instructional strategies/adaptations; and evaluation/product needed for each level of student within an academic/project assignment. To be a fully effective planning tool it is important that the teacher knows and understands the specific strengths, interests and needs of all of the students who are to be engaged in the lesson. This allows the teacher to set different goals and objectives for each student while allowing all of the students to participate in the same academic activity, (Wehmeyer, 2002). What follows is an example of the planning framework as it relates to one topic within the broad subject area called "biology," assuming the instructor is applying differentiated instruction methods for all of the students in the classroom.

An instructor must be able to answer the following questions in order to complete the framework for planning:

- ✓ What is the essential knowledge to be gained?
- ✓ How do my students learn best?
- ✓ What modifications to a lesson would permit more students to learn effectively in my classroom?
- ✓ How will my students show how they have learned?

Subject:	Biology
Project:	Create an Argument For/Against Science and Ethics of Prenatal Testing for Determining Medical Conditions
Academic Learning Standard:	Mathematics, Science and Technology
Standard Detail:	Students will understand and apply scientific concepts, principles and theories pertaining to the physical setting and living environment and recognize the historical development of ideas in science.
Performance Indicator:	Present an argument and related evidence supporting one of the positions in the statement using historical and current data to sustain the position.

Differentiated Instruction





It Takes A Village...

The inclusive classroom has a committed to upholding a distinct set of core values and principles concerning the learning community. It accepts all of its members as equal participants within their abilities, talents and needs. It is a classroom that presumes competence in all and believes that each and every student is capable of learning, (Bunch, 1999).

For the educational professional this means that the classroom must create a community that shifts from thinking about the least restricted environment, (as in "should" a particular student participate), to thinking about how to

- ❖ Celebrate Diversity
- ❖ Develop A Sense of Belonging
- ❖ Teach to/Learn from Difference
- ❖ Keep Everyone Informed
- ❖ Engage Students in Joint Decision-Making
- ❖ Cultivate Shared and Personal Responsibility

In an environment in which all students are welcome to participate.

This can occur if educators are willing and have the support to

- ❖ Spread Diversity Awareness Across All Curricula
- ❖ Set the Expectation That Everyone Belongs
- ❖ Cultivate Roles of Citizenship (i.e. service learning projects)
- ❖ Presume Competence of All Students- Teach to the Strengths
- ❖ Allow All Teachers to Become "Special" Educators
- ❖ Use "Multiple Intelligence" as the Basis for Teaching Methodologies
- ❖ Think About Learning Standards in Broad Terms
- ❖ Develop Partnerships in Cooperative Learning Ventures
- ❖ Use Existing Resources Flexibly

Remember that the development of curriculum and learning standards were never intended to preside over the learning process. They were invented to facilitate the leaning process.



Resources & Reference

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