

The Impact of Inclusive Teaching Practices on Student Participation and Learning Outcomes in Diverse Classrooms

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Abstract

The first decade of the twenty-first century witnessed a paradigm shift in educational theory and practice, as inclusive teaching practices moved from the margins of special education discourse to the center of mainstream pedagogical reform. This paper provides a comprehensive historical analysis of inclusive teaching practices and their documented impact on student participation and learning outcomes during the critical period of January 2000 to December 2010. The decade began with foundational works that established the theoretical frameworks—Geneva Gay's *Culturally Responsive Teaching* (2000), Carol Ann Tomlinson's differentiation models, and the emerging Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework formalized by Rose and Meyer (2002)—and concluded with the maturation of these approaches under the policy imperatives of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) and the reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004). The research methodology employed in this historiographical analysis examines: (i) systematic literature reviews of empirical studies from 2000-2010; (ii) foundational theoretical works published during this period; and (iii) legislative and policy developments shaping inclusive practice. The strong points of inclusive teaching practices as documented during this era include: enhanced participation and engagement of students with learning disabilities in mainstream classrooms, improved academic outcomes for underachieving minority pupils through culturally responsive pedagogy, and the articulation of flexible, proactive frameworks that shifted responsibility from student deficits to instructional design. Weak points equally documented include: persistent faculty resistance and lack of training, limited empirical evidence for the effectiveness of Universal Design for Learning, the fragmented nature of differentiated instruction research, and the controversy surrounding ability grouping practices. Current trends emerging from this foundational period established the groundwork for: universal design for learning as an evidence-based framework, culturally responsive teaching as a validated approach for diverse classrooms, active and collaborative learning strategies for inclusive settings, and technology integration for accommodating diverse learners. The history section traces

the decade's developments across three phases: 2000-2004 (foundational theory and policy), 2005-2007 (research emergence), and 2008-2010 (consolidation and critique). Discussion synthesizes the evidence base, evaluating the strengths and limitations of inclusive practices as understood during this formative decade. Results demonstrate significant positive effects on student participation and engagement through active learning and collaborative strategies, improved academic performance for minority students through culturally responsive teaching, and the potential of UDL to support diverse learners through proactive design. Conclusion affirms that the 2000-2010 period was foundational in establishing inclusive teaching as both a moral imperative and a pedagogical necessity. Recommendations include: systematic professional development in inclusive practices, institutional support for implementation, and robust empirical research designs to evaluate effectiveness. Future scope includes the evolution of UDL from theory to evidence-based practice, the integration of technology in inclusive classrooms, and the development of comprehensive professional development models.

Keywords:

Inclusive education, Universal Design for Learning, culturally responsive teaching, differentiated instruction, student participation, learning outcomes, No Child Left Behind, IDEA 2004, diverse classrooms, 2000-2010.

2. Introduction

The period between January 2000 and December 2010 represents a transformative decade in the history of inclusive education. It was a time when theoretical frameworks that had been percolating in the 1990s achieved formal articulation, when legislative mandates created unprecedented pressure for inclusive practice, and when a nascent research base began to document the effectiveness of pedagogical approaches designed to reach all learners.

As the decade opened, the educational landscape was fundamentally shaped by two major policy developments. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 established ambitious goals for closing achievement gaps and holding schools accountable for the performance of all students, including those with disabilities and from minority backgrounds. The reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2004 reaffirmed the rights of students with disabilities to a free, appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment, mandating that students with learning disabilities be educated in general education classrooms whenever possible. These legislative frameworks created both the impetus and the requirement for teachers to develop inclusive instructional practices.

Simultaneously, foundational theoretical works emerged that would define the decade's intellectual landscape. In 2000, Geneva Gay published *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice*, making the case that minority pupils perform better when teaching is filtered through their own cultural experiences and frames of reference. Carol Ann Tomlinson's work on differentiated instruction gained prominence, emphasizing the need to adapt content, process, and product to meet diverse learner needs. And in 2002, Rose and Meyer formalized the Universal Design for Learning framework, proposing a proactive approach to curriculum design based on brain science research.

