

# The Cost of Retrofitting: Designing for everyone from the start

By Dr. Shelley Moore

Creating inclusive education for students with disabilities means carefully planning learning experiences that benefit all students. This is similar to how buildings are designed: both need thoughtful planning to be accessible and functional for everyone.

In Dr. Shelley Moore's video "The Cost of Retrofitting," she discusses the challenges of modifying existing systems to make them inclusive. Changing an educational space after it's built, like adding elevators to an already constructed building, can be expensive and may not fully solve the issues. Instead, we should design educational systems to be flexible and inclusive from the very beginning.

## **Building Inclusive Education**

To create an inclusive educational setting, we can think of it like constructing a building, which involves community engagement, planning, design, materials, building, and maintenance.

## **Community Engagement: Positive Attitudes and Understanding**

A supportive community, especially among teachers, is crucial for successful inclusion in K-12 education. Research shows that when teachers have positive experiences with students with disabilities, they are more likely to adopt inclusive teaching strategies. Professional development can help teachers feel more confident and effective in inclusive settings.

Involving families in the process is also vital. When schools engage with families, they create partnerships that help implement inclusive practices. Family involvement leads to better outcomes for students because parents can share their insights, contributing to a deeper understanding of their children's needs.

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## **Planning: Understanding Learners**

Just as architects consider the purpose of a building, educators must understand their students' diverse needs. Responsive learning experiences that adapt to individual needs improve engagement and achievement for all students. This phase is about recognizing strengths rather than just focusing on difficulties, leading to a more productive learning environment.

## **Design: Access and Removing Barriers**

Designing for inclusion is essential for supporting a diverse group of students. Curricula designed with inclusion in mind not only promote academic success but also create a sense of belonging. Frameworks like Backwards Design and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) help ensure that educational practices accommodate various learning styles.

Backwards Design encourages teachers to define learning goals before choosing teaching methods, ensuring that lessons meet diverse student needs. UDL emphasizes flexibility in teaching approaches, providing multiple ways for students to engage, learn, and express what they know.

## **Materials: Supporting Collaboration**

To create an inclusive educational environment, resources must reflect inclusive principles. Ineffective practices, like using one-on-one assistants or segregated programs, can isolate students. Instead, schools should use research-based resources that support collaborative planning among educators, which enhances the educational experience for everyone.



## **Building: Centering Student Voices**

Educators play a key role in shaping their students' learning experiences. By listening to students and encouraging them to express their strengths and needs, teachers can tailor their instruction to better meet diverse learning requirements. This approach empowers students, making them active participants in their education.

## **Maintenance: Ongoing Professional Learning**

Just like buildings need regular maintenance, inclusive practices require continuous reflection and updates. Ongoing professional development helps educators stay informed about new strategies to support diverse student needs. Preparing future teachers to support students with disabilities is crucial for effective inclusive education.

## **Conclusion**

Designing inclusive educational experiences is like building a well-planned structure: it requires careful thought, teamwork, and commitment over time. By focusing on inclusivity from the start, we can create environments that support students with disabilities and enhance the educational journey for all learners.



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