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Praise for *Inclusion in Action*

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“This book is a useful resource for all educational teams who plan to modify instructional curriculum or students with disabilities. Eredics provides practical ideas and ready-to-use templates for making modifications that enable students to be full members and participants in their general education classrooms. This book embodies values and pedagogy, but even more practical resources teachers can really use.” —**Jennifer A. Kurth, Ph.D.**, University of Kansas

“Inclusion in Action is an extremely practical resource that all teachers will find valuable. It is an easy to understand text that provides accurate information about inclusive education. And it is full of resources that can be immediately accessed. This book is a must for all teachers who want to provide inclusive education in their classrooms.” —**Kathy Wahl**, Director, Inclusion Collaborative, Santa Clara County Office of Education

“[Nicole Eredics’] international perspective and years of experience with her blog and podcasts have provided her with unique insights to the issues that teachers face within the classroom setting.” —**Kathleen G. Winterman, Ed.D.**, Associate Professor and Program Director of the Special Education Program at Xavier University

“Inclusion in Action is the comprehensive handbook schools need to create meaningful inclusive school communities. It makes the case for inclusive practice and provides K-12 educators and administrators a detailed roadmap for getting there.” —**Torrie Dunlap, CPLP**, Chief Executive Officer, Kids Included Together

“In clear and engaging prose, Nicole Eredics not only outlines the case for inclusion in education, but also offers helpful examples from her own teaching experience, along with sound practical strategies that educators can easily adapt for their own use. Essential reading for everyone involved in student learning.” —**John Draper**, Founder of Together We Rock!

“Inclusion in Action is primed to be a game changer for educators with how they deliver special education services in inclusive classrooms. Simple, straightforward, and immediately relevant strategies for any teacher to implement, Inclusion in Action is an instant classic that will ultimately facilitate comprehensive systems change in the United States and beyond.” —**Tim Villegas, CAS**, Founder and Editor-in-Chief of Think Inclusive

"I often hear educators ask 'how' to do inclusion. This book is the 'how' they've been searching for. Every educator should have this book in their mailbox!" —**Sandra Assimotos McElwee**, Author of *Who's the Slow Learner? A Chronicle of Inclusion and Exclusion*

"This should be a required book for all teachers, especially general education teachers! Nicole has put together a book that provides the essential elements for making inclusion a reality for all students. Few books on inclusive education are written specifically with the general education teacher in mind. Yet, they are the ones who will lead the way forward so that all students, regardless of their abilities or disabilities are educated together." —**Susan Marks, J.D., Ph.D., BCBA-D**, Professor of Special Education at Northern Arizona University

"Wow! What an excellent resource for general education teachers. This book is a comprehensive guide to what inclusion is and how to insure you can create an inclusive classroom for all students. I will be sure to share this book with teachers looking for new ideas to include their students." —**Brenda Giourmetakis, M.Ed.**, Supervisor of Inclusive Learning at Edmonton Public Schools

"This book provides a great foundation for educators or parents to understand the inclusion movement for students with more complex needs. Nicole provides a plethora of resources grounded in work samples for curriculum modifications to help bridge the gap for students with targeted academic needs." —**Lisa Dieker, Ph.D.**, University of Central Florida

"The title of this new book delivers on its promise – 'practical' strategies. If you are looking for lots of examples of how to include and modify for students who are working below grade level, this book is for you!" —**Anne Beninghof**, Consultant and Author, www.ideasforeducators.com

"Inclusion in Action: Practical Strategies to Modify Your Curriculum offers a practical and comprehensive approach to increasing inclusive practice across grades, disciplines and school communities. Nicole's strategies and insights are clear and attainable, and hers is a resource beneficial to all educators." —**Lisa Friedman**, Disability Inclusion Expert and Author of the Removing the Stumbling Block blog

"Nicole Eredics' book is needed more now than ever before to not only address the difficulty of including students with disabilities in the Gen. classroom, but also to show schools how to make the process work with efficacy. Nicole addresses topics for promoting inclusion through building a strong foundation for inclusive school culture to addressing positive classroom management, and collaboration between teachers, specialists, paraprofessionals, parents, and volunteers and inclusive school spaces. She leaves no stone unturned. While her coverage of the components that foster an inclusive environment is thorough, possibly her best gift to the reader is her clear explanation and examples of curriculum modifications. Inclusion in Action: Practical Strategies to Modify Your Curriculum includes hundreds of tips that are practical and easily implemented as well as forms and handouts that support the inclusive process." —**Susan Fitzell, M.Ed., CSP**, Author, Educational Consultant, and Professional Speaker

