

# Making Inclusion Work

My inspiration and passion for teaching special education stems from a lifetime of experience: growing up with a sister with severe cerebral palsy who spent time in many different programs in the school system. I began my professional career teaching in a K–1 class for students with moderate, severe, and profound intellectual disabilities after graduating with a degree in intellectual disability. After four years in that setting, I completed my master's degree in orthopedic impairments (OI). I then taught students with orthopedic impairments at the high school level for eight years. Most of my students were fully included in the general education curriculum and were college or career bound. Other students were partially included in the general elective curriculum. Since that time, I completed my PhD in physical disabilities and have worked with many educators who teach pupils with orthopedic impairments.

## Inclusive Education Experience

In most cases, I favor inclusive education for students whose primary disability is physical. It is much easier to justify making physical modifications and accommodations for access to the general curriculum than it is to justify removing students due to modification and accessibility difficulties. Many different models exist for including students, ranging from intermittent checkups with the teacher to random student observations to having

full-time assistance from either the OI teacher or a paraprofessional. Using an inclusion model allows teachers to collaborate, problem-solve, and inspire each other creatively. It also exposes teachers and students to a variety of teaching and learning styles. Because of multiple needs in the classroom, information is often explained in a variety of ways, and information is often presented through different modalities. Many students shine when they are given access to experiences they have not had before because of their physical limitations. Classmates are given the opportunity to look past the students' physical limitations and see their capabilities. The benefits for all students in the inclusive environment are reciprocal.

I have often run into lowered expectations and skepticism about the OI students' abilities. This is when it is necessary to get into the classroom and prove students' capabilities. The negativity usually doesn't last long. Another problem arises when OI students in inclusive environments use assistive technology (AT). Although AT often equalizes access, it can be tremendously frustrating as well. Some of the most common initial problems with inclusive OI are the general education teachers' fears of not being supported, fears of not knowing how to interact or communicate with the student, and concerns over assistive technology use. Associated medical problems can be intimidating as well. One way to overcome these problems is through education, training, and modeling by the OI teacher.