

Benefits of Integration of Students with Disabilities

There are many reasons to provide opportunities for students with disabilities to learn and interact with their peers without disabilities. Integrating students can be beneficial for both groups of students, as well as for their parents, teachers, and program administrators.

STUDENTS WITHOUT DISABILITIES

Students without disabilities progress in social cognition and develop a greater understanding and acceptance of students with disabilities and diversity as a whole, as a result of experiencing inclusive programming. Students without disabilities also experience increased self-esteem and improved self-concept.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

When students with disabilities are educated with their peers without disabilities, they learn age-appropriate social skills by imitating students without disabilities in the environments where they are needed. Integrated settings provide a challenging environment for students with disabilities. Therefore, these students learn to be more independent and acquire developmentally advanced skills. Also, they may develop friendships and a more positive self-image by having the opportunity to do what other students do.

TEACHERS

Both general education and special education teachers can learn by teaching in integrated settings. General education teachers have the opportunity to learn about disabilities and special education. Special education teachers have frequent contact with normally developing students and, therefore, have more realistic expectations for the students they teach. In addition, both groups of teachers are able to exchange information about instructional activities and teaching strategies, thus expanding their skills.

FAMILIES OF STUDENTS WITH AND WITHOUT DISABILITIES

When students attend integrated programs, parents of children with disabilities have the opportunity to see that many of their children's behaviors are typical of most students. By seeing their children accepted by others and successful in integrated settings, parents may feel better about themselves and their children. Parents of children with disabilities also have the chance to become acquainted with other parents and participate in the same activities.

Providing positive experiences in integrated settings allows children without disabilities and their parents to learn about disabilities and develop positive attitudes about people with disabilities. Integration can expand and enhance the personal experiences of children, parents, and teachers.

ADMINISTRATORS

Educating students with and without disabilities together can facilitate major change and transformation of general education to better address the needs of all students. In addition, staff skills may improve through inservice and modeling opportunities. Everyone benefits from having increased classroom and staff resources. Families and IEP teams may be able to choose between a greater number of service delivery options for students with disabilities.

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McLeskey, J., & Waldron, N. L. (2000). *Inclusive schools in action: Making differences ordinary*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

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Inclusion Maximizes Individual Growth and Builds a Sense of Community

For students with disabilities, inclusion...	For all students, inclusion...	For teachers, inclusion...	For society, inclusion...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • affords a sense of belonging to the diverse human family • provides a diverse stimulating environment in which to grow and learn • evolves in feelings of being a member of a diverse community • enables development of friendships • provides opportunities to develop neighborhood friends • enhances self-respect • provides affirmations of individuality • provides peer models • provides opportunities to be educated with same-age peers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provides opportunities to experience diversity of society on a small scale in a classroom • develops an appreciation that everyone has unique characteristics and abilities • develops respect for others with diverse characteristics and sensitivity toward others' limitations • develops feelings of empowerment and the ability to make a difference • increases abilities to help and teach all classmates • develops empathetic skills • provides opportunities to vicariously put their feet in another child's shoes • enhances appreciation for the diversity of the human family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • helps teachers appreciate the diversity of the human family • helps teachers recognize that all students have strengths • creates an awareness of the importance of direct individualized instruction • increases ways of creatively addressing challenges • teaches collaborative problem solving skills • develops teamwork skills • acquires different ways of perceiving challenges as a result of being on a multi-disciplinary team • enhances accountability skills • combats monotony 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promotes the civil rights of all individuals • supports the social value of equality • teaches socialization and collaborative skills • builds supportiveness and interdependence • maximizes social peace • provides children a miniature model of the democratic process

Adapted from: Raschke, D., & Bronson, J. (1999). *Creative educators at work: All children including those with disabilities can play traditional classroom games*. Retrieved from <http://www.uni.edu/coe/inclusion/philosophy/benefits.html>