

Inclusive Education

By Leslie Soodak, Ph.D.

Pace University

and Elizabeth Erwin, Ed.D.

City University of New York - Queens College

Inclusive education happens when children with and without disabilities participate and learn together in the same classes. Research shows that when a child with disabilities attends classes alongside peers who do not have disabilities, good things happen.



For a long time, children with disabilities were educated in separate classes or in separate schools. People got used to the idea that special education meant separate education. But we now know that when children are educated together, positive academic and social outcomes occur for all the children involved.

We also know that simply placing children with and without disabilities together does not produce positive outcomes. Inclusive education occurs when there is ongoing advocacy, planning, support and commitment.

The Benefits of Inclusive Education

Here are key findings about the benefits of inclusion for children and families:

- **Parents' visions of a typical life for their children can come true.**
All parents want their children to be accepted by their peers, have friends and lead "regular" lives. Inclusive settings can make this vision a reality for many children with disabilities.
- **Children develop a positive understanding of themselves and others.**
When children attend classes that reflect the similarities and differences of people in the real world, they learn to appreciate diversity.
- **Friendships develop.**
Schools are important places for children to develop friendships and learn social skills. Children with and without disabilities learn with and from each other in inclusive classes.
- **All children learn by being together.**
Because the philosophy of inclusive education is aimed at helping all children learn, everyone in the class benefits. Children learn at their own pace and style within a nurturing learning environment.

What It Means To Be Inclusive

These are the principles that guide quality inclusive education:

- **All children belong.**
Inclusive education is based on the simple idea that every child and family is valued equally and deserves the same opportunities and experiences. Inclusive education is about children with disabilities - whether the disability is mild or severe, hidden or obvious - participating in everyday activities, just like they would if their disability were

not present. It's about building friendships, membership and having opportunities just like everyone else.

- **All children learn in different ways.**

Inclusion is about providing the help children need to learn and participate in meaningful ways. Sometimes, help from friends or teachers works best. Other times, specially designed materials or technology can help. The key is to give only as much help as needed.

- **It is every child's right to be included.**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act clearly states that all children with disabilities should be educated with non-disabled children their own age and have access to the general education curriculum.

Common Misconceptions About Inclusive Education

Some opinions about inclusive education are based on unsound information. Three common myths about inclusion are:

Myth

Reality

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Separate is better.

Segregation doesn't work.

Whether children are separated based on race, ability, or any other characteristic, a separate education is not an equal education. Research shows that typical children and children with disabilities learn as much or more in inclusive classes.

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Children must be "ready" to be included.

All children have to the right to be with other children their own age.

A child with disabilities does not have to perform at a certain grade level or act exactly like the other children in their class to benefit from being a full-time member in general education.

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Parents don't support inclusive education.

Parents have been and continue to be the driving force for inclusive education.

The best outcomes occur when parents of children with disabilities and professionals work together. Effective partnerships happen when there is collaboration, communication and, most of all, TRUST between parents and professionals.