

Learning in an inclusive classroom community

[Sociology](#), [Community](#)



This paper explores the benefits of the inclusive classroom over the concerns that this kind of learning is hindering academic growth. In *The Other Side of Inclusion*, Associate Professor Wade A. Carpenter presents a view of inclusion being ineffective because it overwhelms classroom teachers and causes mediocre instruction. Meanwhile, Professor Mara Sapon-Shevin believes that, if specific strategies are used, inclusion can help build a learning community that benefits all. We live in a diverse country; therefore understanding strategies to build a workable inclusive classroom is the goal.

Going to school in the late 70's to 80's, students with special needs were placed on the other side of campus in separate buildings. This created a shroud of fear due to superstition and ignorance surrounding these students. Even though Sapon-Shevin states, "the primary justification for inclusion has traditionally resided in the belief that disabled children have a right to and can benefit from inclusion in a regular educational environment," I believe that the 'regular' classroom has the right to benefit from having a diverse learning experience as part of their education.

"Research carried out by the Carnegie Institute of Technology shows that 85 percent of financial success is due to skills in 'human engineering,' personality, and ability to communicate, negotiate, and lead. Shockingly, only 15 percent is due to technical knowledge." (Jensen, 2012) Knowing that success is driven by communication and the ability to understand, accept, and motivate people, having a diverse classroom is the best teacher. We as educators must first learn strategies to enable us to act as effective catalysis to initiate and sustain a diverse learning community.

The first strategy addresses the teacher's beliefs about inclusion and diversity. Sapon-Shevin (2008) explains that "in truly inclusive classrooms, teachers acknowledge the myriad ways in which students differ from one another (class, gender, ethnicity, family background, sexual orientation, language, abilities, size, religion, and so on); value this diversity; and design and implement productive, sensitive responses." Sapon-Shevin encourages the inclusive teacher to redefine educational tools to include more learners that fit that specific category.

"For example, access can mean, Is there a ramp? But it can also mean, Will letters home to parents be written in a language they can understand?" (Sapon-Shevin 2008) Differentiated instruction includes tools that will help meet the instructional needs of different learning challenges. Having books on tape, lessons that are multi-sensory, and planning curriculum that meets the needs of different learner types is just better instruction for all students, not just ones with difficulty in a specific area.

Teachers need training in positive behavior management for classrooms that provide support for "community building, classroom meetings, cooperative games, and a culture of appreciation and celebration of all students" as well helping them cope with students who suffer with emotional problems. (Sapon-Shevin, 2008) Out of the many strategies Professor Sapon-Shevin provides, training teachers in facilitating discussions and handling bullying are the most needed.

Students have the ability to build strong healthy learning communities if they are allowed to discuss and process the issues as they arise. Educators need to help tear down the walls that separate the many ways we differ by

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addressing the ways in open conversations instead of awkward silence and taboo topics. Three ways I agree with how Sapon-Shevin suggests we tackle these discussions are: teachers familiarizing themselves with the terminology, providing opportunities for class discussions of diversity, and address bullying in open discussions before it becomes an issue in the class or school.

First, educators need to familiarize themselves with the proper terminology to model appropriate language and to educate students to the proper terms to respectfully address people and topics. Secondly, since teachers spend the most amount of daily time with students they have the opportunity and responsibility to take the time to open up the class in honest respectful discussions to address diversity.

Such discussions help educate students as they process new and diverse peoples while learning how to become effective communicators. Lastly, as educators we are bound by law to protect the rights and environment of the students under our care, which means addressing any and all teasing, bullying, or inappropriate language in our classrooms or on our campuses. The best offense is a good defense, so training the student body to be respectful in word and deed prevents the community disease of prejudice of any kind.

If there should be any teasing or bullying the educator must address the subject and students involved and deal with the issue justly with the aim of atonement, restoration and healing. Using these strategies along with extensive teacher training in common core standards, we can help our students become successful adults that will be able to choose any field

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because they will have learned the key concepts they need, and the most important lesson of human engineering in a diverse world.