"All staff, administrators, general and special education teachers, and paraeducators can easily find themselves utilizing this book to help reach students they may not know how to otherwise connect with." —**Renay H. Marquez**, Co-Founder of ParaEducate

"The most helpful section of [Inclusion in Action] is the 40 practical strategies for curriculum modification. [Each strategy is] explained in a step-by-step manner along with specific examples showing how the strategies work. All teachers should find [these] strategies . . . doable and workable in most classrooms." —**Carolyn Coil, Ed.D.**, Educational Consultant and Author

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Inclusion in Action

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Inclusion in Action:

Practical Strategies to Modify Your Curriculum

by

Nicole Eredics

Mentone, CA

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About the Author

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Nicole Eredics, B.Ed., Mentone, CA

Nicole Eredics is an educator who advocates for the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. She draws upon her years of experience as a full inclusion teacher to write, speak, and consult on the topic of inclusive education to various local and national organizations. Nicole uses her unique insight and knowledge to provide practical strategies for fully including and instructing students of all abilities in the classroom.

Nicole's advocacy work also includes managing a highly successful blog, *The Inclusive Class*, which has been a reputable resource on the topic of inclusion for families and schools since 2011. Through the blog, Nicole disseminates information about inclusion, which includes more than 100 episodes of *The Inclusive Class* podcast, dozens of articles about inclusive education, numerous webinars, and an online introductory course to inclusion. For more information please visit www.theinclusiveclass.com.

Nicole is a Canadian who traded the snow for sun and lives in Southern California with her husband, kids, and a Vizsla.

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CHAPTER 3

Supporting Inclusion in the Classroom

As discussed in Chapter 2, certain supports are required in a school to successfully include students. Inclusion is largely dependent on the support of administration and school personnel. The language, schedules, events, and school spaces also facilitate a welcoming culture where all students feel valued and respected. Finally, the school needs support from the community, which gives valuable assistance with funding, resources, volunteer time, and advocacy.

In addition to establishing inclusive practices at the school level, it is important to provide supports for inclusive education within each classroom. In this chapter, we will examine classroom structures that facilitate inclusion, beginning with the people responsible for making inclusion happen daily. The chapter opens with an overview of the roles and responsibilities that the classroom teacher, co-teacher, and paraprofessional have in making an inclusive classroom run smoothly. I will also discuss the role that families and community volunteers have at the classroom level—not to mention the vital role that built-in peer supports play in the inclusive classroom culture. Finally, I will discuss how to establish and maintain an inclusive classroom culture. This is accomplished through establishing a strength-based classroom; cultivating a climate of acceptance; supporting students' social-emotional development; taking a positive, proactive approach to classroom management; and responding appropriately to student needs.

THE INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM TEAM: BUILDING A NETWORK OF SUPPORT

Successful inclusion in the classroom depends on the collaboration and expertise of a range of professionals (e.g., co-teacher/special educator, paraprofessionals), not just the classroom teacher. Equally important are contributions from family and community members, who provide advice on meeting the needs of individual students (e.g., through membership on the individualized education program [IEP] team) and assist in daily classroom operations. Finally, peers are a natural form of support for students with disabilities—through reciprocal

relationships, children both with and without disabilities benefit from one another socially and academically. The sections that follow discuss the roles and necessary skills of each of these key team players who together help to uphold inclusive practices at the classroom level.

The Classroom Teacher

The knowledge and confidence that a general education teacher has with inclusive practice have a significant impact on the success of an inclusive learning environment (Forlin, Loreman, Sharma, & Earle, 2009). For successful inclusive education, teachers need to have some form of training in inclusive schooling. In his model for teacher preparation on inclusion, Whitworth (1999) tells us that there are three components to an effective preservice program:

1. Preservice teachers need **opportunities for collaborative teaching**, such as co-teaching, collaborative planning, and collaborative assessment.
2. Preservice teachers need to learn the **techniques and strategies for teaching in an inclusive classroom**. Teachers need to feel comfortable with providing accommodations, inclusive instruction, and modified materials.
3. Preservice teachers need **practice and multiple experiences** with teaching in an inclusive classroom.

Keep in mind that it takes more than a course in inclusive education to adequately prepare teachers for inclusion. Training teachers for inclusion involves sharing knowledge, shaping belief systems, mentoring, and providing actual classroom experiences. Note that the learning does not end once the training is over. Teaching is a lifelong process of learning how to best meet the needs of students, classrooms, and schools. Inclusive schools often host workshops and discussions that help teachers address questions and issues in the classroom.

