

Children's thoughts on the social exclusion of peers with disabilities

Elizabeth Nowicki, PhD

Lynn Dare, MEd

Jason Brown, PhD



What did we study?

Children with disabilities are at risk for social exclusion at school, but we don't know much about children's thoughts on why social exclusion happens. By understanding children's thoughts on the issue, we can develop more effective inclusion strategies.

What did the students do?

Students in grades 5 and 6 participated in interviews at their school. We asked, "Why do you think that some children who find learning difficult aren't always accepted by other children?" We recorded their answers onto cards, and in a follow-up interview the students sorted the cards into conceptually meaningful groups. Next we statistically analyzed the card groupings to calculate the main findings.

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, authored by Elizabeth Nowicki, Jason Brown, and Magdalena Stepien has been published in the Journal of Intellectual Disability Research, Volume 58(4), under the title *Children's thoughts on the social exclusion of peers with intellectual or learning*

What did we find?

Students thought of 49 reasons why children with disabilities might not always be accepted by others. The common theme seemed to be that of difference, and our analysis identified four key factors within that theme. We have listed the factors below, together with examples of the students' comments.

- **Thoughts and actions of others:** *"Other kids are too cool to play with them."*
- **Differences in ability and resource allocation:** *"They get to go and do easy work."*
- **Differences in actions and physical characteristics:** *"They do different things."*
- **Negative behaviours and thoughts:** *"Other kids are being mean."*

What's next?

Children voiced a recognition of differences among classmates. They told us that social exclusion might be due to inappropriate attitudes and behaviours towards peers with learning or intellectual disabilities. Such comments suggest that we need to teach proactive social skills to all children in school so that we can support positive social inclusion.