



CATHOLIC SCHOOLS OFFICE

Diocese of Salt Lake City

Inclusion

As more children are diagnosed with a variety of learning disabilities it has become a challenge for educators. Catholic schools are committed to meet the needs of the mild to moderately disabled students. Incorporating children with learning disabilities in the schools is given the name inclusion.

Being strong advocates for what is best for our children, inclusion demands that our Catholic school teachers receive training and resources to deal with accommodations. Once equipped with tools to address a variety of learning styles and problems, teachers feel more confident and able to accept the student who does not fit the normal educational mold. If teachers are confident and competent, the children feel secure and more willing to cooperate with the learning process.

The most logical place to begin with meeting each child's needs is to get to know the student. Important in this process is a strong relationship between the teacher and the parents of each child. When a child exhibits symptoms of abnormal behavior or inability to learn at a normal rate, it is often recommended that parents have children evaluated to see if there is a learning disability or a diagnosis of Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)/ Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

What is ADHD? ADHD is a "complex syndrome of impairments in development of the brains cognitive management system." It is a chemical problem in the management of the brain. It affects one's ability to

- Organize and get started on tasks.
- Attend to details and avoid excessive distractibility.
- Regulate alertness and processing speed.
- Sustain and shift focus.
- Use short-term working memory and access recall.
- Sustain motivation to work.
- Manage emotions appropriately.

Most children exhibit some of these symptoms at times but if a child consistently displays the above actions, testing may be suggested. Parents and the teacher will be given a report of the findings with suggested educational accommodations. Once diagnosed, the child is entitled to receive some help from local public schools. Catholic schools have sought that assistance and have been very willing to partner with the local public school using whatever assistance might be offered.

All of the Catholic schools have sought to implement programs to work with at risk students. Most have counselors or a resource teacher. These persons work with the classroom teachers to tailor instruction to the needs of the child. Although some teachers are better at dealing with children who have disabilities, all are encouraged to do their best and seek assistance to implement suggested accommodations. Teacher aides and the other students in the classroom can also be of assistance while

growing in tolerance and understanding of all types of persons. Every child benefits from the efforts of the educator to meet individual needs.

Teaching to students' interests automatically facilitates differentiated instruction (instruction which meets individual needs and learning styles). The process of encouraging authentic questions facilitates decision making, engaging the executive functions of the brain: activating for work (organizing and prioritizing), focus, effort, emotion (managing frustration), memory, and self-regulating action. These are the same qualities which are affected by ADHD and many learning disabilities. It is the teacher's role to create an accepting climate where students will become involved and be guided, while feeling cherished. The key is to respect the student and questions s/he may ask.

With research, the development of brain theories and better ways of diagnosing student learning disabilities, the teacher has experienced a changing role. This role is a greater challenge but can bring about great strides in the child's development. Maintaining a class of relaxed alertness will facilitate student confidence, competence, and motivation.

None of this is easy, especially when a child interferes with the learning of the majority of the class. Teachers can become impatient and students can feel frustration and experience a sense of being treated unfairly. The others may also copy some of the behavior of an ADD child in hopes of getting attention or just because they feel drawn to step out of the teacher's expectations. Adjusting to dealing with the varied student population in a room can be a lesson for life,

Students may be grouped with complimentary skills. The strengths of one can compensate for the weaknesses of another, causing all to feel proud when the task is accomplished. Others may be grouped with compatible strengths and weaknesses to build up the strengths.

An observant teacher will notice that every child learns in a different way. Howard Gardner lists the multiple intelligences as follows:

- linguistic- ability to understand and use spoken and written communication,
- logical-mathematical- ability to understand and use logic and numerical symbols,
- musical- ability to understand and use such concepts as rhythm, pitch, melody and harmony,
- spatial- ability to orient and manipulate three-dimensional space,
- bodily-kinesthetic- ability to coordinate physical movement,
- naturalistic- ability to distinguish and categorize objects,
- interpersonal- ability to understand and interact well with other people,
- intrapersonal- ability to understand and use one's thoughts, feelings, preferences, and interests,
- existential- ability to contemplate phenomena or questions beyond sensory data

If the teacher offers rich experiences, opening avenues to a variety of the intelligences, each student will become engaged and the multiple intelligences will work together, in some cases interfering with another but mostly compensating or enhancing others. In the end, inclusion is an enriching challenge to which our Catholic schools remain committed.