Inclusive teachers see one another as members of the same team. They share ideas, instructional strategies, and even classrooms. As an example, for several years I collaborated with a colleague who taught the same grade as I did. At the beginning of each school year, we assessed our students' overall performance in the subject of math. We would then place students into one of three groups based on their ability level. My colleague would teach the group of students who were performing above grade level, I taught the group that was working right at grade level, and we arranged for the school's special education teacher to work with the students who were working significantly below grade level.

Another defining characteristic of inclusive teachers is that they take primary responsibility for educating all students, including those with disabilities. With the support of specialized school staff, inclusive classroom teachers deliver and assess instruction to students in the most effective way possible. Some of these methods include *universal design for learning* (UDL) with *differentiated instruction* (which will be discussed further in Chapter 4). They facilitate instruction and learning through the use of inclusive spaces, materials, and resources.

Finally, and most notably, classroom teachers model inclusive behavior and set similar expectations for members of the class. Through class routines, discussions, and activities, inclusive teachers engage students in respectful and meaningful interaction with one another. For example, students with and without disabilities are not only in the same class but they also eat lunch and have recess together. Furthermore, these are not contrived or forced experiences in which one student helps out another by being a buddy or lunch partner.

The Co-Teacher

Co-teachers are teaching professionals who help support and facilitate student access to the curriculum. In most schools, co-teachers are also the special education or learning support teachers. They devote their day to helping students and teachers throughout the school. Note that co-teaching is not synonymous with collaborative or shared classroom teaching models, in which teachers share equally the responsibility for teaching the general education curriculum to typically developing students as well as students with disabilities. In contrast, a co-teacher generally has less direct responsibility for shaping the general education curriculum but plays a vital role in implementing this curriculum with students whose educational needs differ from those of typically developing students. Co-teachers have specialized training and knowledge that can enhance a student's learning experience in the general education classroom. According to Zigmond and Magiera:

Co-teaching draws on the strengths of both the general educator, who understands the structure, content, and pacing of the general education curriculum, and the special educator, who can identify unique learning needs of individual students and enhance curriculum and instruction to match these needs. (2001, p. 2)

The type of support that a co-teacher provides for students is typically intensive, specialized, and tailored to a student's learning goals. It can be in a one-to-one format or small-group setting for a period of time during the school day. Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, and Shamberger propose six different models for co-teaching. In short, they are:

1. **One teach/one observe**—One teacher teaches the class while the other teacher observes students and collects data.
2. **One teach/one assist**—One teacher teaches the class while the other teacher walks around the class assisting students.
3. **Parallel teaching**—One teacher teaches half the class while the other teaches the remaining students.
4. **Station teaching**—One teacher instructs small groups of students for one portion of the lesson and then sends them on to the other teacher to learn the remaining material.
5. **Alternate teaching**—One teacher leaves the room with a group of students to provide them with more explicit, direct instruction.
6. **Team teaching**—Both teachers share responsibility for delivering and planning instruction. (2010, p. 12)

Regardless of the co-teaching model used, however, the instruction provided by both teachers is purposeful and research based. Typically, the co-teacher will also assist in assessing and reporting the progress of students in the area in which they received extra support. Co-teachers can help track compliance with student IEPs or Section 504 plans. Finally, the collaborative nature of a co-teaching model can provide both teachers with an opportunity for professional development.

Several authors have written extensively on the topic of co-teaching and have produced books for education professionals. For teachers who are new to co-teaching or are looking to improve their current practice, it is well worth the time to look for these resources. They will provide a more thorough understanding of the processes involved in co-teaching, as well as the advantages, pitfalls, and tips for success. Some of those resources are noted in Appendix A.

The Paraprofessional

A paraprofessional is a trained adult whose job is to help the student(s) with disabilities. Paraprofessionals help the students access curricula and school life. In addition, some paraprofessionals provide assistance during school time with the student's functional life skills. The type, duration, and extent of the support are determined by the student's physical, intellectual, and/or social-emotional goals. These goals and supports are identified and prioritized by the school-based team and recorded on the student's IEP. The paraprofessional, with the guidance of the classroom teacher and special education teacher, then uses his or her skill set to implement the supports and meet the student's IEP goals.

A paraprofessional does not replace the classroom teacher and is not responsible for determining educational programming and goals. Rather, a paraprofessional facilitates the individual educational goals recorded in the student's IEP. Paraprofessionals are also not expected to create a separate classroom curriculum for the student in an inclusive class. Instead, in collaboration with the teacher and special education teacher, a paraprofessional will help the student access the curriculum through accommodations and modifications to subject matter as necessary.

