

VISION Classroom Inclusion-101

Inclusion within the general education classroom is becoming more common within early childhood settings. Teachers need to understand the unique learning needs of all students with disabilities, including those with visual impairments. An inclusive educational classroom refers to a learning environment where the academic, physical, and social needs of all learners, including those with disabilities, are addressed within one comprehensive setting. *Danene K. Fast (November 5th 2018)* The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) highlights that children in the United States of America must have access to equal opportunities within public education settings. According to federal mandates, states are required to provide all students with a free, appropriate public education (FAPE). Children with disabilities are entitled to the same educational opportunities as their peers without disabilities. Students learn best when the teachers who educate them first understand their needs and, then, provide instruction in a way that meets these needs.

Visual impairment is one specific category within special education identified under the IDEA. Within inclusive classroom settings, early childhood teachers may come across students with different visual impairments. First, one must understand that the term “visual impairment” is categorized as a “low incidence disability” within the field of special education in the United States.

Low-Incidence disabilities include the following IDEA categories:

- Mental Retardation.
- Hearing Impairments.
- Orthopedic Impairments.
- Visual Impairments including Blindness.
- Deaf-Blindness.
- Deafness.
- Various Health Impairments (Sickle-cell anemia, TB, etc.)
- Autism Spectrum Disorders.

None of the disabilities listed under the category of low-incidence, including students with visual impairments, generally exceeds 1% of the school-aged population at any given time. *[IDEA]* This means that early childhood educators who work within inclusive settings may only encounter students with visual impairments on a limited basis throughout their careers. Due to this fact, these educators may have minimal to no experience in delivering services that meet the unique needs of students with visual impairments within the early childhood classroom.

The specialized needs of students with visual impairments, including the need to participate fully in the general education classroom **with sufficient accommodations**, must be met if academic success is to be achieved and it all starts with Early Childhood Education. If these accommodations are in place in “EI” and are followed and updated as the student transitions throughout school, academic success can be achieved.

The early childhood setting is one of the first formal learning experiences for young children and it is often within this setting that visual impairments are first identified. Because a lot of classroom learning occurs through a visual model, it is important for early childhood educators to recognize when a visual impairment may be present. If visual impairments are overlooked, delays in learning can occur for children who require accommodations. Students with visual impairments access information using a range of tools, including enlarged print, Braille, technology, screen-reading applications, audio output, and close-circuit televisions (CCTV). The tools being used by learners with visual impairments will vary based on age, individual capabilities, learning characteristics, and the extent of vision loss. Adaptations are determined by team decisions, after an assessment is completed by a certified teacher of students with visual impairments (TVI) and/or orientation and mobility (O&M) specialist. By working collaboratively with educational and mobility specialists to assist with assessment, planning, teaching, and implementation of strategies to address the expanded core curriculum (ECC)—including Braille, technology, and orientation and mobility (O&M) within inclusive settings, children with visual impairments who receive specialized services will receive a broad range of educational services to meet their unique needs.

Once these professionals are part of a student’s educational planning team (IEP Team), early childhood educators should be able to work cooperatively with them, as well as the school administration, student families, and other related service providers to provide educational experiences that are effective and enjoyable.

Remember, when working with students who have visual impairments, be challenged to take risks that encourage the growth of these students. Try not to eliminate parts of a curriculum that may be challenging for a child with a visual impairment, but find meaningful ways to make it accessible or adapt the activity and use the accommodations that will help the student become successful in the classroom!

REFERENCES:

- 1.) Danene K. Fast (November 5th 2018). *Including Children with Visual Impairments in the Early Childhood Classroom*
- 2.) *intechopen.com*
- 3.) *isbe.net*
- 4.) *sites.ed.gov*

<https://www.intechopen.com/books/early-childhood-education/including-children-with-visual-impairments-in-the-early-childhood-classroom>

Including Children with Visual Impairments in the Early Childhood Classroom

Students with visual impairments must *learn through experiences—learn by doing*—in order to master a skill. Using the hands as a tool to gather information is needed for children who are learning without the use of sight as their primary sense. Allowing children to explore objects so that they can experience and learn details that are invisible without the use of touch is essential for learning. Allowing children to smell, feel, and move objects using all of their senses, in addition to exploring with their hands, provides multiple inputs for learning. When completing lessons, provide actual objects for the student to touch, hear, smell, and explore. An actual piece of fruit that can be peeled, smelled, and tasted is a much richer experience than looking at a photo or touching a model.

QUIZ - ISRC Parent University

1. True or False _____ Teachers need to understand the unique learning needs of all students with disabilities, including those with visual impairments.

2. According to federal mandates, states are required to provide all students with a:
 - a. FRAPPE
 - b. IDEA
 - c. FAFE
 - d. FAPE

3. True or False _____ The term “visual impairment” is categorized as a high incidence disability within the field of special education in the United States.

4. Sufficient _____ must be met if academic success is to be achieved and it all starts with Early Childhood Education.

5. Students with visual impairments access information using a range of tools, **list three**.

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____