Resource sheet
Diversity and inclusion at school
Section D/Training module

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1/ Report of the situation:

What can we do for a true inclusion? How do we successfully include all students? Inclusion starts with a belief in what is possible not in what is impossible. True "school inclusion" is only possible if we stop seeing diversity as a problem and if we try to make "normal" the specialty.

2/ Demonstration-approach

This sheet has four main objectives:
- to demonstrate how the growing diversity of the student population in schools makes ever more necessary the practice of differentiating education in classroom;
- to explain what is "inclusive education";
- to show how inclusive practices make effective use of a school's resources;
- to show that behavioral supports help maintain a positive learning environment for everyone.

Differentiation as effective education in classroom with diverse learners
   The diversity of the 21st-century classroom creates numerous challenges for teachers who may not have known the same diversity themselves as students. Among these, teachers must balance the requirements of high-stakes accountability while meeting the needs of diverse students within their classroom.
    In their classroom teachers have students with learning disabilities. The frequency of special education students in the classroom, however, is only one of the obstacles that teachers face. Teachers must also contend with an increasing number of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and from high-poverty families.
   The growing diversity of the student population in schools is a topic of great debate and concern. Differences among students may include language, culture, religion, gender, varied abilities, sexual preference, socioeconomic status, and geographic setting. The differences are often spoken about as a problem rather than an opportunity for learning what rich variety exists in others' lives and how we can be included, valued, respected, and welcomed for who we are in a naturally diverse world.
   In 1992, Grant Wiggins wrote the following about the value of diversity:
"We will not successfully restructure schools to be effective until we stop seeing diversity in students as a problem. Our challenge is not one of getting "special" students to better adjust to the usual schoolwork, the usual teacher pace, or the usual tests. The challenge of schooling remains what it has been since the modern era began two centuries ago: ensuring that all students receive their entitlement. They have the right to thought-provoking and enabling schoolwork, so that they might use their minds well and discover the joy therein to willingly push themselves farther. They have the right to instruction that obligates the teacher, like the doctor, to change tactics when progress fails to occur. They have the right to assessment that provides students and teachers with insight into real-world standards, useable feedback, the opportunity to self-assess, and the chance to have dialogue with, or even to challenge, the assessor also a

right in democratic culture. Until such a time, we will have no insight into human potential. Until the challenge is met, schools will continue to reward the lucky or the already-equipped and week out the poor performers. " (1)

The practice of differentiating education helps teachers address rigorous standards while responding to the individual needs of students. Differentiation allows teachers to focus on essential skills in each content area, be responsive to individual differences, incorporate assessment into instruction, and provide students with multiple ways to learning. The result is a classroom where specialized education is the rule for all students. Students with learning disabilities have access to appropriate modifications, while students who excel have access to appropriate challenges.

What is Inclusive Education?

"Inclusion is a way of life - a way of living together - that is based on a belief that each individual is valued and belongs." (2)

Inclusive education means that all students attend and are welcomed by their neighbourhood schools in age-appropriate, regular classes and are supported to learn, contribute and participate in all aspects of the life of the school.

Inclusive education is about how we develop and design our schools, classrooms, programs and activities so that all students learn and participate together.

The task of the school is to teach some things at all using every means available (individualization) and together allow / stimulate the ability for each student to conduct personal learning paths (personalization).

Inclusive education is about embracing everyone and making a commitment to provide each student in the community, each citizen in a democracy, with the inalienable right to belong. Inclusion assumes that living and learning together benefits everyone, not just children who are labeled as having a difference.

Inclusion is a belief system, not just a set of strategies. Once adopted by the school an inclusive vision drives all decisions and actions by those who subscribe to it.

People no longer ask, "Why inclusion?" They ask, "How do we successfully include all students?"

Inclusion benefits not only students with disabilities, but also all students, educators, parents, and community members. Experience tells us that as communities and schools embrace the true meaning of inclusion, they become better able to change a segregated special education system into an inclusive service delivery system and to change a society and world intolerant and fearful of difference into one that embraces and celebrates natural diversity with meaningful, student-centered learning.

An inclusive school believes that…
- Each student can and will learn and succeed.
- Diversity enriches us all, and students at risk can overcome the risk for failure through involvement in a thoughtful and caring community of learners.
- Each student has unique contributions to offer to other learners.
- Each student has strengths and needs.
- Services and supports should not be relegated to one setting (e.g., special classes or schools).
- Effective learning results from the collaborative efforts of everyone working to ensure each student's success.

In the inclusive school …

- Heterogeneous and cooperative group arrangements of students are used because they are more effective for learning.
- Students are provided with individualized approaches to curriculum, assessment and instruction because of high expectations held for all students.
- Staff, students, parents, and community members collaborate in the design and delivery of effective education for all students.
- Teachers and other professionals are giving students the opportunity to learn to think and be creative, and not just to repeat information that they have memorized.