In addition to supporting students in learning the academic curriculum, paraprofessionals will often facilitate access to the "hidden curriculum" of the classroom. The hidden curriculum is considered to be the social and cultural rules of a school and/or classroom that are not taught but are implied. Because paraprofessionals work in close collaboration with students, they can provide advice, model behavior, and assist with communication skills. The paraprofessional can use visual prompts, facial cues, and social stories to help a student interact with his or her peers.

When a paraprofessional supports a student with special needs, there can be concern as to whether the paraprofessional is helping or hindering. There is a fine line that exists concerning how much assistance and guidance the student needs, and too much or too little can limit a student's growth. Paraprofessionals, ideally, should offer support but not take over, redo, rework, or refine. They do not act as gatekeepers or barriers to classroom and curriculum. Together, the paraprofessional and the teacher work to deliver the best possible inclusive education program to a student with disabilities. Table 3.1 suggests some ways in which teachers and paraprofessionals can establish a positive working relationship. (For more on working with paraprofessionals, see Julie Causton and Chelsea P. Tracy-Bronson's 2015 book *The Educator's Handbook for Inclusive School Practices*.)

Families

Who knows a student better than that child's parents? Inclusive schools respect the insight parents or guardians provide about their child's abilities and needs. Teachers welcome them as members of the child's educational team. The wealth of information that parents can share significantly helps a teacher plan appropriate educational support and activities. In addition, parents can be valuable resources by assisting with daily classroom activities and special events.

Even before the school year gets into full swing, you will find teachers sending home forms and arranging private meetings with families. These meetings are sometimes known as *intake meetings* and usually happen within the first 2 months of school. Questionnaires are sent home asking about student interests, strengths, and areas for further development. Figure 3.1 is an example of an interest inventory that teachers can use to gather information from parents. This form (Getting to Know Your Child; Appendix B, Form 1) can be handed out at the beginning of the year. Some teachers create another version halfway through the

Table 3.1. Tips for teachers to establish a positive working relationship with paraprofessionals

Be welcoming	Introduce yourself and welcome the paraprofessional to your class. It is his or her work environment as well, and the paraprofessional should feel comfortable and included.
Establish a workspace	Ask about the paraprofessional's preferred workspace. Some paraprofessionals like to have their own desk, work from a student desk, or carry around a bag or basket.
Discuss strengths and skill sets	Identify areas of strength and interests that the paraprofessional can bring to the classroom. Discuss any personal preferences the paraprofessional might have and ask what has worked for him or her in the past.
Tour the classroom	Show the paraprofessional around your classroom. Point out where important materials and resources are kept.
Communicate classroom expectations	Share one another's classroom philosophy and teaching style, expectations of students, behavior management, and general routines. Talk about the levels of support that the paraprofessional can provide. For example, will the paraprofessional sit next to the student or sit a few feet away and help when necessary?
Share resources	Share any relevant resources that might be helpful to the paraprofessional. Provide him or her with a copy of the curriculum plans for the year, the weekly and daily schedule, and most important, a copy of the student's individual education program. Be sure to share any ideas and tips learned from workshops and meetings throughout the year.
Give credit where credit is due	Recognize the experience and expertise of the paraprofessional. Listen to suggestions and take advice where necessary. Don't assume the paraprofessional's level of education and expertise is any less than yours. Many paraprofessionals have come from other careers, have varied backgrounds, or have their own children with disabilities.
Identify areas for support	Be aware of any challenges that the paraprofessional is facing. Be supportive and help when necessary.
Establish ongoing communication	Set up lines of communication with the paraprofessional. Make time to meet to check in and discuss areas of concern or needs.
Plan together	Most important, plan the student's program together. Collaborate on ways to meet the needs of the child, discuss the support systems that need to be in place, and review the child's progress on a regular basis.

year for parents to provide any updates. Both teachers and parents appreciate this process. The tone of interest and respect opens the door to communication about the child's development throughout the school year. Also, it is a proactive step toward identifying any issues that may arise. For example, parents can express their concern over their child's social skills and ability to make friends. The teacher can respond by embedding a social skills program in the curriculum. Reviewing the family's information about the student gives teachers a well-rounded understanding of each child in their classroom, and meeting with parents or other caregivers provides further insight and allows for discussion of questions and concerns.

Overall, family and parent involvement in a student's education is crucial. A meta-analysis of 41 studies done by Jeynes found, "a considerable and consistent relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement among urban students" (2005, p. 258) and, "programs meant to encourage parental support in their child's schooling appear positively related to achievement for urban children" (2005, p. 260). It is important to note that Jeynes' results also indicated that the positive effects of parental involvement seem to transcend differences in socioeconomic and race.

Getting to Know Your Child

This information will help me teach your child this year!

