

PHILOSOPHY AND PRACTICE



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The philosophy of inclusion means why we do it. The practice of inclusion means how we do it.

Philosophy of Inclusion

Inclusion means creating a positive sense of belonging, building friendships, community and empathy for others.

And, it also means the fundamental philosophy that diversity is an asset to all, and that we want Equal Play for Every Body.

And, the educational mandate that all children should be in the least restrictive environment possible. Or, as we like to think of it, it is a child's human right to have educational equity. *Every learner matters equally.*

And, it is the philosophy that all children benefit we we remove barriers in our teaching environment, whether those barriers are physical, social, emotional, or simply our attitudes and assumptions.

Practice of Inclusion

As a teacher in an inclusive program, the practice of inclusion means:

- Having a shared mindset and expectation that children experience and interact with the world in their own unique way
- There is no one standard- we hold each child to their own individual best

- We plan for a diverse group of learners/players, and that we are flexible and creative in that planning.
- We are process based in our planned activities- our focus in on the experience not on the product
- That we think about and welcome the use of adaptations and supports that will assist participation
- That we try new things as a staff and class
- We share information and are collaborative in our approach with fellow teachers, and our students' families
- We practice self-reflection, and ask ourselves questions like what worked today, and what didn't? Why did I say that that way? What were my assumptions? How can I do better? How can I be more inclusive tomorrow?
- We do not necessarily consider ourselves experts, but we are willing to try
- We scaffold social play and interaction
- We encourage children to speak directly to one another and ask permission: May I push your wheelchair, Liam? May I help with your G-tube, Chaya?
- We don't speak about a child who is present in the third person
- We use our voice as a teacher to advocate for children who cannot verbally advocate for themselves
- We use our voice to draw attention to shared interests or to create a meaningful narrative that enhances play and social interaction Wow, I see Leo is enjoying putting his hands in the mud just like you!
- We highlight and celebrate each other's successes, learning, and growth
- We make sure each member of our class has a turn being front and center, whether that means putting a child with a disability right in the middle of a play scenario, or taking time in circle to support a child in speaking up, sharing, or asking for a favorite song
- We draw from a solid foundation in child development, and that we always keep in mind the appropriate developmental stages and needs of our students, despite individual learning differences
- And finally, that we practice teacher supported conversation about disability and differences, using concrete information and language in our conversations, and that we highlight strengths and shared interests within these conversations. Winnie has Down Syndrome, so she sometimes learns things more slowly than another child, but have you noticed how good she is at catching the chickens and holding the bunnies? Wow! The core message in these conversations being We can't all do everything, but we can all do something! (We take our cues from parents as to what specific medical language or diagnoses we will reference in these conversations.)

Reflection Questions:

1. Which of the inclusive teaching practices do you already use in your interactions with kids?
2. What practices can you adopt into your organization right away?
3. What practices can you add with a little bit of intentional planning or restructuring of your organizational practices?