

Inclusive Education: A Guide for Classroom Teachers



Module 2: FOSTERING INCLUSION

Understanding the Classroom Teacher's Role

Preface

Saskatchewan is guided by a Student First approach which puts the student front and centre by focusing on each student's strengths, abilities, interests, and needs. To create intentional and responsive educational experiences in classrooms and in the school involves the entire school community, including students and families.

The Saskatchewan Ministry of Education promotes the belief, attitude and approach of inclusion for meeting student needs. A strong commitment to inclusive education by the school community is demonstrated by inclusive educational practices that are part of the everyday school experiences of the student. Environments where students feel safe, accepted, respected and confident to engage in learning are essential to student success.

Supporting students through a needs-based service delivery model promotes the success of all students, including those who have learning needs that require supports to optimize learning opportunities. The needs-based model is a Student First strengths-based approach in which responsive instruction, interventions and supports are identified, planned and provided to meet student needs at the school and classroom level, through targeted and/or group approaches, and at an intensive individual level. The needs-based model recognizes that a student's needs change over time and that individualized, flexible and responsive supports are required.

Fostering Inclusion: Understanding the Classroom Teacher's Role is part of a series of modules that provide examples of high quality inclusive practices. **This module provides information to classroom teachers about fostering inclusion so that all students feel safe, accepted, respected and confident to engage in learning.**

Teachers who are inclusive:

- understand their role in supporting all learners;
- create and nurture inclusive learning environments;
- are contributing members of school-based and/or school division teams; and,
- are prepared to work with and plan for educational assistants.

Supporting documents and resources can be found throughout the module by clicking on the underlined term, phrase or title.

The Classroom Teacher's Role in Inclusive Education

Inclusive education includes the curriculum and support systems that make the school and classroom places of community and learning for all students. Teachers have an important role in identifying and addressing barriers to learning engagement. In order to create an inclusive learning environment, teachers need to consider:

- components of a supportive environment;
- which adaptations will best support students' learning; and,
- the teacher's role and responsibilities in supporting students who require additional or intensive supports.

Classroom teacher includes teachers responsible for teaching a grade or subject.

Creating an Inclusive Learning Environment

An inclusive learning environment is a welcoming, accepting and affirming environment where all students have equitable access to barrier-free learning experiences. All students benefit from appropriate services that support their learning and well-being. Students feel a strong sense of community, are motivated to learn, believe in their ability to learn and are empowered to advocate for themselves and others in an inclusive learning environment.

The Adaptive Dimension

The Adaptive Dimension is a necessary component of all education in Saskatchewan schools. Through the Adaptive Dimension, teachers can make changes to the learning environment, instruction, assessment and resources to meet student needs.

Effective teachers think about which adaptations support students' physical development, their social, emotional, behavioural and academic strengths and needs, and encourage student success. A systematic approach is recommended when choosing classroom adaptations (Hutchinson, 2017; Friend & Bursuck, 2016). This approach includes the following steps:

I love changing my room around but could that cause problems for my student who has a visual impairment?

1. Identify the strengths and needs of the learners in your classroom.
2. Create a learning environment that supports your learners.
3. Choose adaptations that support students' social, emotional, behavioural, physical and academic strengths and needs.
4. Implement and evaluate the effectiveness of adaptations.
5. Record adaptations.

Choosing Adaptations	
Identify the strengths and needs of the learners in your classroom.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review students' cumulative files. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identify current social, emotional and behavioural, physical, and/or academic strengths and needs. • Consult with parents/guardians and/or school staff if you need more information.
Create a learning environment that supports your learners.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider whether the learning environment supports your students: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ socially, emotionally and behaviorally e.g., length of time for instruction or information sharing, groupings, positive role models, number of transitions; ○ physically e.g., placement of furniture, equipment, materials; and, ○ academically e.g., instructional materials, assessments, expectations.
Choose adaptations that support social, emotional, behavioural, physical and academic strengths and needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose adaptations that are age appropriate, manageable and have demonstrated effectiveness. • Consider whether the adaptations will benefit one, many or all students. • Reflect critically on the adaptations and consider them from many perspectives (teacher, student, peers, and parents/guardians). Consider whether there might be any unintended consequences. • Identify potential mismatches (demands of curriculum or instructional approaches do not match student strengths) and identify ways to eliminate them. • Use bypass strategies (Hutchinson, 2017) when differentiating for students to access, practice or demonstrate learning of the curriculum by working around a difficulty. Examples of bypass strategies include using a calculator, text to speech/speech to text software, braille, audio books or spell check (note: bypass strategies should not replace instruction or remediation).
Implement and evaluate adaptations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide enough time for the adaptations to be effective. • Evaluate effectiveness, e.g., is there evidence of growth in student learning and/or increase in student engagement as a result of the adaptations?
Record adaptations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Record adaptations</u> that support whole group, targeted group and/or individual needs.

The learning environment can significantly influence student success. When teachers examine the social, emotional, behavioural, physical and academic demands of the environment on students, they can better understand what students may experience and explore ways to provide effective support.