Child's name (preferred name) is _____

List three to five words that describe your child's character. _____

What are your child's strengths? _____

What are your child's favorite activities? _____

Who are your child's friends? _____

What are your child's favorite subjects in school? _____

What are your child's least favorite subjects in school? _____

Do you have any concerns about your child's progress in school? _____

What hopes or goals do you have for your child this year? _____

Do you have any other information you would like to share? _____

Thank you!

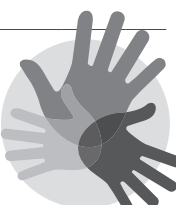


Figure 3.1. An example of a questionnaire that can be given to parents at the beginning of the school year. The questionnaire helps teachers to collect information about students in their classes. See Form 1, Getting to Know Your Child, in Appendix B.

Volunteers

Volunteers are a much-needed support system in inclusive schools. Whether they are parents of attending students or community members, their role is invaluable. Schools often will use volunteers to help in classrooms, the library, the lunchroom, and on field trips and to help with fundraising events. There are many evening or after-school activities that schools host in which they might recruit the help of volunteers. Some volunteers help by creating class materials at home and then sending them back to the school. As with students, volunteers should be made to feel welcome in the inclusive school system.

By opening its doors to volunteers, a school makes families and the community privy to school life. Volunteers have a chance to see some of the daily challenges, celebrations, and needs within classrooms. For those reasons, volunteers often become allies and advocates for the education system. Similarly, in an economy where resources for schools can be scarce, I have seen parent committees revitalize playgrounds,

populate libraries, and rebuild computer labs. Never underestimate the value of help from a volunteer!

Peers

The inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom not only provides all students access to a broad, rich curriculum, but also serves as an opportunity for students with disabilities to interact with typically developing peers. In the inclusive classroom, students can be seen sitting in groups with one another, working collaboratively on a project, or discussing an assignment. All of these genuine activities with same-age peers result in social and emotional gains. Data collected from a study of students with learning disabilities showed that students who were educated in general education classrooms were more accepted by their peers, had better relationships, were less lonely, and had fewer behavior problems than students with similar challenges who were educated in a separate setting (Wiener & Tardif, 2004). Because direct instruction from teachers is not the only method of delivering curriculum in an inclusive class, peers can provide a valuable and natural system for transferring knowledge. Teachers can bring groups of students of various abilities together

to learn from one another or learn together. Research shows that peer tutoring is most successful when students of different ability levels work with one another (Kunsch, Jitendra, & Sood, 2007). Even more noteworthy are the findings in a 2010 synthesis of literature on the academic effects that peer tutoring has on students with disabilities. The literature overwhelmingly reveals that peer tutoring has a positive effect on the academic outcome of students with disabilities in Grades 6 through 12 (Okilwa & Shelby, 2010).

Let's not forget that a student with disabilities can also provide peer support for his or her classmates. Students with disabilities should have an equal opportunity to share their skills and talents for the benefit of peers. Through this reciprocal relationship, friendships can form that otherwise might not have a chance to develop. Autism advocate Judy Endow tells us, "I knew that I was the only kid in the class who could never be counted as a peer to anyone else. I also could never be the recess buddy or lunch partner – only the kid who needed one" (2013, para. 5). If we want students to include, encourage, and help one another, they have to view one another as equal, not less. An example of this kind of relationship is shown in Figure 3.2, in which Nathan and his friends pose for a high school graduation picture.



Figure 3.2. Nathan and his friends pose for a high school graduation photo. (Contributed by Renee Laporte.)

CREATING AN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM CULTURE

One of my favorite quotes about education is, "My teacher said I was smart, so I was." The only credited source is "a 6-year-old." If true, then a very insightful 6-year-old has perfectly summed up the culture of an inclusive classroom. Much like school culture, *classroom culture* is the collective beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of the teacher and students. Inclusive classrooms welcome all students, create opportunities for all students to participate in learning, and are respectful of diversity. Inclusive classrooms support the abilities—and recognize the possibilities—of all students, not only academically but also in terms of social-emotional growth. You can create an inclusive classroom culture by establishing a strength-based classroom, supporting students' social-emotional development, and adopting a positive classroom management style.

Establish a Strength-Based Classroom

In a *strength-based classroom*, there is a shift in thinking about student abilities. The teacher assesses what the student is capable of doing and has the potential to do in the future. Rather than letting the child's deficits or medical label define his or her potential as a learner, a strength-based classroom presumes competence. According to Lopez and Louis,

Strength-based education begins with educators discovering what they do best and developing and applying their strengths as they help students identify and apply their strengths in the learning process so that they can reach previously unattained levels of personal excellence (2009, p. 2).