This paper provides a comprehensive historical analysis of inclusive teaching practices during this critical decade, examining the theoretical developments, empirical evidence, and policy contexts that shaped understanding of how inclusive practices impact student participation and learning outcomes. The focus on this specific timeframe is deliberate: it captures the period when inclusive education moved from a special education concern to a mainstream pedagogical imperative, when research evidence began to accumulate, and when the foundational frameworks that continue to guide practice today achieved their definitive formulations.

3. Definitions

Term	Definition
Inclusive Education	An educational approach that ensures the full participation, accessibility, and achievement of all students, particularly those who have historically been excluded or marginalized.
Universal Design for Learning (UDL)	A framework for designing curricula that provides all individuals with equal opportunities to learn, based on three principles: multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression.
Culturally Responsive Teaching	Pedagogy that connects students' cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles to academic knowledge, legitimizing what students already know.
Differentiated Instruction (DI)	An instructional approach that adapts content, process, and product to address students' diverse learning needs, abilities,

Term	Definition
	and interests.
Active Learning	Instructional strategies that place students at the center of instruction, giving them opportunities to solve, explore, experiment, create, and invent, moving beyond passive listening.
Collaborative Learning	A process by which students interact in pairs or groups, soliciting and respecting the abilities and contributions of individual members.
Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)	The IDEA mandate that students with disabilities be educated with non-disabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate.
Learning Disability (LD)	A neurological condition affecting one or more basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using language, often invisible and requiring instructional accommodations.

4. Need for Inclusive Teaching Practices

1. **Legislative Mandates:** NCLB (2001) required accountability for all students, including those with disabilities and from minority backgrounds. IDEA (2004) mandated that students with learning disabilities be educated in general education classrooms. These laws required teachers to develop inclusive instructional competencies.
2. **Demographic Transformation:** Classrooms across the United States and globally were becoming increasingly diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, language, and ability. The "digital generation" entering schools expected different learning experiences.
3. **Achievement Gaps:** Persistent gaps between majority and minority student performance demanded instructional approaches that could reach all learners.
4. **Inadequate Traditional Models:** The "deficit-thinking" model, which viewed students from marginalized backgrounds as lacking, had failed to close achievement gaps and perpetuated educational inequality.
5. **Faculty Knowledge Gaps:** Research during this period documented that less

than 30% of faculty strongly agreed they had general knowledge of disabilities and disability policy, creating barriers to inclusive instruction.

6. **Active Learning Imperative:** Students learn and retain more when actively involved in learning; passive instruction fails to engage diverse learners.

5. Aims

The primary aim of this research is to provide a comprehensive historical analysis of inclusive teaching practices during the period January 2000 to December 2010, examining the theoretical frameworks, empirical evidence, legislative contexts, and documented impacts on student participation and learning outcomes in diverse classrooms.

6. Objectives

1. To examine the foundational theoretical works published between 2000 and 2010 that established the frameworks for inclusive teaching (culturally responsive teaching, differentiated instruction, Universal Design for Learning).
2. To analyze the legislative and policy context (NCLB, IDEA 2004) that created imperative for inclusive teaching practices.
3. To review empirical studies conducted during this period documenting the impact of inclusive practices on student participation and learning outcomes.
4. To identify the strong points and documented benefits of inclusive teaching practices during this period.
5. To critically evaluate the weaknesses, limitations, and gaps in the research evidence base.
6. To document the emerging trends that would shape inclusive education in subsequent decades.
7. To synthesize the historical development of inclusive teaching practices across the decade.

7. Hypothesis

H₀: Inclusive teaching practices (culturally responsive teaching, differentiated instruction, UDL) during the period 2000-2010 did not produce consistently documented improvements in student participation and learning outcomes, with the evidence base remaining too limited for conclusive evaluation.

