

Preface

Inclusion is not just putting students together of differing abilities and hoping that everyone learns. We have learned that students with disabilities, especially those with more severe disabilities, will require specific instruction to acquire the skills that they need to learn. Close physical placement with peers who are not disabled will not lead to social interactions and the development of social skills unless they are specifically taught (Carter & Hughes, 2005; C. Hughes, Carter, Hughes, Bradford, & Copeland, 2002). Likewise, these students are not likely to pick up all the possible academic skills in general education classrooms unless the material has been adapted *and* the skills taught to them.

We know that students with the most severe types of disabilities can learn a number of skills when systematically instructed in a manner that is appropriate for the task and accounts for individual learning needs. This information will be presented in Chapter 2 and so not repeated here. This acquired knowledge over many years of teaching and research should not be discarded because the placement of the students may have changed from special education environments to inclusive ones. Applying what we know about how students learn to inclusive environments makes sense, given the necessary adjustments.

This text will present evidence-based practice in the field of severe disabilities with suggestions based on personal experience of how to effectively incorporate them into general education classes. Chapter 1 provides the foundation for the text with descriptions of recommended practices that are to be assumed throughout the entire text. Such factors as family involvement, inclusion, and positive behavior support are integral to any high-quality educational program. The information hopefully will assist teachers as they include their students in general education lessons that address the core curriculum. Chapter 2 covers researched and evidence-based strategies that address the “how to” of instruction. Such strategies can be effective when students are in general education classes, although adjustments will need to be made, especially during lessons involving large group instruction. Chapter 3 targets assessment issues, both of the student and the learning environment. Identifying learning opportunities during typical classroom activities must be part of any assessment when the goal is to enhance the student’s access to the core curriculum. Chapter 4 describes numerous and very specific examples of different students, ages five to twenty-one, who have severe disabilities and are learning a variety of subject matter (e.g., science, social studies, reading, Spanish). The focus is on techniques to shape desired behavior using adapted material while still keeping the student as an integral member of the overall class activity. Of course, the ideas suggested in this text will have to be adjusted to meet the individual needs of specific students.

One premise of this text is that students will have multiple teachers across any one school day who must work collaboratively to provide the most meaningful education. Chapter 5 highlights the many different potential teachers any one student may have and the need for the student to learn to work with many different individuals. Chapter 6, cowritten with Dr. Kathy Peckham-Hardin, stresses the importance of collecting data on meaningful skills to show accountability. Students cannot just be exposed to core curriculum; they must also be expected to learn and acquire new skills. Finally, the issue of next steps to take is addressed in Chapter 7. A person-centered approach is recommended, keeping the student's needs and interests in the forefront of any future steps taken to support the individual.

Too often, students with severe disabilities are denied access to general education classrooms because educational teams cannot see how they could benefit from this placement. They may not know how to adapt the core curriculum to make it meaningful for students of such different abilities. They may not know of positive behavioral support strategies to assist students with severe behavior challenges to control their unwanted and problematic behaviors. They may not know how to employ direct and systematic instruction to teach meaningful skills during typical classroom activities. While these issues are real and do pose a hindrance to inclusive learning opportunities, they should not bar the students with moderate or severe disabilities from the general education classroom. Students with disabilities have the right to obtain an appropriate education in the least restrictive environment. Those providing educational support for these students must acquire the skills needed to ensure such placement occurs. One major purpose of this text is to offer some information pertaining to this goal. My hope is that those on the educational team, both professional and family, will find the information and examples provided in this text helpful toward creating inclusive opportunities that are beneficial to all students.