In a strength-based classroom, teachers view student learning and development as dynamic. Teachers believe that students grow and learn at different rates, in different ways, and under different circumstances. What works for one child may not work for another. Dr. Gordon F. Sherman, a leader in the field of dyslexia research and education, called these variations in learning “cerebrodiversity” (Cowen, 2016), a positive and strength-based approach that differs greatly from how learning differences are traditionally viewed. Typically, schools have perceived vast differences in learning as a disability. However, when teachers view students with a strength-based mindset, they seek to celebrate, support, and accommodate learning differences. Through educational assessment and data collection, teachers and education specialists can apply strategies that are more appropriate and meaningful to that individual student’s development. With differences addressed and accommodated for, students can continue to participate and advance through the education program. They can realize their potential as learners and prepare for life beyond school. Isn’t that the goal of any classroom?

Support Social-Emotional Development

Inclusive classrooms are not only places to learn math, reading, and writing, but also places where students have the opportunity to grow as human beings. Educators know this type of personal growth as *social-emotional development*. The diverse nature of an inclusive environment provides a natural opportunity for social and emotional learning. An example of this is shown in Figure 3.3, in which Patrick and friends take a break from their classwork and have some fun with duct tape.

It is widely accepted that social-emotional development stems from learning how to control one’s emotions, empathize with others, set and achieve goals, and have positive relationships, as well as learning how to maintain those positive relationships (Elias et al., 1997). Students with strong prosocial skills exhibit a greater acceptance of their peers (Newcomb, Bukowski, & Pattee, 1993) and decreased incidents of bullying (Frey et al., 2005). Most important, a recent research study showed that young children with well-developed social competence skills are more likely to live healthier, successful lives as adults (Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015b).

In addition to the natural opportunities for social-emotional learning that inclusive classrooms offer, it has been recommended that students also receive formal instruction in this area. Studies have shown that it is imperative to have direct social-emotional programming integrated into the school experience so students can prepare for adult life in a global world (Katz & Porath, 2011). Inclusive educators can teach and reinforce social-emotional development by providing instruction on social skills that meets the needs of a broad range of students in the classroom. Sometimes, these



Figure 3.3. Patrick and friends take a break from their classwork and have some fun with duct tape. (Photo taken by Sarah Barnes. Contributed by Beth Foraker.)

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programs focus lessons on a subset of skills, such as turn taking. Other programs tackle larger concepts of character development, such as integrity, honesty, and perseverance. There are currently more than 200 recognized social-emotional learning programs used in schools across North America (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). Some of the more effective programs are The Leader in Me (Covey, 2014), Roots of Empathy (Gordon, 2012), and Tribes Learning Communities (Gibbs, 2006). The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2017) provides a more comprehensive overview of social and emotional learning programs in their 2017 guides, which can be found online at www.casel.org/guide/.

Outside of structured programs, educators can also teach social skill development through experiential activities. Consider using the following eight ideas to cultivate social and emotional skills in your inclusive classroom.

1. **Model manners.** Teachers support inclusion in their classrooms by modeling inclusive behavior and language. If teachers expect their students to learn and display good social skills, then they need to lead by example. A teacher's welcoming attitude sets the tone of behavior among the students. They learn how to socialize and respect one another from the teacher's example. For instance, teachers should not be yelling to get students' attention and then expect students to be respectful of one another.
2. **Assign classroom jobs.** Classroom jobs provide students with opportunities to demonstrate responsibility, teamwork, and leadership. Jobs such as handing out papers, taking attendance, and being a line-leader can highlight a student's strengths and build confidence. This practice also helps alleviate the workload! Teachers often will rotate class jobs to ensure that every student has an opportunity to participate.
3. **Role-play.** As any teacher knows, it's important to teach students a concept and then give them an opportunity to practice the skill and demonstrate their understanding. The same holds true for teaching social skills. A common teaching strategy that teachers use is to have students practice social skills through role playing. Teachers can provide structured scenarios in which the students can act out various social situations, and then the teacher can offer immediate feedback.
4. **Arrange a pen pal program.** For years, I arranged a pen pal program in my class. Students from my class wrote letters to students in another class at another school. This activity was a favorite of mine. It taught students how to demonstrate proactive social skills through written communication. Especially valuable for introverted personalities, writing letters gives students time to collect their thoughts. It levels the playing field for students who do not speak. I was also able to provide structured sentence frames in which the students held polite conversation with their pen pals. Setting up a pen pal program in your classroom takes some preparation before the letter writing begins. In particular, teachers need to give guidelines on language usage, topics, and how much personal information to share.
5. **Provide large- and small-group experiences.** In addition to their academic benefits, large- and small-group activities can give students an opportunity to develop teamwork skills, goal setting, and responsibility. Students are often assigned roles to uphold within the group such as reporter, scribe, or timekeeper. At times, these groups are self-determined and sometimes they are prearranged. Group work can also help quieter students connect with others; it appeals to extroverts and reinforces respectful behavior. Examples of large-group activities are group discussions, group projects,



and games. Small-group activities can be used for more detailed assignments or activities. Before any group work takes place in the class, it is a good idea for the teacher to review group behavior and expectations.