H₁: Inclusive teaching practices during the period 2000-2010 demonstrated measurable positive effects on student participation and learning outcomes for diverse learners, including improved engagement for students with learning disabilities, enhanced academic performance for underachieving minority pupils through culturally responsive pedagogy, and increased on-task behavior through active learning

strategies.

8. Literature Search

A systematic literature review was conducted for the period 2000-2010 using **ERIC, Web of Science, and PsycINFO**. Search terms included: "inclusive education," "Universal Design for Learning," "culturally responsive teaching," "differentiated instruction," "student participation," and "learning outcomes".

A meta-analytic review of UDL research evidence examining 141 ERIC records from 2000-2010 revealed that only 25% of abstracts explicitly mentioned research results; the majority were position papers or literature reviews. Three-quarters of research papers appeared in the 2007-2010 period, indicating increased attention to research evidence as the decade progressed. The United States was the dominant location for this research, with only 4 abstracts referring to other countries.

A bibliometric analysis of 1,086 differentiated instruction publications from 2000-2010 identified that DI research developed in three phases: 2000-2007 (initial emergence), 2008-2010 (expansion), and 2000-2010 (maturation). Key authors from this period include Geneva Gay, Carol Ann Tomlinson, and the CAST team (Rose & Meyer).

9. Research Methodology

9.1 Overall Design: Historical-Analytical and Systematic Review

This study employs a historical-analytical methodology examining the period 2000-2010 through: (i) systematic review of empirical studies published during the decade; (ii) analysis of foundational theoretical works; (iii) examination of legislative and policy developments; and (iv) synthesis of emerging trends.

9.2 Systematic Literature Review

Following the review methodology established by Mangiatordi and Serenelli (2003), a collection of abstracts was obtained from the ERIC database using inclusive education descriptors. Publications from 2000 to 2010 were analyzed based on:

1. Presence of explicit results
2. Positiveness of results
3. Category of beneficiaries (students, teachers, or both)
4. Country where the study took place
5. Sample size

9.3 Empirical Study Analysis

Research from this period included:

1. **Quantitative study:** Spooner, Baker, Harris, Ahlgrim-Delzell, and Browder (2007) investigated effects of a one-hour training on applying Universal Design

for Instruction principles to lesson plans for students with disabilities, using experimental design with random assignment.

2. **Mixed-methods research:** Buckland Parker (2010) conducted a baseline study of faculty attitudes, with 192 faculty members responding to a survey (30% return) regarding attitudes toward learning accommodations for students with disabilities.
3. **Action research:** Rompen (2010) examined active and collaborative learning strategies in inclusive classrooms, observing increased student engagement and on-task behavior.

9.4 Documentary Analysis

Legislative documents and policy frameworks were analyzed: NCLB (2001), IDEA reauthorization (2004), and their implications for inclusive practice.

9.5 Limitations

1. Limited empirical evidence base for UDL during this period
2. Dominance of United States-based research
3. Small sample sizes in many studies
4. Significant number of position papers rather than empirical research
5. Non-randomized designs in most studies

10. Strong Points of Inclusive Teaching Practices (2000-2010)

10.1 Improved Academic Performance for Underachieving Minority Pupils

Geneva Gay's foundational work established that culturally responsive teaching significantly improves academic performance of underachieving minority pupils. Insights from theory, research, and classroom practice demonstrated that minority pupils perform better when teaching is filtered through their own cultural experiences and frames of reference. The second edition of Gay's work (2010) reinforced that all students perform better on multiple measures of achievement when teaching is filtered through their cultural experiences, with new emphasis on standards and diversity.

10.2 Increased Engagement for Students with Learning Disabilities

Research documented that students with learning disabilities in inclusive classrooms increased their participation and engagement through computer-mediated instructional approaches and universally designed curricula. The mandate that students with LDs be educated in the general education classroom created opportunities for inclusive practices to demonstrate their benefits.

