Chapter 2
Inclusive Education:
What Every Educator and School Leader Must Know and Do

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ABSTRACT

The challenges facing full inclusion are many: time, scheduling, role clarity, self-efficacy, collaboration, parity, classroom management, new and different skill sets, training, and support. If we plan for, train, and schedule special and general education teachers as separate entities, they will be. Instead, all educators and leaders must be viewed, and treated, as part of a single working system. This chapter outlines concrete and actionable strategies for school leaders and general and special educators to support effective inclusion and make it a reality for all students. Hard work? Yes! Worth it? Absolutely!

INTRODUCTION

We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us; we already know more than we need to do that; and whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far. (Edmonds, 1979, p.23)

Historically, students with /dis/abilities in the United States were primarily educated in spaces segregated from their peers without /dis/abilities. The results were anything but equal. A movement began and a law was passed (Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)), to more intentionally include students with /dis/abilities *to the maximum extent possible* in the general education (GE) classroom, a practice known as *inclusion.*

Resulting from decades of activism, research, and legislation, an increasing number of students with /dis/abilities are being included - and an increasing number of general education teachers (GETs) and special education teachers (SETs) are educating them - within general education (GE) classrooms. The United States Department of Education (2018) found that 63.3% of students with /dis/abilities spend at least 80% of their school day in the GE setting, up from 57.2% in 2007. Further, research spanning decades, demonstrates multiple positive impacts of inclusion, including increased academic achievement, graduation rates, peer relationships, socialization, and post school outcomes for both students with and without /dis/abilities (e.g. Ballard & Dymond, 2017; Broderick & Kasa-Hendrickson, 2001; Cole, Murphy, Frisby, Grossi, & Bolte, 2019; DeSimone, Maldonado, & Rodriguez, 2013; Fisher & Meyer, 2002; Tremblay, 2013; Ryndak, Morrison, & Sommerstein, 1999; and Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Levine, & Garza, 2005), as well as teachers' professional growth (Conderman, Johnston-Rodriguez, Hartman, & Kemp, 2013).

While effective inclusive schools can be found across the nation, implementation is not without challenges. Inclusion is complex, highly-nuanced work that significantly shifts the capacities demanded of SETs and GETs as well as the educational leaders supporting them. Both GETs and SETs are expected to hold expertise in grade level content, classroom management, pedagogical decision-making, and child and adolescent development, while also being able to build relationships, provide social and emotional support, make data-driven adjustments to practice, and incorporate the newest technology and innovations. Inclusion requires they do all this, while working collaboratively, often with more than one co-teaching partner! In addition, too often school leaders view SE and GETs as separate entities, failing to build structures, systems, and supports that facilitate effective inclusion.

Compounding this, teacher and leader preparation programs have not been proactive in their approach to the intricacies of inclusion. Too often, programs operate in siloes, with GETs and administrators receiving little to no instruction in supporting students with /dis/abilities, and SETs graduating from programs with little to no training for the realities of collaborative teaching. Both GE and SETs report feeling unprepared (Kloo & Zigmond, 2008; Rea & Connell, 2005) and lacking the skills (Grant & Gillette, 2006; Little & Theiker, 2009) to effectively implement

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