6. **Establish a big buddy system.** In terms of social skills, it is just as important for students to know how to communicate with younger or older people as it is with their peers. The big buddy system is a great way for students to learn how to interact with different age groups. In a big buddy situation, an older class will pair up with a younger class for an art project, reading time, or games. Again, this type of activity needs to be preplanned and carefully designed with students' strengths and interests in mind. Classroom teachers meet ahead of time to create pairings of students and to prepare a structured activity. There is also time set aside for the teacher to set guidelines for interaction and ideas for conversation topics. Entire schools have implemented buddy programs to enrich their students' lives.
7. **Read, write, or tell stories that teach social skills.** There are dozens of stories for kids that teach social skills in direct or indirect ways. Stories written expressly for this purpose are known as social stories (Gray, 2010) or social narratives. Find ways to incorporate these stories in your class programs. You can set aside some time each day to read aloud a story to the class or use a story during instructional time. Better yet, have your class write stories with characters that display certain character traits.
8. **Hold class meetings.** Class meetings are a wonderful way to teach students how to be diplomatic, show leadership, solve problems, and take responsibility. They are usually held weekly and are a time for students to discuss current classroom events and issues. Successful and productive meetings involve discussions centered on classroom concerns and not individual problems. Also, these meetings reinforce the value that each person brings to the class. Before a class meeting, teachers can provide the students with group guidelines for behavior, prompts, and sentence frames to facilitate meaningful conversation.

Adopt a Positive Classroom Management Style

Classroom management is more than just rewarding good behavior and giving detentions. It is a systematic way of providing predictable routines, lessons, and activities that keep students engaged in learning within a safe environment. The *Glossary of Education Reform* defines *classroom management* as "the wide variety of skills and techniques that teachers use to keep students organized, orderly, focused, attentive, on task, and academically productive during a class" ("Classroom Management," 2014). Teachers, particularly those working in inclusive classrooms, must adopt a classroom management style that is responsive to the needs of such a diverse group of students. Inclusive classrooms are diverse not only in student ability but also in language, culture, and student experience. They are hubs of activity with students learning at different rates, at different times, and in different ways. There is student movement throughout the classroom as students move between activities. There are various supplies and learning materials that need to be deployed, depending on the lesson. In addition, students are given the opportunity to interact with one another through group work and cooperative learning activities.

Given the intensity of student needs and pace of activity in an inclusive classroom, there must be routines and expectations aligned with the principles of inclusion. According to prominent inclusive education expert Leslie Soodak (2003), a classroom management style

that promotes community building, friendships, collaboration, parent participation, and a positive behavior management system is consistent with the goals of inclusive education. Therefore, inclusive teachers need to avoid punitive and exclusionary classroom management techniques such as isolating, humiliating, or disrespecting a student.



TIPS FROM AN INCLUSIVE EDUCATOR:

Building Your Classroom's Infrastructure

I vividly remember my first day teaching my primary class. It was a disaster. I would like to say that I was able to put to use all my handy inclusive teaching skills, but that didn't happen. In fact, I didn't get a chance to teach at all that day. I just spent it watching all my fabulous plans fall apart. As I tried to teach six different subjects to four different grades, I was painfully aware that the only thing the kids were learning was how to use the bathroom pass to escape the chaos in the classroom. We reached the end of the school day and I collapsed, thinking long and hard about my fledgling teaching career.

The following morning, I had a new plan in hand and felt confident that the students would be more engaged and attentive. We got straight to work, but things began to fall apart again. With the various attention spans, interests, abilities, and needs in the class, I couldn't keep anyone engaged in the task at hand. The younger students wanted me to tie their shoes, help spell their name, read instructions, open the paint jars, and sharpen their pencils. Meanwhile, the older students became bored quickly, chatted with one another, and wandered the classroom. Struggling to bring some sense of purpose and order back into the room, I realized why my well-thought-out lessons were falling apart. I hadn't taken the time to get to know the students, their interests, or their abilities. I hadn't established any class routines such as when to sharpen pencils (ideally, not while I'm trying to give a lesson) or what to do if and when students completed their work. I hadn't taken the time to develop any classroom infrastructure, expectations, or routines.