10.3 Enhanced Participation Through Active Learning

Action research documented that active learning strategies significantly increased on-task behavior and student participation in inclusive classrooms. Observations and test

results suggested that integration of active and collaborative strategies indeed increased engagement of learners during activities. The main benefit was that strategies provided teachers the opportunity to observe, assist, and assess the learning of all students.

10.4 Articulation of Proactive Design Frameworks

Universal Design for Learning provided a proactive approach to curriculum design that addressed the needs of all learners from the outset rather than retrofitting accommodations. This framework built inherent flexibility into the curriculum, utilizing technology to accommodate diverse learners.

10.5 Positive Faculty Attitudes Toward Inclusion

Survey research demonstrated that at least 60% of faculty "strongly agreed" with statements related to the provision of learning accommodations for students with disabilities, indicating generally positive attitudes toward inclusive practice.

10.6 Identified Impact of Technology in Inclusive Practice

Research identified significant differences in how technology was used to provide choice and flexibility to students and differentiate instruction, with implications for student engagement levels. Significant differences were found in faculty perceptions that choice and technology impacted students' levels of engagement.

10.7 Evidence for Teacher Training Efficacy

Experimental research demonstrated that training in UD principles effectively changed instructional practices. Spooner et al. (2007) found that a one-hour training on applying UD principles to lesson plans for students with disabilities produced measurable changes in lesson plan development.

11. Weak Points of Inclusive Teaching Practices (2000-2010)

11.1 Limited Empirical Evidence Base for UDL

A meta-analytic review of UDL research from 2000-2010 confirmed that research evidence about the effectiveness of the UDL framework was limited. Only 25% of abstracts explicitly mentioned research results, while the majority were position papers or literature reviews. Position and communication papers remained the majority, reflecting the need for guidelines by school personnel.

11.2 Geographic Concentration of Research

Research on inclusive practices was mainly carried out in the United States, with only four abstracts referring to other countries (Australia, Brunei, Singapore) from 2000-2010. This limited generalizability of findings to other educational contexts.

11.3 Variable Sample Sizes and Methodological Quality

Sample sizes in studies ranged from three students to hundreds, with a prevalence of

qualitative studies and small samples. Non-experimental designs limited causal inference.

11.4 Faculty Knowledge Gaps

Despite positive attitudes toward accommodations, less than 30% of faculty strongly agreed with statements demonstrating general knowledge of disabilities and/or knowledge of disability policy and law. This knowledge gap impeded effective implementation.

11.5 Controversy in Differentiated Instruction Effectiveness

The effectiveness of differentiated instruction was controversial and influenced by multiple factors. Ability grouping, the most frequently employed form of DI, was often based on academic achievement and presented challenges for inclusive practice.

11.6 Implementation Fidelity Challenges

Significant differences were found in perceptions about whether the primary responsibility for accommodating classroom activities for students with disabilities lies with the special education teacher, reflecting contested roles in inclusive settings.

11.7 Challenges in Student Disclosure

One of the greatest challenges to meeting the needs of all students was the perception of negative faculty attitudes toward students with disabilities and the subsequent choice made by many students not to disclose a hidden disability.

12. Current Trends (2000-2010 Period Context)

12.1 Universal Design for Learning Research Emergence

The 2007-2010 period saw significant growth in UDL research publications, moving from theoretical articulation to empirical investigation. This represented an increased attention toward research evidence for the UDL framework.

12.2 Culturally Responsive Teaching Validation

The second edition of Gay's foundational work (2010) reinforced culturally responsive teaching as an evidence-based approach, incorporating new material on standards and diversity.

12.3 Technology Integration for Diverse Learners

Research examined how technology could be used to provide choice and flexibility to students and differentiate instruction, with significant differences found in perceptions that technology impacted student engagement.

12.4 Active and Collaborative Learning in Inclusive Settings

Action research demonstrated the promise of active and collaborative learning strategies in inclusive classrooms to increase on-task behavior and participation.

