

International Journal of Research in Special Education

E-ISSN: 2710-3870
P-ISSN: 2710-3862
IJRSE 2022; 2(1): 12-14
© 2022 IJSA
www.rehabilitationjournals.com
Received: 10-11-2021
Accepted: 14-12-2021

Dr. Dhaval P Vyas
Assistant Professor,
Shri P. K. Mehta College of
Special Education, Mamta
Mandir Campus, Palanpur,
Gujarat, India

Corresponding Author:
Dr. Dhaval P Vyas
Assistant Professor,
Shri P. K. Mehta College of
Special Education, Mamta
Mandir Campus, Palanpur,
Gujarat, India

Creating an inclusive environment in school

Dr. Dhaval P Vyas

Abstract

Inclusive education is a new approach to the education of children with disabilities and learning difficulties with the normal one within the same roof. It brings together all students in a classroom and community, regardless of their strengths or weaknesses in any area, and seeks to maximize the potential of all students. It is one of the most effective ways to promote an inclusive society. About eighty percent of the Indian population lives in rural areas with no special school facilities. It means there are approximately 8 million out-of-school children in India (MHRD 2009 statistics), many of whom are marginalized by dimensions such as poverty, gender, disability and caste. What are the needs and challenges today to achieve the goal of inclusive education? How will an inclusive school environment meet the needs of children with disabilities? How can quality education be provided to all children effectively and efficiently? Therefore, an inclusive environment in schools must meet the needs of all children in all communities and central and state governments must manage inclusive classes. With these questions in mind, this article discusses in detail the reasons for creating an inclusive school environment, tips for creating an inclusive school environment, and ways for teachers to create an inclusive school environment.

Keywords: Inclusive environment, school, children with disabilities and inclusive education

Introduction

Inclusion in education has traditionally meant ensuring that students with disabilities are integrated into general education classes to the maximum extent possible. The law ensures that all children with disabilities have access to free and adequate education. It offered special education students specialized accommodation and services as outlined in their Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and the opportunity to learn alongside their peers. Inclusion in schools today means much more. It means ensuring that students of all backgrounds, regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, gender, household income or postcode, have equal access to education and services. Creating a truly inclusive school starts in each class, but it also needs to have a wider reach. It requires specific strategies and cultural change that is shared and promoted by the school administration, teachers and students.

Reasons to create inclusive school environment

The legal imperative to provide all students with free, appropriate and least restrictive education is only the official reason for making inclusion an important part of any school community. When schools focus on inclusion, there are several significant benefits for students that also extend to the wider community.

A. Students gain social and community skills

Isolating students in special education classrooms limits their full range of educational opportunities, including learning and practicing important social skills. In addition, inclusion fosters diverse friendships and interactions, enriching the lives of all students.

B. Inclusive schools experience fewer absences and behavioural issues

Students included in the general education classroom develop better self-esteem. The social skills and behaviour they build around their peers help to minimize behavioural challenges and disruptions. When students from all walks of life feel included and that they are important members of the school community, they are more invested in their own education.

C. Inclusive schools lead to greater overall acceptance and tolerance

Students not traditionally excluded in education also benefit from inclusion. They learn

valuable lessons about tolerance, patience, and the benefits of diversity.

D. All students and teachers benefit from a great support system

This creates an opportunity for teachers to meet their students with lesson plans tailored to the needs of the students. Inclusive practices in schools make learning and academic achievement more accessible to all.

Tips for creating inclusive school environment

Although the legislations have changed and are the basis for ensuring inclusion at all levels of education, exclusion persists. Teachers and schools are still struggling to find ways to balance classes and educate and manage in ways that include all types of students. For creating a more inclusive school environment, it is essential to understand what inclusion looks like, especially compared to traditionally exclusive practices.

A. Inclusivity is a shared responsibility

An inclusive environment is one of shared responsibility between all stakeholders. Schools with an exclusionary culture divide responsibilities between general education teachers, special education teachers, counsellors and others. Inclusion requires that all staff take responsibility for all students.

B. Teacher collaboration is a must

In an environment of exclusion, teachers and other staff remain isolated from each other. They work independently and do not share information or experiences. When they begin to share responsibility for all students, teachers work together. The environment of the school is an inclusive school that helps teachers spend time together, develop lesson plans, teach together and share resources.

C. Behaviour management should be a school-wide initiative, not individual

Traditionally, each individual teacher is responsible for managing the class. The teacher sets the rules and expectations for the class and student groups. Inclusion requires the consistent use of management strategies across the school. A school-wide plan, developed with input from all stakeholders, leaves no room for exclusion tactics by individual teachers.

D. Reaching all families starts with strong communication

Inclusion is not possible if families are not involved. There are obstacles to reaching some family members, and overcoming them requires a variety of strategies. For example, parents who do not speak English or who work long periods can request a translator or meetings at times suitable for their schedules.

True inclusion involves all adults in the school community, from families and teachers to everyone else. This includes support staff such as counsellors, therapists, aides, psychologists and social workers.

Ways to create inclusive classroom environment by the teachers

School-level strategies for creating inclusive classes are important. But individual teachers can immediately start

developing inclusion. Not all schools support cultural change or collaboration, but every teacher can take steps within their classroom to start making a difference right away.

1. Get to Know Each Student and Their Families

The foundation of inclusion knows your students and their backgrounds. Take the time from the beginning of the school year to talk to each student and communicate with their families. Find out his favourite name, any other languages he speaks, his favourite hobbies and activities, and other relevant information.

For students with IEP, find out about their accommodations and meet their special education teachers. Push to partner with those teachers so you can provide better education.

2. Use Inclusive Language

Language can be exclusive, even if it is not your intention. Everyone has implicit biases and their own cultural perspective. Being more inclusive with language requires conscious and constant effort. Consider students' perspectives and use words and phrases that avoid exclusion.

