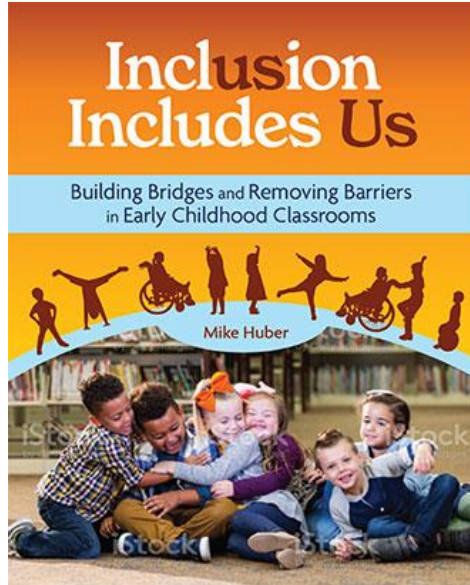


Removing Barriers in Play to Include All Children

Mike Huber



Barriers to Belonging

- Being in the same room is not the same as being included
- Disabled children:
 - Play alone more often than non-disabled children
 - Interact more with adults than with peers
 - Are less likely to lead peer play compared to non-disabled children
- If disabled children are going to feel a sense of belonging in the classroom, our goal for them needs to be **engagement** with materials, with peers, and with adults
- Adults must be attuned to each child's strengths, needs, and preferences
- Every child should be supported and challenged

Addressing Barriers

The Four Types of Barriers to Engagement (based on Tom Shakespeare)

- Physical (including sensory accessibility)
- Informational
- Attitudinal
- Cultural

Resources:

[Microsoft Word - Davis chapter on social model1.doc \(thedigitalcommons.org\)](#)

[Disability: The Basics by Tom Shakespeare \(goodreads.com\)](#)

Addressing Physical Barriers

- Space allows for all mobility and physical needs
- All children feel challenged and supported
 - Diversity of physical equipment for gross motor
 - Diversity of toys for fine motor

Addressing Sensory Barriers

Sensory avoidance

- Allow child to go under tables or in nooks
- Allow child to move away from a group of children
- Find opportunities to play in quieter areas (e.g., a second set of blocks)

Sensory seeking

- Provide materials with a variety of sensory experiences
- Allow children to get messy (or loud)

Resources:

[Developing Our Sensory Systems Through Exploration - St. David's Center for Child and Family Development \(stdavidscenter.org\)](#)

[Sensory Diet: What is it and how can it impact your child - St. David's Center for Child and Family Development \(stdavidscenter.org\)](#)

Addressing Informational Barriers

- WHO
 - Say children's names aloud and describe what they are doing so all children learn to attune to each other
- WHAT
 - Have important messages represented visually
 - Create visuals for routines such as washing hands or putting on outdoor gear
 - Use social stories for situations that children need to work through (such as separating from parents, regulating strong emotions, going on a field trip)
- WHERE
 - Label bins and shelves in ways that children can find and return materials independently
- WHEN
 - Post a visual schedule that children can refer to as needed
- WHY
 - Use and post guidelines (one or two broad, positive statements)
 - We Take Care of Each Other
 - We Solve Problems Together

Resource: [Using Social Stories to Improve Your Child's Understanding & Behavior | TherapyWorks](#)

Addressing Attitudinal Barriers

- Diversity in movement needs
 - Movement is not a behavior issue
- Diversity in sound and volume
 - Loud play is not a sign of defiance, but engagement
- Diversity in social behaviors
 - Some may need adult facilitation to engage with peers
- Diversity in emotional regulation
 - Dysregulation is not a sign of misbehavior

Addressing Cultural Barriers

Differences in norms can lead to cultural disconnects (or misunderstandings). Awareness of differences can make it easier to notice and address these disconnects.

- Eye contact
 - Some cultures view eye contact as a sign of disrespect and others view it as a sign that one is paying attention
- Interdependence vs. independence
 - Some cultures show love by adults doing things for the child and others show love by having the child do it themselves
- Direct or indirect language
 - Some cultures give commands with direct statements and others give commands with passive language or asking questions (“It’s time to clean up for lunch.” “Do you want to clean up for lunch?”)
- Personal space
 - Some cultures need more space than others to feel comfortable
- Addressing adults
 - Some cultures expect children to go to the adult when called and some cultures expect the child to verbally address the adult without stopping their activity

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