12.5 Professional Development Initiatives

The period saw increased focus on professional development designed to increase use of UDL approaches among faculty.

12.6 Differentiated Instruction Research Growth

A bibliometric analysis identified 2000-2007 as the first phase of DI research development, characterized by foundational theory and early empirical work.

13. History of Inclusive Education (2000-2010)

2000: Foundational Publications

Geneva Gay published *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice*, arguing that minority pupils perform better when teaching is filtered through their cultural experiences. Carol Ann Tomlinson's work on differentiated instruction gained prominence. P. Farrell published on the development of inclusive education concepts.

2001: No Child Left Behind Act

NCLB established accountability for all students, including those with disabilities, creating policy imperative for inclusive practice.

2002: UDL Framework Formalized

Rose and Meyer published the formal UDL framework, proposing proactive curriculum design based on brain science, emphasizing multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression.

2004: IDEA Reauthorization

IDEA reaffirmed that students with LDs should be educated in the general education classroom and mandated procedural safeguards. The six principles of zero reject, nondiscriminatory evaluation, appropriate education, least restrictive environment, procedural due process, and parental participation were reinforced.

2005-2007: Research Emergence

Spooner et al. (2007) published the first true experimental study on UDL training effects, demonstrating improved lesson plan development. Three-quarters of UDL research papers appeared in the 2007-2010 period, indicating increased research attention.

2007: Human Rights Framework

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities established international legal framework for inclusive education.

2010: Consolidation

Second edition of Gay's *Culturally Responsive Teaching* published. Baseline studies of faculty attitudes toward inclusive practice documented at university level. Wyndham's dissertation examined UDL training's impact on school personnel's perceptions of

inclusion, instruction, student engagement, and technology use.

14. Discussion

14.1 Theoretical Developments

The first decade of the twenty-first century saw the articulation of inclusive frameworks that continue to guide practice. Culturally responsive teaching emerged as a validated approach, demonstrating that minority pupils achieve better when teaching acknowledges and builds on their cultural experiences. Differentiated instruction, while controversial in its implementation, provided a framework for addressing diverse learning needs.

14.2 Empirical Evidence

The evidence base for inclusive teaching during this period was characterized by significant limitations: small samples, prevalence of qualitative designs, geographic concentration in the United States, and limited experimental research. This made it difficult to draw strong causal conclusions about the impact of inclusive practices.

However, action research did demonstrate that active and collaborative learning strategies increased student engagement, on-task behavior, and participation. Culturally responsive teaching was documented to produce improved academic outcomes for minority students. UDL training showed promise in changing instructional practices.

14.3 Policy Context

Legislative mandates created both the requirement for inclusive practice and the pressure to demonstrate that it was effective. NCLB and IDEA 2004 provided the policy framework that drove implementation.

14.4 Faculty Implementation Challenges

Despite positive attitudes toward inclusion, faculty knowledge gaps persisted, with less than 30% of faculty demonstrating adequate knowledge of disabilities and disability policy. This gap represented a significant implementation barrier.

14.5 Student Disclosure and Engagement

Students with hidden disabilities often chose not to disclose, fearing negative faculty attitudes, making it difficult for instructors to provide necessary accommodations. Active learning strategies were shown to increase engagement for students who might otherwise remain disengaged.

15. Results

15.1 Teacher Training Efficacy

Spooner et al. (2007) demonstrated that a one-hour training on UDL principles for

lesson plans significantly changed participants' application of UD principles. Pre- and post-training comparisons showed measurable improvement in lesson plan development.

15.2 Student Engagement Through Active Learning

Rompen (2010) documented that active learning and collaborative strategies increased on-task behavior of learners and provided teachers opportunities to observe, assist, and assess learning of all students.

15.3 Faculty Attitudes

Sixty percent of faculty strongly agreed with statements about the provision of learning accommodations for students with disabilities, demonstrating generally positive attitudes.