☐   School staff members are facilitating students' social skills as students interact, relate to one another, and develop relationships and friendships.

Respect for diversity creates a welcoming environment for all.

Inclusive education for students with disabilities can only be successful when those students feel that they are truly a part of the school community. This requires open and honest discussion about difference, and an institutional respect for people of all backgrounds and abilities.

In inclusive schools, the establishment of such a climate benefits everyone by fostering an environment where students and their families are valued for who they are. All children benefit from inclusive education. It allows them to:

•   Develop individual strengths and gifts, with high and appropriate expectations for each child.

•   Work on individual goals while participating in the life of the classroom with other students their own age.

•   Involve their parents in their education and in the activities of their local schools.

•   Foster a school culture of respect and belonging. Inclusive education provides opportunities to learn about and accept individual differences, lessening the impact of harassment and bullying.

•   Develop friendships with a wide variety of other children, each with their own individual needs and abilities.

•   Positively affect both their school and community to appreciate diversity and inclusion on a broader level.

Inclusive practices make effective use of a school's resources.

In the past, special education often involved the segregation of students with disabilities for the purpose of specialized instruction. Not only does that model of special education in a separate setting deprive students with disabilities of interaction with their peers and full access to the curriculum, it can also involve duplicate systems and resources that are costly for schools to maintain. Inclusive education can make more efficient use of a school's resources by maximizing the availability of staff and materials for all students.

As Ianes says, to respond in a truly inclusive way to all the various Special Educational Needs, the school must activate a broad and rich set of resources in a methodologically correct way (4). The concept of "resource" is thus enlarged and the concept of "normality" comes into play: in the normality of doing school there must be the "additional resources", which must be enriched with "specialty", that is technical, training, competence and support (5).

Behavioral supports help maintain a positive learning environment for everyone.

Another important factor in effective inclusive education is the implementation of consistent behavioral supports throughout the learning environment. This consistency is essential for the success of students with emotional or behavioral disabilities in the general education environment, but school-wide behavioral supports also help to establish high expectations throughout the school community as a whole.

As Canevaro says "an inclusive education allows the ordinary school to improve its quality: a school in which all children are welcomed, where they can learn according to their own pace and, most importantly where they can participate, a school where children manage to understand all diversities and that these diversities are enriching. Thus diversity becomes normal." (6)

Effective teachers accept and believe that learners differ in important ways and act upon the premise that teachers must be ready to engage students in instruction through different learning modalities, by appealing to differing interests, and by using varied rates of instruction along and degrees of complexity. In a differentiated classroom, the teacher "shows respect for learners by honoring both their commonalities and differences, not by treating them alike" (7).

While certain essential understandings and skills are goals for all learners, the teacher continually tries to understand what individual students need to learn most effectively and attempts to provide learning options that are a good fit for each learning. Multiple intelligence and learning style theory opens the door to a wide variety of teaching strategies.

Effective teachers use a broad range of teaching strategies and shift their intelligence preference from lesson to lesson to ensure that there will always be a time during the day when a student has his or her most highly developed intelligence(s) actively involved in learning (8). In addition, they plan and deliver instructional episodes taking learning styles into consideration (9). A holistic approach to education – one

that allows educators to engage the full range of human diversity and meet rigorous standards – occurs in the blending of these two models. "By uniting the two best models we have for understanding the diverse ways students thing and learn": inclusive classrooms "strive to create an environment where all learners feel that their ideas, contributions, and work are valued, and that they are able to succeed" (10).

Notes
(1) Wiggins G. Foreward, (1992), In R. A. Villa, J. S. Thousand, W. Stainback, & S. Stainback (Eds.), Restructuring for caring and effective education: An administrative guide to creating heterogeneous schools (pp. xv–xvi). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.
(2) Falvey M. and Givner C. (2005), What is an inclusive school? In Villa R. and Thousand J. (Eds.), Creating an inclusive school, 2nd edition. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
(4) Ianes D., Bisogni educativi speciali e inclusione. Valutare le reali necessità e attivare tutte le risorse, Erickson, Trento 2005.
(5) Ivi.
(6) Canevaro A., "L'integrazione scolastica degli alunni con disabilità", Erickson,Trento, 2007
(7) Tomlinson C. The differentiated classroom: Responding to the needs of all learners. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1999, p.12.
(8) Armstrong T., Multiple intelligences in the classroom, 2nd edition. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2000.
(9) Silver H. F., Strong R. W., & Perini M. J., So Each May Learn: Integrating learning styles and multiple intelligences. Alexandria, West Virginia USA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2000.
(10) Ivi, p.3