



IE+ Training Course: Chapter VI

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1. Inclusive education and an inclusive classroom

In an inclusive education system, the framework changes to adapt to the individual needs of the learner and applies attitudes, approaches and strategies that include all learners in all activities, regardless of their support needs, with respect to their individual learning level.

An inclusive classroom is one that creates a supportive environment for all learners, including those with learning disabilities by building a more responsive learning environment.

Inclusivity also means respecting people from all backgrounds and cultures. By teaching our students the importance of this, we can create a much more tolerant and understanding environment, not just in the classroom and school but also in wider society.

An inclusive school or classroom can only be successful when all students feel they are truly a part of the school community. This can only happen through open, honest discussion about differences and understanding and respecting people from all abilities and backgrounds. An inclusive environment is one where everyone feels valued.

Highlights:

- In an inclusive education system:
 - every person has the same possibilities to enjoy a high-quality education;
 - the framework changes to adapt to the individual needs of the learner.
- An inclusive classroom is:
 - one that creates a supportive environment for all learners;
 - a place where all students feel they are a part of the school community.

2. Benefits for all students

Over the last few decades, studies have shown that all learners, both those with and without disabilities, benefit from an inclusive education (Kalambouka et al., 2007 [117]; Cole et al., 2004 [116]). For students with disabilities these benefits include the full enjoyment of their human rights; being able to realise the development of their personality, talents and creativity to their fullest potential; better communication and social skills, as well as more friendships. More time



in mainstream classrooms is also associated with fewer absences and referrals for disruptive behaviour.

For their peers without disabilities, inclusive classrooms have been shown to foster more positive attitudes towards diversity. Participating in a class alongside students with disabilities can yield positive impacts on the social attitudes and beliefs. Staub and Peck (1995)[119] identify five main benefits of the inclusion for peers without disabilities:

- Reduced fear of human differences accompanied by increased comfort and awareness (less fear of people who look or behave differently);
- Growth in social cognition (increased tolerance of others, more effective communication with all peers);
- Improvements in self-concept (increased self-esteem, perceived status, and sense of belonging);
- Development of personal moral and ethical principles (less prejudice, higher responsiveness to the needs of others);
- Warm and caring friendships.

Research shows the presence of learners with differing learning styles and needs provides students with new kinds of learning opportunities. One of these is that students can serve as peer-coaches. By supporting other students, learners also improve their own performance. In addition to this, as teachers take into greater consideration the diverse learning needs of their learners, they provide instructions in a wider range of learning modalities (visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic), which is for the benefit of all students (Dell'Anna et al., 2019 [111]).

Highlights:

- All learners, both those with and without disabilities, benefit from an inclusive education.
- The presence of learners with differing learning styles and needs provides students with new kinds of learning opportunities.

3. Role and attitudes of peers and teachers in an inclusive classroom

To understand how to create inclusive classrooms, especially where children with intellectual disabilities are present, teachers must develop their knowledge and skills, and an understanding



of key strategies critical to achieving success. Successful inclusion practices highlight the significance of not only the presence of children in the class, but also the quality of their experiences and their achievement across the curriculum. Teachers play a pivotal role in mainstreaming inclusive education. An inclusive classroom welcomes, nurtures, and educates all children regardless of their gender, physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other characteristics. An inclusive classroom is thus one in which the teacher understands the value of this diversity in the classroom and takes steps to ensure that all girls and boys come to school.

The implementation of inclusive education requires teachers to reconsider their teaching practice, but many teachers do not feel competent doing this, so professional development should support teachers by providing good practices (see Chapter V).

Evidence from multiple countries suggests that teachers generally support the concept of inclusive education but question their own ability to teach in an inclusive classroom. Although teachers approve inclusion in theory, few are willing to include students with disabilities in their own classrooms. Many teachers attribute their hesitation to include students with disabilities to a lack of proper training. Providing training for teachers can influence teachers' attitudes towards inclusion. Multiple studies have found that teachers who have received training on inclusion are more likely to have positive attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities. (Van Mieghem et al., 2018 [112])

Training programmes focusing on specific student needs or disabilities were found to be more effective than general training programmes. It is suggested that tools and strategies, related to specific teachers' concerns and their teaching context (e.g. curriculum), are the most helpful and effective in encouraging change in teachers' practice. Practices to enhance inclusive education for students with special educational needs can be divided into two categories: additional support by teachers and support by peers. (Van Mieghem et al., 2018 [112])

Additional support by teachers/teaching assistants for students with intellectual disabilities include:

1. *Co-teaching*

Co-teaching is found to be an effective instrumental and pedagogical model for handling diversity from which students with and without SEN can benefit. Fluijt, Bakker, and Struyf (2016) [113] define co-teaching as: "Multiple professionals working together in a co-teaching team, with a shared vision, in a structured manner, during a longer period in which they are equally responsible for good teaching and good learning to all students in their classroom". Co-teaching teams develop an attitude in which they embrace the complexity in their work as an opportunity for professional development. In addition, team-reflection is suggested to empower co-teachers and increase normative



professionalism in co-teaching teams. To implement co-teaching models effectively, training for teachers is required and organisational aspects should be considered, such as training and time for co-planning, co-instruction, co-assessment, and co-reflection. Effective co-teaching strategies focus directly on student learning goals and provide adequate planned instructions.

2. *Teaching assistants*

Teaching assistants provide special education services within regular education. Clear role clarification for teaching assistants is vital for success. Their roles should be restricted to supplemental, teacher-designed instruction as well as essential non-instructional roles (e.g. clerical duties, materials preparation, personal care, group supervision) that help create time and opportunities for general and special educators to collaborate with each other and spend more time directly instructing students with disabilities.

Peer support is a technique that involves putting learners in pairs or small groups to engage in learning activities that facilitate academic education and social competencies. This approach to teaching does not require additional personnel or additional funding. It is an evidence-based approach that delivers positive results related to academic achievement and a feeling of “belonging” over time. Peer supports offer a good learning tool for educators to improve student instruction with and without disabilities. (de Boera, Pijla, Minnaerta, 2012 [114])

Next are three innovative ways where peer aid can be used to meet students with disabilities’ educational and social needs in general educational settings. Furthermore, each of these models requires an up-front preparation that entails choosing the right type of approach, using it at the right time, with perhaps individualised results, all consistent with the lesson’s goals. (Szumski, Smogorzewska, Karwowski, 2017 [115])

Collaborative Training – An instructional method used to enhance the skills provided by the teacher. This teaching approach provides time for practice, analysis and opportunities for learners to develop higher-level thinking skills.

Cross-Age Peer Support is another technique which assists with learning in general education. This method typically involves older students, primarily of high school age, who provide educational support to primary or secondary school pupils.

Peer Modeling is another tool that can be used to help students understand instructional content, procedures and classroom habits. It also offers classroom teachers with ways to use classmates to help with guidance, explain instructions and provide contextual feedback with little or no interruption to the instructional process. It is a great way for peers to provide effective behavioural patterns for students who need to develop their interpersonal skills.



Highlights:

- Teachers play a pivotal role in mainstreaming inclusive education.
- Teachers who have received training on inclusion are more likely to have positive attitudes towards inclusive education.
- Co-teaching is an effective instrumental and pedagogical model for handling diversity from which students with and without intellectual disabilities can benefit.
- In a co-teaching team two or more specialists/teachers are working together by teaching a lesson.
- Peer support is a strategy that involves placing students in pairs or in small groups to participate in learning activities that support academic instruction and social skills.

4. Role and attitudes of families

4.1 Parental contribution to the process of building an inclusive classroom

In recent decades, there has been a trend that schools are becoming more open to parental involvement as full participants in the school community. They are a valuable partner in building, respectively, an inclusive learning environment and an inclusive classroom.

The collaboration of teachers and other professionals at school with parents is often not easy. Sometimes conflicts may arise and different perspectives need to be reconciled. Such difficulties may lower teachers' motivation to seek parental collaboration by the process of building an inclusive classroom.

Despite the obstacles, parental involvement can make a significant contribution to building an inclusive classroom. A number of benefits of the active parental involvement can be listed, to motivate the collaboration of teachers, parents and other specialists in that process. Some of them, reviewed in the International Journal of Advanced Educational Research (Monika, 2017, p. 259) [120] are:

- Parents know their children best. They know their likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses, needs and desires, abilities, capacities, capabilities and challenges. This information shared with teachers is invaluable while developing an educational plan for the child.



- Family members can provide important information about the strengths and weaknesses of their child.
- Families and community groups can take an active role in promoting inclusive education by helping and cooperating with the school authorities in making or providing necessary arrangements and accommodations for the education of special peers.
- When families get involved in their children's education, the students achieve more, stay in school longer and engage in school more completely.
- The participation of family members in all spheres of a child's life plays a vital role in shaping and determining his/her personality.
- Parental involvement in inclusive education programmes builds positive relationships, encourages new behaviours, and increases self-satisfaction and optimism among themselves, their children and teachers.
- The parents may see whether the child with special needs benefits from the school experience or not.
- Parents and teachers working together can ensure children acquire as many necessary skills and abilities to be successful in life as possible.
- As a parent it is important to be fully involved in all the aspects of decision-making that go on during a child's education.
- In some cases where the children are identified very early in their lives by family members, it becomes the responsibility of the parents or family to inform the school authorities about their child's special needs.
- If parents will work with their children at home, not only will they progress more quickly and show better results, but they will also realise how dedicated and committed their parents are to their education.