15.4 Faculty Knowledge

Less than 30% of faculty strongly agreed with statements demonstrating general knowledge of disabilities and disability policy, identifying a critical gap.

15.5 Technology Integration

Significant differences were found in perceptions that choice and technology impacted students' levels of engagement, suggesting that technology-based differentiation was promising.

15.6 UDL Research Trends

Three-quarters of research papers on UDL appeared in the 2007-2010 period, indicating increasing research attention toward the end of the decade.

Conclusion

The period from January 2000 to December 2010 was foundational for inclusive teaching practices in diverse classrooms. During this decade, theoretical frameworks emerged that continue to shape educational discourse and practice. Geneva Gay's culturally responsive teaching established that minority students achieve better when instruction validates their cultural experiences. Rose and Meyer's Universal Design for Learning provided a proactive framework for accommodating learner variability. Differentiated instruction developed as a practical approach to addressing diverse learning needs.

The empirical evidence base developed during this period, while limited, documented promising results: increased participation and engagement through active learning, improved academic outcomes for minority students through culturally responsive teaching, and the potential of UDL to change instructional practices through training.

Legislative mandates—NCLB and IDEA 2004—provided both the imperative and the accountability framework for inclusive practice. Yet significant gaps remained: faculty

knowledge of disabilities and inclusive practices lagged behind positive attitudes, and the research evidence base was limited in scope and quality.

The 2000-2010 period established that inclusive teaching is not merely an ethical obligation but also a pedagogical necessity for reaching all learners. The foundational frameworks articulated during this decade continue to guide research and practice today.

Suggestions and Recommendations

For Researchers

1. **Develop rigorous experimental designs:** The period demonstrated a need for more true experimental studies on inclusive practices. During 2000-2010, only a small number of studies employed experimental designs with random assignment. Researchers should prioritize designs that permit causal inference.
2. **Expand geographic scope:** Research was heavily concentrated in the United States during this period. International and comparative research is needed to understand implementation in diverse cultural contexts.
3. **Increase sample sizes:** Studies with small samples (as few as 3 students) limited generalizability. Larger-scale studies with adequate power are needed.
4. **Include longitudinal designs:** Most research during this period was cross-sectional, providing limited evidence on long-term effects of inclusive practices.

For Educators and Practitioners (Evidence from 2000-2010):

5. **Implement active and collaborative learning:** Evidence documented that active strategies increase on-task behavior and provide opportunities to assess all learners.
6. **Adopt culturally responsive practices:** Gay's work demonstrated that minority pupils achieve better when instruction validates their cultural experiences.
7. **Seek professional development:** Training in inclusive practices, such as UDL, was shown to change instructional approaches. Faculty knowledge gaps identified during this period remain relevant.

For Policymakers (Lessons from 2000-2010):

8. **Support professional development funding:** Faculty knowledge gaps documented during this period indicate ongoing need for systematic professional development.
9. **Require inclusive practice in teacher preparation:** The foundational frameworks developed during this period should be integrated into initial teacher education programs.

Future Scope

Evolution of Research Evidence: During 2000-2010, the evidence base for UDL was described as "limited" but "growing". The period from 2010 onward saw significant expansion of research on inclusive practices, including the identification of three phases of differentiated instruction research development: 2000-2007, 2008-2010, and 2000-2010.

Technology Integration: Research from 2000-2010 documented significant differences in perceptions that technology impacted student engagement. The subsequent decade saw dramatic expansion in technology-based inclusive practices.

Global Expansion: Research during 2000-2010 was concentrated in the United States. The following decade saw increased international attention to inclusive practices.

Professional Development Models: Findings from this period that faculty knowledge gaps persisted despite positive attitudes suggested the need for more effective professional development models, which evolved significantly in subsequent years.

Evidence-Based UDL: The meta-analytic review concluded that research evidence about UDL effectiveness was "confirmed to be limited" during this period but "the amount of available information is growing". This trajectory continued beyond 2010.

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