



Building an Inclusive Classroom Teacher Toolkit

Presented by Parris Consulting

Parris

WHY BUILD INCLUSION IN THE CLASSROOM?

Creating inclusion in the classroom is one of the most important gifts we can give young learners. When students experience and embrace diversity in class, that sets the template for how they'll live and function in the world as adults.

Kids do best when they see a variety of cultural backgrounds reflected. And importantly, they need to see *themselves* within that diversity. They benefit when they see teachers and administrators who are like themselves, when they're exposed to learning materials that feature kids who are like them, and when those materials are presented as worthwhile and valuable to the entire class.



WHAT DOES AN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM LOOK LIKE?

- ✓ **Supportive** – everyone can participate and learn, regardless of difference; everyone is included.
- ✓ **Respectful** – all cultures, ethnicities, gender identities, abilities and experiences are respected.
- ✓ **Community-based** – reflective of where the kids come from and how they've grown up.
- ✓ **Human** – teachers take the time to get to know their students as people.
- ✓ **Safe** – kids feel welcome to try new things, make mistakes and be vulnerable in an environment where there is no judgment.
- ✓ **Informed** – teachers use a variety of methods, such as surveys, to learn how they can best support students' learning.
- ✓ **Equitable** – teachers use an equity and social justice lens.
- ✓ **Relevant** – class materials and books resonate with the students because they reflect who they are and where they live.
- ✓ **Responsive** – teachers respond to students' needs, treating them as individuals with unique differences.
- ✓ **Proactive** – teachers reach out to kids and their families to find out what's going on in their lives and provide support when needed.
- ✓ **Participatory** – all kids get to participate, not just the most keen or outgoing, and teachers find ways to engage those who are shy or reluctant.
- ✓ **Inventive** – teachers find innovative ways to reach all students and give them a sense of belonging.
- ✓ **Celebratory** – teachers incorporate cultural celebrations and practices from kids' lives into learning, allowing them to become cultural ambassadors.
- ✓ **Strengths-based** – every student has unique strengths and weaknesses; teachers help them further develop the things they're good at and encourage them to build on areas that need more support.
- ✓ **Growth mindset** – everyone makes mistakes, including teachers – it's how we learn and grow.
- ✓ **Fun!** When everyone feels a sense of belonging, the classroom is joyful and fun.

HOW CAN TEACHERS MAKE CLASSES MORE INCLUSIVE?

Inclusive classrooms are all about creating a supportive environment where everyone can participate and learn, regardless of difference.

Inclusive classrooms are responsive to kids' needs. Some learners need extra time to do their work; some learners seek additional challenges; some learners have difficulty paying attention; and some are anxious about being there in the first place.

In addition to respecting these different ways that children encounter school, inclusive classrooms demonstrate respect for all cultures, ethnicities, gender identities, abilities, and lived experience. Teachers who practise inclusivity take a community-based approach that considers the lives kids lead outside of school—what their families are like, how much exposure they've had to other perspectives and ideas, and whether they've had opportunities to travel and experience other places.

Some educators use surveys to help them get a handle on the many kids they'll be teaching. This is an expedient way to learn about students' learning styles, personalities, social/emotional needs and special learning needs.

In recent years there has been a rise in the number of kids who identify as non-binary, gender fluid, or a different gender from the one they were born with. Students may be reluctant to speak up about their transition in class, and teachers may not know whether to ask or how to ask appropriately about their status. A survey provides a safe way for kids to indicate their name and pronoun preferences.

Sample survey questions for students and their parents

- What cultural resources would they like to be included in the class?
- What can help them feel safe trying new things?
- What will help them learn best?
- What will help them be successful?
- What do teachers need to know about them to support their learning?
- What is the best way to communicate throughout the year?
- What pronouns do they want to use?

TEACHER TOOLS FOR INCLUSION IN THE CLASSROOM



MENTORSHIP

Teachers can leverage relationships in class by identifying mentors and suggesting mentor/mentee groupings. Students have unique qualities to offer—for example, a student learning English for the first time could be paired with a friendly bilingual student.



CALLING STICKS

Some kids are reluctant to speak up in class. They remain silent while others chime in. Calling sticks are a great way to give everyone an equal shot to participate. They also keep students on their toes and help teachers with classroom management.



ONLINE NAME GENERATOR

A higher-tech version of calling sticks, an online name generator allows teachers to load student names into a spinnable wheel that they can use to select random students to answer questions or participate in discussion.



SURVEY

At the start of class in September, many teachers survey their students and their parents to find out how they learn best, what their strengths and weaknesses are, and how they can best be supported to succeed. Follow-up surveys can be administered throughout the year.



BOOKS

There are some great books out there, and many include tools teachers can use to promote inclusion in the classroom.

- *Universal Design Daily: 365 Ways to Teach, Support, & Challenge All Learners* by Paula Kluth.
- *Autism Spectrum Disorder in the Inclusive Classroom: How to Reach & Teach Students with ASD* by Barbara Boroson.
- *Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching and Learning – Classroom Practices for Student Success, Grades K–12* by Sharroky Hollie.

Looking for more ideas to make your classroom more inclusive? [Parris Consulting](https://www.parrisconsulting.ca) has worked with organizations across North America to build their diversity & inclusion profiles. We work with coaches and educators one-on-one or in groups. We're passionate about helping you succeed. **Get in touch!**