4.2 The involvement of parents/families in the team that supports the child

There are different models for the collaboration of the parents and specialists from the team for personal development of a student at school. They differ by the degree of joint planning, the joint work of the participants of the team. Other differences can be found in the degree of involvement of the family and the parents respectively in the planning and implementation of the child support plan. It is important to stress that none of these models are better than the others. A model can be chosen according to the characteristics of the child, the family, the school, and their cultural characteristics.

Three basic models can be distinguished. These are the models of Multidisciplinary team, Interdisciplinary team and Transdisciplinary team:

The model of multidisciplinary team



In this model the team members recognise the importance of contribution from several disciplines. The family meets with the team members separated by discipline.

The model of interdisciplinary team

In this model the team members are willing and able to share responsibility for services among disciplines. The family might be considered as a team member. Families may work with the whole team or with a team representative.

The model of transdisciplinary team

In the model of transdisciplinary team, the team members commit to teach, learn and work across disciplinary boundaries to plan and provide integrated services. The parents are always members of the team and they determine their own team role. The basic principles of the model of the interdisciplinary team are:

- Parents are full members of the team;
- Parents are understood as competent experts on their family and child;
- The team shares responsibilities;
- The team communicates in only one language;
- Within concrete support processes the team shares who will do what;
- The parents might choose one key person within the team;
- Professionals might give up a bit of their professional identities;

Highlights:

- Families and community groups can help the school authorities in making or providing necessary arrangements and accommodations for the education of special peers.
- Family members can provide important information about the strengths and weaknesses of their child.
- There are different models for the collaboration of parents and specialists at school. A model can be chosen according to the characteristics of the child, the family, the school, and their cultural characteristics.

5. Building inclusive classrooms

Providing an appropriate learning environment can be as central to a student's success as any teaching strategy or educational tool. Students with intellectual disabilities, as well as all the students in the class, will be the most prepared to learn in places where they can relax and feel



secure and belonging. In order to create environments most conducive to learning, teachers may need to examine ways in which classroom spaces are organised. When we are thinking about the physical space in the classroom, we have to keep in mind the sounds, smells and the lighting in the classroom, as high frequency of sensory processing dysfunctions is prevalent among children with intellectual developmental disabilities and contributes to their maladaptive behaviours (Engel-Yeger et al., 2011) [118].

In general, we will look at three directions in which we can make changes by creating a more inclusive classroom: the changes we can make in the physical space, in the activities of the class and in the way of teaching.

5.1 Physical space

- Classroom arrangement:

- The arrangement of the student desks in a half-circle can help the learners know each other better, learn some important social skills from each other and be more concentrated when their classmates are talking. This type of classroom arrangement encourages the communication between the students and fosters the emotional connections between them (see the example in fig. 1).
- Chairs and desks that are easy to move are convenient in moments of switching the activities (e.g. when the teacher wants to switch from group discussion or lecture to work in small groups). This flexibility allows the teacher to respond to the different social, emotional and educational needs of the different learners in the class.
- It is important for the teacher to consider if, for some of the students, it will be more beneficial that their place in the classroom is closer to the teacher or that their place is near a classmate that can support the learner with difficulties with the current tasks and activities in class.
- Creating a rest area or a place in the classroom where the students can relax. For example, sitting on the floor on a carpet may encourage the communication and can become a good place to get to know each other in a different context beyond learning.

- Visual prompts:

Different types of visual prompts can be used to make the learning environment and process more understandable for all the students and mostly for the students with intellectual disabilities. The visual prompts can be prepared by the teacher, by the parents or by the learner with some help from the adults if needed. Different visual prompts can also be found online and can be free printed and used at school (e.g. at <http://www.victoriesnautism.com/schedule-activity-and-task-cards.html>).



