

Today's Montessori Classroom for Today's Students

A Response to Inclusive Classrooms: Looking at Special Education Today

<http://inservice.ascd.org/inclusive-classrooms-looking-at-special-education-today/>

Since this first appeared in 2016, an Inclusive Classroom model is fast becoming the norm in the broader educational landscape. Built on the IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) mandate for serving students with special needs in the “least restrictive environment,” the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 includes a framework for serving most all students in the general, Inclusive, classroom with a Multi-Tiered System of Support. This framework, along with changes in teacher preparation programs, and ongoing professional development, are giving teachers the knowledge and skills they need to meet the needs of most all students in their classrooms.

Montessori classrooms, at every level, are ideal environments for Inclusive Classrooms. Dr. Montessori's commitment to working with children, who today would be identified as having special needs, provided the foundation for what came to be known as “The Montessori Method.” When our classrooms are true to the philosophy, and the pedagogy, our “best practices” are built on:

- A respect for the variability in behavior and learning of all our students.
- A system that allows for Individualized, Differentiated Instruction based on observation and planning.
- A multi-sensory curriculum and materials in a “project-based” model.

Inclusive Classrooms benefit all students with best practices from special education that work for all. High expectations, based on developmental need, serve as the foundation for working with each student. The social benefits of developing positive relationships with an acceptance of a variety of people, recognition of personal strengths and challenges, opportunities to cooperate, and collaborate, empathy and willingness to give and accept help, and a sense of belonging in a cohesive classroom community are all core Montessori values. Inclusion of diverse learners gives our classrooms and schools a concrete way to develop and expand these values.

Do Montessori teachers need the preparation and professional development and ongoing coaching and consultation to optimally serve all students in an Inclusive Classroom? Of course, but with the increasing numbers of challenging students we are serving, providing that support to our Montessori teachers, at every level of experience, should be a one of our primary goals. Building on our foundations and expanding our knowledge and “toolkit” will benefit our students, our families, and increase our presence in the educational landscape. Let's make the commitment to today's students in today's Montessori classrooms with an acceptance and appreciation for the value and benefit of Inclusive Classrooms.

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