Setting up your classroom for a diverse group of students with a variety of ability levels and needs can be challenging, particularly if you are a first-time teacher or are new to inclusion. In addition to the assistance of the school, it is important for the classroom to provide supports for inclusion. In my first job, I underestimated the importance of providing a foundation on which to teach such a span of abilities. While trying to provide appropriate instruction for the individual grades, I glossed over the basics. I didn't pay attention to getting to know the students and establishing class guidelines, such as behavior, routines, and acceptable language. Adopting a positive, proactive classroom management style also creates a greater level of inclusion, because students know the class expectations, feel secure, and feel valued. Here are some tips for developing a solid infrastructure in your classroom where all students feel safe, welcome, and supported to learn:

Establish clear expectations for student behavior. Ensure that students understand the meaning and purpose of each expectation. For example, students need to know what you expect when you ask them to pay attention. Does that mean they stop talking? Do they look at you? Do they put their pencils down? It's important to be very clear about what each expectation looks like and sounds like.

Develop and implement routines for students to safely move and learn in the classroom. Some routines might include lining up for exiting the room for recess, handing in homework, or returning library books. Again, as with the behavior expectations, provide students with the opportunity to learn the routines and practice them. For example, on the first day of school, I would show the students how to enter the classroom safely by lining up and walking in single file. The students were given time to practice this routine so they fully understood how it worked.

Keep tasks clear and manageable. Break down instruction, requests, and explanations into chunks and tell students the expected outcomes. Make use of visuals, lists, charts, and diagrams to convey the information.

Use language that is meaningful, respectful, and positive when interacting with students. Be specific about their accomplishments (i.e., “I’m impressed that you were able to solve that math problem!” instead of “Awesome!”). Positive reinforcement and behavior modification encourage student success, whereas frequent reprimands, low expectations, and infrequent praise can result in inappropriate behavior (Aron & Loprest, 2012; Morgan, 2006).

Share the schedule of daily activities with students and families. Inform students about daily lessons and activities ahead of time by posting a daily schedule. Let both students and parents know about important events such as assemblies, tests, and celebrations. Distribute information in a way that is convenient and accessible, such as a class web site or chat. Communication apps can keep families and school connected; as of this writing, *ClassDojo* and *Bloomz* are two useful apps available for this purpose.

Reflect and Respond to Student Needs

Teacher reflection is the deliberate thinking about the choices we make as educators and how they affect our students’ education. It begins by a teacher noticing a dilemma that a student faces and then proceeding to gather information about the situation. After gathering the facts, the teacher looks for solutions and weighs the options and consequences of implementing those choices. Once implemented, the teacher again reflects on the success of the solution.

Educators who work in inclusive classrooms are constantly thinking about the needs of their students. Inclusive educators wonder if they are delivering instruction that reaches all their students, and they are always thinking about ways to improve student access to curriculum. When a student requires extra support for success, teachers and school-based support teams can look to techniques such as the following:

- A change in the physical environment
- One-to-one instruction
- *Positive behavior support*, or PBS (also commonly referred to as *positive behavioral interventions and supports*, or PBIS), in which a specific student behavior, such as shouting out in class, is analyzed to determine its function, which allows educators to determine how best to support the student in learning more adaptive behavior
- Executive function skill acquisition, which addresses skills such as planning, paying attention, organization, focusing on a task, managing time and resources, and setting and attaining goals—in short, the skills that allow people to get things done
- Development of peer relationships

Consider this example of how a teacher responds to a student need. A student is observed having difficulty finishing work during the allotted time. The teacher realizes that the student sits near a window. She sees that outside noises and movement frequently distract the student. To reduce the level of distraction and improve the student’s rate of task completion, the teacher moves the student’s desk to the other side of the classroom and away from the window. Ultimately, an inclusive teacher reflects on and responds to a student’s needs in order to keep him or her learning, interacting, and socializing in the general education classroom with the goal of avoiding exclusion or expulsion.



CONCLUSION

In an inclusive classroom, teachers, co-teachers, paraprofessionals, families, and volunteers work together to best meet the needs of all students. Collectively, all members of the inclusive team, including peers, create a culture of belonging by modeling acceptance and respect for each person involved in the classroom. Students best benefit from classrooms that consider their social, emotional, and physical needs as well as their academic growth, so teachers use positive classroom management techniques to create a safe and supportive learning environment. Finally, inclusive classrooms subscribe to a strength-based mindset, tailoring instruction and the curriculum to accommodate diverse learning styles and cater to the abilities of all learners. In Chapter 4, you will learn more about the instructional supports that allow all students access to the general education curriculum.

FOR MORE, go to www.brookespublishing.com/inclusion_in_action