- Visual prompts may be used for visualising the curriculum for the day, as well as the different cabinets and rooms in the school (music, arts, chemistry, teachers' room etc.).
- Student desk name plates – As it is hard for some students to remember the names of their classmates, each of them can make and put on their desk a tablet with their names and a picture. The teachers can also have such a tablet on their desk during the classes.
- A classroom plan with the names of the students - a small plan of the classroom with the names of the students can also support the adaptation and socialisation of a student in class (see the example in fig. 1)
- Locker tags with pictures on the school lockers.
- Although visual prompts can be helpful for students' orientation and for enhancing their sense of security, they should not be too much in the classroom. A classroom with walls filled with boards, colours and pictures could be also distracting or confusing to some students.

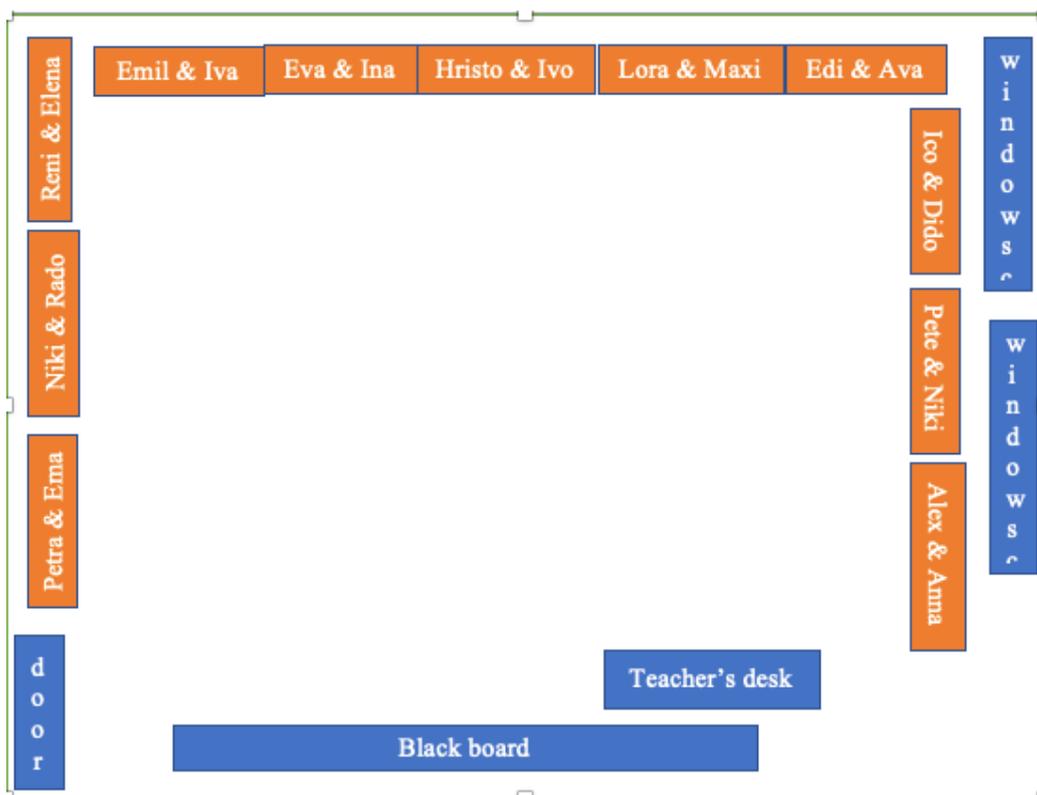


Figure 1 Classroom arrangement plan



- **Reducing unpleasant and distracting noises:**
 - Installing curtains, carpets, poufs or other textile elements in the classroom may create a cozier atmosphere and reduce echoes and noise.
 - Teachers may provide earplugs or headphones for some students that are hypersensitive to sounds by the noisy activities.
 - Soft patches or textiles can be put/stuck on the bottoms of chair or desk legs so that noise can be reduced when furniture are moved.
 - The clapping by celebrations or by congratulations on a task well done may be replaced by finger-clicking or some hand signal (waving, ring gesture) if there are children with hypersensitivity to sound.
 - Pleasant sounds (music, sound of water) may be used during the breaks.
- **Reducing strong smells:**
 - If there are children with heightened sensory system the teacher can avoid room fragrances, strong perfumes, cleaning agents.
 - It may be better to keep food outside the classroom.
 - For students with heightened sensory system it may be better to sit by the window, so they have access to fresh air if needed.

A smell/fragrance that all the students find pleasant, relaxing or calming may be used in the classroom (e.g. lavender, mint, cinnamon).

