

The Definition of Inclusion

The practice of educating all or most children in the same classroom, including children with physical, mental, and developmental disabilities. Inclusion classes often require a special assistant to the classroom teacher.

The 1975 Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142) made inclusion a controversial topic by requiring a free and appropriate education with related services for each child in the least restrictive environment possible, and an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for each qualifying child. In 1991, the bill was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the revision broadened the definition of disabilities and added related services.

Source: From *The Language of Learning: A Guide to Education Terms*, by J. L. McBrien and R. S. Brandt, 1997, Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

What is inclusion?

Doug Fuchs: Inclusion to me, as well as, I think, to most people in special education and general education, means taking more seriously the notion of mainstreaming, of trying to move children aggressively, but with some deliberateness, into least-restrictive environments and especially the regular classroom. It does not mean moving all kids into the mainstream, and it does not mean moving all kids right at once into the mainstream. It speaks, I think, it suggests a notion of commitment—to getting kids as close as possible to normally developing, age-appropriate peers.

What is the difference between inclusion and full inclusion?

Doug Fuchs: The inclusion concept is very different from full inclusion, because full inclusion means (and this is not my interpretation, this is the definition that is provided by full inclusion advocates, and they're very candid about what they mean by full inclusion) all children, literally all—handicapped, English as a Second Language, Chapter 1—are placed in regular classrooms, full time. Explicit in their definition is the elimination of all special education options other than the service that's provided in the regular classroom by a special ed teacher or whomever. So this is a very different, a very different understanding or notion of integration, and it's one that currently is being pushed by a relatively small number of folks, but a very influential group.

For inclusion to work, what must change?

Doug Fuchs: I think that there are too many kids in special education currently. There are about 5 million children in special education nationwide. States are currently spending just under 20 billion dollars a year to serve those kids. Many of them are not, in my view, not really disabled kids. Of the five million special ed kids served in public schools in special ed, half are so-called learning disabled children. Many of those kids are not truly learning disabled kids; they're underachievers who are currently not profiting from instruction in general education. Many of those kids are in underfunded urban school districts that have no other way to provide services to them right now except to give them special education services.

Is inclusion a positive movement?

Doug Fuchs: I'm not sure that it is a positive thing. I don't want to throw cold water on this idea, which is met with lots of enthusiasm in places, but I'm not sure how positive a movement this is. Many teachers tend to like it—both general ed and special ed. There's a colleague of mine, two colleagues of mine—Naomi Zigmond at the University of Pittsburgh and Jan Baker at Vanderbilt University. They spent several months, a year or so ago, traveling across the country, observing and speaking with teachers at "exemplary inclusion schools." And what impressed them about these field visits was the high degree of energy and commitment and enthusiasm that the teachers had about what they were doing. What surprised them and disappointed them was that nowhere were teachers collecting information or data on how effective this new collaborative arrangement was.

What is the benefit of inclusion?

Narrator: In Chicago, Dominique was the first child with physical disabilities to attend regular classes at Solomon Elementary School. Now, she benefits from the collaborative relationship between the school's regular and special ed staff. Her 1st grade class includes several other children with special needs. For

Dominique to be a full participant in the class, she needs a special desk and the help of a full-time special education aide. She also needs, and receives, the attention of the classroom teacher.

Sarah Schwarcz, principal: As we grew to know Dominique more, we let her needs teach us—and I think that's the interesting thing about the special education child. They are teaching us so much. They are enriching our knowledge, our hearts, and our passions about what children can do and about what can be done with those people who need us more.

What accommodations are appropriate in an inclusive environment?

Narrator: Matthew is in his final year at Kilmer Elementary. Meeting his special needs, and those of other students, has meant delivering a range of services—from basic accommodations like a wheelchair or ramp to provide mobility, to more sophisticated administrative and classroom-based services like a full-time special education aide. Matthew responds well to music, but his behavior can sometimes create problems in this and other classrooms.

Margaret Mary Deck, teacher: When we were in the music class watching Matthew, the behavior struck me as things that we need to change. He wants to have what he wants at this point in time, and we need to work on either getting him to attend what he needs to attend or getting him out of the fact that it always has to be me, to let him realize that the other kids are learning at the same time. And that's the one thing that we're fighting with Matthew is being able to see that there's other people involved rather than just himself.

What does commitment mean to staff and administrators?

Narrator: Consultation time, resource materials, and programs like inservice training are critical to the classroom teacher in an inclusive school. With this support, teachers feel they can get the job done.

George Seaman, principal: So the secret of our program is teachers taking ownership for those children—that they are their kids. And the commitment we have made to them is [that] they are not being dumped on and that they will get the support that they need, both inservice, professional support, special education assistant time. And you have to live up to that commitment because you can't do this program on the cheap. [You] can't see it as some way to save dollars—that you can put these kids into classrooms and expect classroom teachers to do it by themselves; they can't.

Inclusive Schools in Action: Making Differences Ordinary

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