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Inclusive Classroom

a practical guide for educators

SiriNam S. Khalsa, NBCT
Illustrated by Yoshi Miyake

GOOD YEAR BOOKS

Dedication

This book is sincerely dedicated to all our children, which includes the many students I have had the privilege to teach in public schools, educational collaboratives, and summer camps. They all have and continue to inspire me to keep learning, growing, and developing as a teacher. Thank you.

About the Author

SiriNam S. Khalsa, M.S.Ed, is a National Board Certified Teacher, Inclusion Coach, seminar leader, and author. He received a B.S. in Art Education and an M.S.Ed from the State University of New York (SUNY) at New Paltz. In addition to his work as an Inclusion Special Educator in the Springfield, Massachusetts, schools, he also has responsibility as a teacher mentor. Khalsa has received special recognition from the Governor of Massachusetts, and in 1993 was honored as Special Education Teacher of the Year in that state. In 2004 he was a Massachusetts Teacher of the Year finalist. In addition to authoring this book, *Inclusive Classroom*, he has authored *Differentiated Instruction* (TEACHINGpoint 2004) and *Group Exercises for Enhancing Self-Esteem 1 & 2* (Professional Resource Press, 1996, 1998), and co-authored *Talking on Purpose: Practical Skill Development for Effective Communication* (Academic Communication Associates, 1993).

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Preface

Since I wrote the first edition of this book, teaching in an inclusive classroom has become even more prevalent among the many educators across this country. The need for diverse academic instruction has also increased due to the makeup of the inclusive classroom. There are greater numbers of students who are English language learners, and therefore there is a greater need for our teachers to support and provide multiple, flexible methods of presentation and options for engagement in the curriculum.

During the past few years, teachers in my workshops have called for ongoing training in the teaching strategies, structure, environmental modifications, curriculum adaptations, and interventions that will allow all students to succeed. In today's schools, most if not all classrooms contain students diagnosed with learning disabilities and ADD/ADHD (attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder). Teachers are also realizing that all children possess unique strengths and have far more similarities than differences. They all can learn. They all want to be successful and achieve in school by gaining the skills and competencies necessary to move forward. All students want to enjoy themselves, be accepted, and feel part of the school community. In my very large school district, at all grade levels we are now making an effort to integrate the majority of students with special needs into the general education classroom or to achieve full inclusion.

Strategies that support the unique learning styles, readiness, and interests among our diverse student population are now being referred to as *differentiated instruction.* Therefore, I have included an additional chapter on this subject in this edition of *Inclusive Classroom.* I am grateful to Good Year Books for the opportunity to share these additional instructional strategies with educators who are dedicated to creating quality educational experiences for all students in the inclusive classroom. My goal was to add an extension to the practical strategies and material included in the first edition, giving teachers an understanding of differentiated instruction and how it can be used to create challenging and comfortable learning environments for all students. I feel this is the essential goal of all public education.

Acknowledgments

This book evolved from a realization that the direction public school education has taken requires that all teachers have the skills and understanding of how to reach and teach all children in the mainstream classroom. As the material presented in this book developed, I was constantly rewarded by the pleasure of working with many individuals who are trying to meet this challenge set before us.

I wish to thank the following individuals for their support and influence. Thank you to those administrators, teachers, and counselors from Kennedy Middle School and the Springfield, MA, School District who are helping to achieve the goals of the inclusive classroom. Special thanks to an inspiring principal, Mrs. Veta Daley, for her leadership and support of the learning needs of all students. Thanks to Laura Strom and the editorial staff at Good Year Books. Appreciation to John Ryan for his early inspiration. And a heartfelt thank you to my wife, Kirn Kaur, and family for their never-ending love and support.

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INTRODUCTION

DEFINING INCLUSION

Inclusive education has arrived. The benefits of including students with special needs in age-appropriate regular education classes in neighborhood schools are making true believers out of parents, teachers, administrators, and students. I've been fortunate, for the past few years, to be part of a school system that has worked hard to make the inclusion process a success for all involved. However, I also have seen the need to give teachers more practical information so that they can develop strategies and environments to support inclusive classrooms.

A few years ago I realized that many parents, teachers, and students with disabilities were requesting more educational options. The walls of segregated classrooms started to fall down and the roles and responsibilities of all educators began to change. Initially, as a special educator, I was resistant to support a philosophy that I believed could be detrimental to the self-esteem of students with learning difficulties. I also didn't think I had enough time to investigate the possibilities inherent in inclusive classrooms, and I wasn't excited about having to team teach. In other words, I was content with the status quo.

