

Strategies for Including Classmates With Disabilities

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What did we study?

One of the goals of inclusive education is that all children are socially included at school. However, research has shown that even in schools that support inclusive education, children with disabilities are sometimes socially excluded. We wanted to hear children's ideas on ways to include their peers with learning or intellectual disabilities at school.

What did the students do?

Students from grades five and six participated in interviews at their school. We asked, "What are some things that can be done at school to help children with learning difficulties feel socially included?" We recorded what students said, then read through all of the responses looking for general themes among the students' ideas.

We are excited to share these study results and wish to thank all who participated and made this research possible. Thanks also to SSHRC via Research Western for funding towards this research. The full report, by Elizabeth Nowicki and Jason Brown, has been published in *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, Volume 51(4), under the title "A kid way": *Strategies for including classmates with learning or intellectual disabilities*.

What did we find?

Students offered many ideas about supporting the inclusion of children with disabilities at school. Through our analysis we identified seven general themes. We have listed the themes below, together with examples of the students' ideas.

- **Involve the teacher:** "Teachers should pick groups."
- **Instruct kids with disabilities:** "...go step-by-step teaching them."
- **Support classmates with disabilities:** "... just help them."
- **Focus on similarities:** "Don't act like they're different, because they aren't."
- **Model appropriate behaviours:** "Be nice and get to know them"
- **Structure social activities:** "Invite them into your group"
- **Provide alternatives:** such as "...a special program for kids with learning difficulties"

What's next?

Our participants offered insightful and potentially effective inclusion strategies. They recognized the challenges experienced by children with learning difficulties and focused on positive roles that teachers and children can play in the inclusion process.