5.2 Activities for fostering the emotional connections in the classroom

Next to the educational activities, as we have already stressed, activities that are fostering the positive emotional climate and the friendships in the classroom are also important. They give the students a sense of belonging and make the learning process easier and calmer. The most of these activities and practices do not cost a lot of time and special resources. Here are some examples of such practices in the classroom:

- Initiation of discussions about favourite activities, hobbies, movies;
- Leaving the last 5 minutes after each lesson for relaxing while sitting on the floor and reflecting (talk about the experiences, emotions, relationships in the class);
- Encouraging the conversation in small groups during the breaks by giving each group a different discussion topic to discuss and share their ideas with the class the next day/week.
- Giving students time to present and play their favourite games with their classmates.



5.3 The process of teaching

The process of teaching can be organised according to the UDL framework that presents different ways of creating more inclusive teaching practices (see Chapter II).

There are three key things educators need to remember when creating a fully inclusive classroom.

1. The pedagogy they have been creating.
2. The material that they create and teach.
3. Techniques and equipment used in the classroom.

5.4 Inclusive Pedagogy

Thinking of pedagogy inclusively means potentially rethinking how learning is done and providing the means to help students excel.

- Explore the curriculum for ways to ensure these methodologies throughout the course.
- A curriculum has been distributed within the course and is easy to access to all pupils.
- The goals of the course and the learning outcomes are properly outlined, either in the curriculum or in the course components themselves.
- Where appropriate, you have taken the time to establish distinct practices. Give the students choices on how to best demonstrate their knowledge and understanding improves interaction and guarantees that all learning styles and requirements can be fulfilled without complicated accommodation.
- You've created opportunities for collective learning all through the classroom.
- Clear guidelines are given for all units, tests and tasks. It is important for students to understand exactly what is expected of them.
- You used the ideas of Universal Design for Learning in the programme.

5.5 Inclusive Content

Thinking inclusively requires updating content and making sure that it is designed for widespread use. It also means rejecting content that does not meet that standard. In your course, review all of the material for the following criteria:

- All pictures have replacement text or have been explicitly labeled as decorative.
- You do not use pictures that are made up of text in your material.



- In your course you don't have any flashing pictures or animations. If you do, the animations are vital to the content, not just enjoyable and amusing. If you keep them make sure you have properly described what the animation conveys in alternate text or comprehensive text explanations.
- All Word and PowerPoint files are well organised.
- All PDFs are labeled for accessibility.
- All video clips are captioned.
- All the colours you use have the right contrast between the background and the foreground. Tables are not used for formatting anywhere in the text.

5.6 Inclusive Technology and Tools

Inclusive thinking entails understanding how people need to communicate with the various tools that you use and adapt or modify as appropriate. Recognise how it can impact people with diverse needs when selecting tools and technology to use in class.

- Will colors have enough contrast in the application?
- Is the whole page magnified, and not the text only?
- Can all controls be accessed using just a keyboard?
- When form labels are clicked, does it move the cursor to the appropriate element?
- Do you provide audio and visual alerts in more than one format?
- When style sheets are disabled in the browser, is the content still understandable?
- Does it require additional plug-ins and downloads?

Highlights:

- Providing an appropriate learning environment can be as central to a student's success as any teaching strategy or educational tool.
- Different types of visual prompts can be used to make the learning environment and process more understandable for all the students and mostly for the students with intellectual disabilities.
- The arrangement of the classroom may support the adaptation of the learners with ID in the class.
- Keep in mind: the sounds, smells and the lighting in the classroom are important. High frequency of sensory processing dysfunctions is prevalent among children with intellectual developmental disabilities.
- Not only educational activities, but also activities that are fostering the positive emotional climate and the friendships in classroom are important.



7 Conclusions

To change the classroom into an inclusive classroom is significant to a student's success. The inclusive classroom provides a supportive environment for all learners, including those with learning differences. It is one that can also challenge and engage gifted and talented learners by building a more responsive learning environment.

There are different practices to enhance inclusive education for students with special educational needs. An additional support by teachers and support by peers are as important as the collaboration with parents and specialists at school. A model can be chosen according to the characteristics of the child, the family, the school, and their cultural characteristics.

An inclusive classroom is one that creates a supportive environment for all learners, including those with learning disabilities by building a more responsive learning environment. Inclusivity also means respecting people from all backgrounds and cultures. By teaching our students the importance of this, we support them to be more aware, tolerant and understanding of each other, not just in the classroom and school but also in wider society.

8 Summary

- In order to make a classroom more inclusive, changes in three directions can be undertaken:
 - o changes in the physical space,
 - o in the activities of the class and
 - o in the way of teaching.
- It is important to use inclusive technologies and tools in the classroom.
- Additional support by teachers and support by peers are as important as the collaboration with parents and specialists at school.



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