After visiting a school where inclusion was being successfully implemented using a co-teaching model, however, my interest was piqued. I began attending conferences and listening to colleagues talk about the possible benefits of providing instructional and emotional support to children with disabilities in the regular classroom setting. I also discovered ways to assist teachers in these efforts with new ideas for instructional modifications.

Even though some school districts are very supportive of full- and part-time inclusive classrooms, it isn't always an easy journey for all involved. Classroom teachers may express concerns about

not being competent or trained to deal with children with disabilities. Not only are we bringing children with special needs into the regular classroom, but all teachers, regardless of their training, are now expected to serve all students regardless of their individual needs! The majority of teachers intrinsically appreciate that this is a positive direction for children and adults to take, but that does not make it any less challenging. Through my experiences with inclusive classrooms, I now realize that inclusion is like a mirror that reflects positively on all those who embrace it.

What Is Inclusion?

The American Heritage Dictionary defines *inclusion* as "the act of including or belonging together from beginning to end."

Inclusion is the natural process of living in a democratic society. Feeling part of and involved in our families, local communities, country, and humanity is the foundation of the life we lead. Unfortunately, for many years we have excluded children with disabilities from fully participating in the general school setting. Children with special needs have been sent to private schools, collaboratives, separate classrooms, or traditional pullout programs. Inclusive education is eliminating segregation of children who learn differently and is changing our perception about what we as educators can do to set the tone for acceptance.

Presently, inclusive education programs are being implemented across the nation in large and small urban, suburban, and rural districts. Many factors have influenced the movement of regular and special education toward closer cooperation. These factors include federal legislation (PL 94-142), student self-advocacy, and parental support for both access and equality for all children in school programs. In addition, there is growing concern about the economic implications of setting up substantially separate programs for students with disabilities. These factors have also helped educators realize that the traditional way of dividing students into two classifications, normal and special, is now neither realistic nor productive.

What Are Some of the Qualities That Define Inclusive Classrooms?

- Students previously served by special education classrooms now being served in the general classroom setting for all or part of the day
- Special and regular education teachers working together as a team in the same classroom
- Special education and regular education staff planning lessons together

- All staff working together in designing a classroom to accentuate the success of all its members
- Regular classroom teachers being given relevant information on students with special needs in order to assist them in adapting or modifying classroom instruction, assessment, and behavior management

The Illusion of Inclusion

It is equally important to understand what inclusion is not:

- "Dumping" students with special needs in regular classrooms without necessary supports and services
- Trading off instructional quality for inclusion goals
- Cutting back or eliminating needed special education services
- Expecting all students to learn at the same time, at the same pace, and in the same way
- Requiring regular education teachers to teach all students without the support needed to succeed
- Sacrificing the quality education of general needs students

Inclusion begins with the decision to educate as many students as possible in the regular classroom setting in their own neighborhood schools. *Neighborhood school* is defined as "the school the child would be attending if he or she were not disabled."

Inclusion of special students in the general classroom is an ongoing process. This process may look different for each school, each teacher, and each student. However, there are some consistent qualities as well as practices that are interwoven within each classroom. Qualities such as **cooperation, communication,** and **commitment** to the inclusive process are essential for success.

CHAPTER 1

GETTING STARTED

Diversity comes in many shapes, sizes, and forms. The inclusive classroom welcomes diversity and the wide range of student needs that accompany students' differences. Teachers who help children understand and discuss differences help create an educational environment that supports empathy for all individuals.

Educators and administrators understand that our laws sometimes require us to define children before we can serve them through special education programs. By definition, students with special needs are in need of and entitled to special approaches to learning from our schools. Special and general education teachers are being asked to meet the learning needs of all students who enter their classrooms. Categorizing can add some clarity in determining what type of instruction is needed for the student with learning problems. For example, because the type of instruction needed depends upon the nature of the difficulty, it's important to distinguish between children who have a learning disability and those who are educationally delayed. The child who is educationally delayed because of mental retardation, emotional disturbance, deafness, and so forth, may need a different kind of instructional approach than a child with learning disabilities. The special educator is trained to assist the regular classroom teacher with these distinctions.

To help teachers understand the differences in these classifications for instructional purposes, brief descriptions of the special needs categories follow.

Defining Types of Disabilities

Learning Disabilities

Children with learning disabilities require a different method of instruction to learn what is taught in class. For this reason some people refer to learning disabled (LD) as meaning "learning different." Students with learning disabilities are the largest, approximately 50 percent, and often the most misunderstood group of children receiving special education services. Children with LD are not less intelligent than most of their peers, yet they often need alternative learning strategies to experience success in school. Some of our greatest achievers, such as Albert Einstein, had a learning disability.