For example, if you have a student on the autism spectrum who struggles to understand sarcasm and jokes, she speaks clearly and avoids double intenders like metaphors and puns. With students speaking English as a second language, observe their American idioms to avoid confusion.

3. Exclusive vs. Inclusive Language

The guiding principle of using more inclusive language is to always consider the person first, not their attributes, diagnosis, religion, ethnicity or sexual orientation.

Table 1: Exclusive vs inclusive language

Exclusive	Inclusive
Guys, ladies, gentlemen, girls, boys	Everyone, all, friends
Christmas/Easter break	Winter/Spring break
Disabled	People with disabilities
Freshman	Ninth grader
Man	Human
Minority	Specific group descriptors
Biological gender	Assigned gender
Homeless or poor	Person experiencing homelessness or poverty; economically disadvantaged

4. Vary Examples for Diversity and Representation

For your students' diverse cultural, religious, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, it is important to include a variety of examples in your lessons. When we talk about famous scientists, for example, we include women, people of colour and scientists from other countries.

5. Establish Rules for Respect and Inclusion

As a teacher, it is your job to set the tone for your class, regardless of what is happening in the rest of the school. Establish rules and expectations from day one that maintain inclusion and respect diversity and differences. Take a firm stand against bullying, which often occurs when some students are excluded. The rules must be specific and have consequences.

6. Culturally Responsive Teaching

Addressing cultural diversity in students is important for building greater inclusion in a school. Culturally responsive teaching is a tool and a style of pedagogy that takes into account the different perspectives and references in each student's culture. Culturally responsive teaching includes many of these elements:

- i. Inclusive teachers express a positive attitude towards students' families.
- ii. A welcoming environment favours the knowledge of the students and their background.
- iii. The curriculum materials should represent a diversity of cultures.
- iv. The teaching strategies allow for the student's first language but also promote the development of English language skills.
- v. Inclusive education allows students to choose certain topics and content.
- vi. Teachers should take time to reflect on their own implicit biases.

The school uses various strategies to create a positive and inclusive environment, such as calling a group of immigrant parents every weekend to register and ask what they need. Students and their families can attend movie nights and potluck dinners. The culture of the school is to welcome newcomers. Everyone feels part of the community with something unique to contribute from their background and experience.

7. A Focus on Universal Design

Universal design is a concept of creating spaces, objects and environments that are accessible to people with a wide range of abilities. For example, playgrounds based on universal design have play structures that children with physical disabilities can use and areas that involve those on the autism spectrum.

The idea expands to universal design in learning, a set of principles that enhances inclusion by ensuring that education takes into account all types of learners. For example, education is authentic and relevant in universal design in a way that engages a variety of students. Teachers provide information in a variety of ways, such as visually, verbally or in writing, so that all types of students can benefit from it.

8. Expectations and Positive Behaviour Strategies

Teachers can perceive student behaviours as problematic when they actually reflect their personal experiences. Positive behavioural strategies are based on the idea that a student's behaviours are types of communication.

The job of an inclusive school is to listen to these communications to try to determine what the students need. This allows teachers to adapt education, environment and other factors to encourage more positive behaviours.

9. Using Data to Group Students by Abilities and Needs

Education is a science and an art. There is a place for data in a school community in order to promote results. Using data can help provide more inclusive and productive learning environments for students with different needs and skills.

Flexible grouping is an inclusion strategy that uses data to constantly change student groups. Just grouping by skill level becomes exclusive and stigmatizing. By regularly

changing small groups, inclusion thrives and students have the opportunity to learn and educate each other.

For example, in a science classroom, the teacher may notice while testing information that some students excel in scientific thinking and process, completing lab tasks with ease, while others have difficulty. The teacher can group some struggling students with those who excel to complete a laboratory exercise.

Students who understand the concepts gain a deeper understanding by helping others. Those who have difficulty with the scientific process learn from their peers. Students support and benefit each other when they are grouped in ways that match the data. The data can come from tests, curriculum assessments or teacher observation and shows how students' skill levels vary based on skills, content area and interests. Students are more inclusive when groups change to accommodate these differences.

Conclusion

The ideas outlined in this article can facilitate a successful start to the school year and provide a structured and encouraging environment. The concepts of good class design, listening skills, self-determination and community-building in the classroom are transferable at all levels. These concepts are not just for students with disabilities, but for all students. Building connections in the classroom through these concepts can lead to improvements in student achievement, as has been shown in research on school climate and student achievement (Church, 2006; Uline and Tschannen-Moran, 2008). Planning ahead and applying these concepts is critical for successful teacher-student interaction and for creating a positive and inclusive school environment.

References

1. Ambrose SA, Bridges MW, DiPietro M, Lovett MC. How learning works: Seven research-based principles for smart teaching. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass, 2010.
2. Armstrong MA. Small world: Crafting an inclusive classroom (no matter what you teach). *Thought and Action*, Fall, 2011, 51-61.
3. Creating Inclusive College Classrooms-UMichigan Center for Research on Learning and Teaching retrieved from https://crlt.umich.edu/gsis/p3_1.
4. Hooks B. Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom. Routledge, 1994.
5. Kaplan M, Miller AT. (Eds. Special Issue: Scholarship of multicultural teaching and learning. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 2007, 111.
6. Salazar M, Norton A, Tuitt F. Weaving promising practices for inclusive excellence into the higher education classroom. In L.B. Nilson and J.E. Miller (Eds.) to improve the academy. (pp. 208-226). Jossey-Bass, 2009.
7. Tanner KD. Structure Matters: Twenty-One Teaching Strategies to Promote Student-Engagement and Cultivate Classroom Equity. *CBE-Life Sciences Education*. 2013;12:322-331.