

Background on Inclusion (continued)

But the whole idea of “fixing” these children was based on a misunderstanding of how children with disabilities develop. As you know from your own experience and education, we expect children, as they grow up, to go through phases or stages: at certain ages all children should be able to do roughly the same things.

Professionals defined disability as a developmental delay that could be corrected with time and practice. We now know that this is not true, as disabilities often alter children’s development in ways that cannot be reversed by time and practice.

Waiting for children with disabilities to “catch-up” with their peers before being allowed access to age-appropriate settings often meant that they missed many of the events of childhood. As a result some developed behaviors and mannerisms that made them look and act differently than other children their age.

Recently, parents and professionals have begun to recognize the need that all children have to be with other boys and girls their own age. A better understanding of the social nature of children’s growth and development has changed how children with disabilities are cared for and instructed. The earlier emphasis on prolonged practice in isolated settings has been replaced with services that are provided within the context of everyday activities and routines.

In 1975 Congress passed Public Law 94-142, which states that all children have the right to a “free, appropriate, public education” in what is known as the “least restrictive environment.” Environments where typical children learn and grow are considered “least restrictive.”

It is not always easy to create more inclusive practices. Yet inclusion is an idea whose time has come because it is based on a truth about human nature: each child, regardless of ability, develops in his or her own way. Inclusion assumes that children with disabilities are a natural part of the community in which they live. In inclusive programs, children with disabilities are no longer separated — they are members of their age group, to the mutual benefit of all.



15 MINUTES

There are several ways to think about inclusion:

- accommodating to individual differences
- assisting children to participate at whatever level they can, and
- understanding the reciprocal nature of inclusion

Each builds on what you already know about and do all the time with typical children. Now you want to apply these skills and insights to children with disabilities: how can I make objects more accessible to Jorge who has trouble holding on to them? How can I help Kevin be a part of a group when he can’t talk? How can I help Savannah show an interest in what is going on around her in the after school program? By thinking and acting in an inclusive way, you will not only learn a great deal about the children but also a great deal about yourself.

Thinking about inclusion

Topic	Content
<p>DIRECTIONS</p> <p>Activity</p>	<p>Accommodation</p> <p>Let me give you an example of what I mean by the first way of thinking about inclusion: accommodation. I have some menus here from an exclusive French restaurant. I am going to ask you each to look them over and decide what you would like to order for dinner.</p> <p><i>(Distribute menus. Wait a few minutes for people to look them over.)</i></p> <p>You may notice that the menus are written in French. I'd like those of you who can read them to remain seated. And I'll ask those of you who are not able to read them to go to the back of the room.</p> <p><i>(Have the people gather at the back of the room.)</i></p>
<p>Discussion</p>	<p>What would it be like if we told the people at the back that they had to become fluent in French before they could join us for dinner?</p> <p><i>(Wait for response — include responses from the people standing.)</i></p> <p><i>(Hand out French Menu Terms to all.)</i></p> <p>Here is an accommodation to help those of you who don't speak French. Sit back down if you feel that you are now able to order from the menu.</p> <p><i>(Wait for people to re-take their seats.)</i></p> <p>So most (all) of you can now enjoy a meal in this French restaurant since an accommodation was provided.</p> <p>What other types of accommodations could the restaurant have provided?</p> <p><i>(Wait for responses. Suggestions include: having sample dishes on display so people can see what they want to order; have bilingual waiters; have translations under the menu items.)</i></p> <p>Restaurants and other places of business make accommodations every day. This is a necessary part of attracting customers and turning a profit. It is to their benefit to meet the needs of the customer. Otherwise they put unnecessary and potentially harmful limits on their success.</p> <p>The same is true of society. When people with disabilities are excluded from age-appropriate natural settings, it places an unnecessary and potentially harmful limit on what can occur within it. Conversely, accommodations that include everyone promote the success and well being of everyone.</p>