Some children with LD exhibit poor motor coordination and body image. These students are easily spotted in gym class, since they usually perform poorly in physical education activities for their age level. If this is the case, modified exercises and activities may be needed to help students with disabilities take advantage of the same physical, emotional, and social benefits of exercise, recreation, and leisure activities that other students enjoy. Many children with LD could learn more easily if taught how to better organize their materials and assignments and if given extra support in this area. Some simple and effective ways to help students get organized are described in "How to Succeed in Eight Lessons," chapter 5.

"Some of our greatest achievers, such as Albert Einstein, had a learning disability."

Mental Retardation

A child who is identified as having mental retardation has difficulty in learning how to read, write, spell, or calculate at his or her age level. Presently, the degree of mental retardation is determined by the child's IQ. It is known that a child whose IQ is 50, 60, or 70 has a mental level of 3 to 4 years at the age of 6. This means that the child possibly will be 9 to 12 years old before he or she has the prerequisite skills for reading. Mental retardation is not a disease, nor should it be confused with mental illness. Children with mental retardation grow into adults with mental retardation; they do not remain "eternal children." All individuals who are mentally disabled have the capacity to learn, develop, and grow. The great majority can become economically productive, fully participating members of society. The student's education should be general, practical, and adapted to the slower rate of development.

Mental retardation can be caused by any condition that impairs development of the brain before and during birth or in the childhood years. Some of the most common causes include

genetic irregularities; drug and/or alcohol abuse; problems before, during, or after birth; and environmental factors that, according to the President's Committee on Mental Retardation (1985), account for 75 percent of our nation's citizens with mental retardation.

Some children will use the term "retarded" to tease a peer who did something wrong. The teacher can use this as a learning opportunity to help children understand the implications of using this term, and the difference between having a mental disability and doing something annoying or inappropriate.

Speech and Sensory Handicaps

This category includes visual, speech, and hearing impairments that affect the ability to learn. Deaf children, for example, are often delayed in reading because deafness interferes with the development of language. Children with speech difficulties have problems with pronunciation and speech fluency. Children with language disorders demonstrate difficulties in the use of language. Speech-language pathologists have developed ways to assess language disorders and teach those who have them. These children often need additional time to express themselves in class. A simple technique to facilitate verbal responses with this type of student is to offer him or her a choice of answers: "Is Boston a city or a state?"

Emotional Disturbance and Behavioral Disorders

Students exhibiting an emotional disability are often delayed educationally as well. These children may demonstrate a variety of behavioral problems that may have existed for a long time across a range of environmental settings. Some of these behavioral problems include verbal aggression, confrontational behavior, impulsive and uninhibited behavior, resistance to change, and frustration, even when confronted with a simple task.

Certain behaviors, however, should be targeted as priorities in the inclusive classroom when working with children who have an emotional disturbance. These target behaviors include:

- Excessive absences or tardiness
- Defiance of authority
- Erratic and explosive outbursts
- Poor social relationships
- Poor attention span
- Low frustration level
- Inability to remain seated for a short period of time

Students who exhibit emotional and behavioral problems are often the most difficult to work with. For this reason, Chapter 6 is dedicated to managing behavior problems in the classroom. Possible causes and instructional considerations are provided. Many children who fall into this emotional and behavioral category are being identified today as having an attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). This is diagnosed by clinical assessment and includes information from all those who know the child. (See chapter 6, "Managing Behaviors in an Inclusive Classroom.")

Physical Disabilities

Children with a physical disability have difficulty using their bodies. The cause of their disabilities may be cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, spina bifida, or multiple sclerosis. Children with severe physical disabilities may receive services in motor development from specialists, such as occupational or physical therapists. Many children with physical disabilities are of normal intelligence, and thus should not be prevented from participating in class activities. The child in a wheelchair, just as one who brings an inhaler for chronic asthma to class, should be expected to participate as fully as possible.

Other Factors Determining Achievement

There are other factors that result in children not achieving in school. The following are three of the most prevalent external reasons for underachieving. These children aren't necessarily receiving special educational services.

Lack of Opportunity

This refers to a child who has matured at a normal rate emotionally, socially, and linguistically, but who is behind academically. Although there is a difference between the student's potential and achievement, the student is not considered learning disabled. Take, for example, a 9-year-old child who has moved several times during the past two years and who is consequently lacking