Scenario: A classroom teacher is thinking about implementing an adaptation for a student in the classroom.

An adaptation that was recommended by the team is to have the student verbally repeat directions. I feel comfortable doing this during one to one situations but during class time I am concerned about singling him out because he is shy and may not like the attention. Maybe I could incorporate repeating directions as part of my daily class routines as a “turn and talk”. Not only will this support the student, but it may benefit other students in my class as well.

The Teacher as a Collaborative Team Member

No one professional has all the knowledge and skills required to successfully meet the range of diverse student needs in today’s schools. Using a collaborative approach creates opportunities for two or more members of an inclusive learning community to share ideas, problem solve, reflect on instruction, plan for interventions and supports, and share expertise and perspectives. Collaboration among parents/guardians, teachers, supporting professionals, educational assistants, outside agencies and community organizations is central to student success within inclusive settings. As part of the collaborative team, the classroom teacher plays an essential role that includes:

- planning instruction for the class as well as individual students;
- creating a learning environment that is accessible and equitable for all students;
- collaborating and planning with members of the school-based and/or school division team;
- developing and supporting individualized student outcomes as described in the student’s Inclusion and Intervention Plan (IIP);
- evaluating and reporting on student progress;
- implementing and recording adaptations that support whole group, targeted group and/or individual student success; and,
- providing information about students’ characteristics, behaviours, strengths and needs.

In an inclusive school the duties of the teacher are often shared with other members of the collaborative team.

Working with Educational Assistants in the Classroom

Educational assistants (EAs) provide assistance in schools and classrooms. Educational assistants assist teachers in supporting students in various ways, for example, providing assistance to students who require occasional or frequent support to meet their learning outcomes. Classroom teachers should expect and be prepared to work with EAs at some time during their career. Educational assistants are placed according to policies determined at a local

level (*The Education Regulations*, 2015). Teachers should inquire about a school division's policies before working with an EA in their classroom.

Teachers who receive support from EAs have the following responsibilities:

- communicating effectively as the lead;
- sharing their instructional philosophies and/or pedagogy;
- establishing a pattern of regular communication;
- informing EAs of routines, procedures, expectations, rules and approaches to classroom management;
- assigning appropriate responsibilities to EAs as outlined by their school division and/or administrator;
- assisting EAs to develop the skills they need, such as modelling person-first terminology and using behaviour management strategies; and,
- encouraging high standards of practice.

Educational assistants can support teachers and students by:

- supporting the programming needs of students as determined by the student support school team;
- assisting teachers in working with students with diverse learning needs;
- carrying out the roles and responsibilities as described by the school division and/or administrator; and,
- being a contributing member of the school support team(s).

Reflective questioning provides educators with the opportunity to think deeply about their educational ideologies and practices and how they impact students.

Fostering an Inclusive Learning Environment	
Reflective Questions and Considerations	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are my students' current levels of performance? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What can my learners do independently? ○ What do they still need to learn? ○ Do my expectations match my students' abilities? ○ Can my students successfully achieve what they are being asked to do? ○ What are the barriers to learning for my students? ○ What can I do to eliminate or reduce the barriers? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the learning environment support the strengths and needs of my learners? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How should my classroom be arranged to support my learners? ○ Are there any obstacles in the way? ○ Can I see all of my learners? Can they see me? ○ Do I have well established classroom routines, procedures, expectations and rules? • Do I vary my instructional methods to accommodate student preference and need? 	

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Is there a balance of challenge and skill? Have I thought about the amount of instructional time that my students are receiving versus non-instructional time? ● Do the students have access to materials at a variety of reading levels, home language and/or interest areas? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Can materials be accessed through different modalities (e.g., text to speech software, audio books, braille)? |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Have I selected appropriate adaptations? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Do I know which students will benefit from instructional adaptations and which students will benefit from behavioural adaptations? ○ Are there potential benefits to the adaptations for others in the class? ○ Are there drawbacks? ○ Have I selected adaptations with demonstrated effectiveness? ○ Which adaptations will benefit all of my learners? Which adaptations are needed to support a specific group or an individual student? |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Do I understand my role as a collaborative team member? Do I understand the roles of the other team members? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How and when does my school conduct team meetings? What are the expectations in my school? ○ Who can I turn to if I have questions or require support? |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● When do I need EA support in my classroom? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Could I plan or schedule with other teachers to maximize and share EA support? ○ Does the EA need a place to work in the classroom? ○ Do we have a shared understanding of the EA's role in my classroom? What can I do to support a good working relationship? |

Helpful Ministry Documents and Resources:

- [Accessing Professional Supports: Saskatchewan Guidelines for School Division Professional Services](#)
- [Actualizing a Needs-Based Model](#)
- [The Adaptive Dimension for Saskatchewan K-12 Students](#)
- [Caring and Respectful Schools: Ensuring Student Well-Being and Educational Success](#)
- [EAL, Immigration and Languages](#)
- [Inclusive Education](#)
- [Stewart Resources Centre](#)
- [Using Words with Dignity](#)

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