

AN INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY TO MEET THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS...AND TEACHERS



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When it comes to meeting the diverse needs of students and promoting the success of as many as possible, the college network reflects a relative societal consensus on the need to foster equal opportunity. This wish for inclusion is an outgrowth of humanist values that are essential for living together, giving meaning to our collective actions, and fulfilling the educational mission of our colleges. Teachers, as the key players in fulfilling this mission, welcome heterogeneous classrooms that include anxious, autistic, dyslexic, allophone, Aboriginal, gifted, back-to-school, mentally challenged, and simply unmotivated students. Given their desire to adequately support all their students, teachers sometimes have a sense of powerlessness or exhaustion when faced with this seemingly gargantuan task. The situation is compounded by frequent confusion between the concepts of inclusion and integration, and a lack of knowledge about issues relating to accommodations, college admission requirements, and the achievement of standards. All of these elements contribute to a sense of demoralization among teachers, and can sometimes influence their instructional choices, which do not always prove realistic in such a context. Nevertheless, these elements must be addressed, given that they shape the scope of actions teachers take in the classroom.

This article begins with an overview of relevant concepts before presenting an educational perspective that helps clarify the role of the teacher as a figure that complements other professionals in our colleges. The paper ends with a discussion of the tools teachers have at their disposal to nurture an inclusive pedagogy, that help them meet the needs of their students as well as their own.

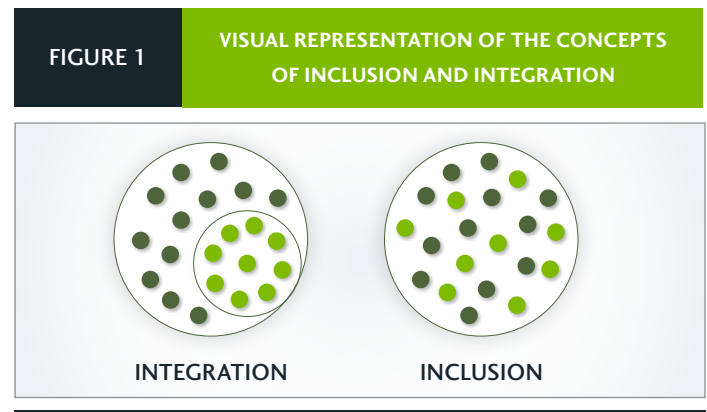
WHAT EXACTLY ARE INTEGRATION AND INCLUSION?

The distinction between integration and inclusion (and their respective realities) is sometimes ambiguous, and closely bound up with the various approaches that have been put in place to respond to the gradual influx of students with disabilities in schools over the past 50 years. The conceptual vagueness surrounding the two is often a barrier to understanding teachers' potential role with regards to fostering inclusion within their teaching context with a view to supporting all students in their learning.

Integration means providing support to students with special needs, outside the usual learning context, to enable them to continue taking and to meet the requirements of a regular course.¹ This entails individual accommodation measures tailored to each person (determined by college professionals), as well as assistance measures outside the classroom (via a help centre, program success measures, etc.).

In contrast, **inclusion** means creating the conditions that will meet a myriad of individual learning needs within the common educational context that all students share. Rather than, "considering students with disabilities as outsiders, an inclusive orientation invites teachers to view them as being connected to the group" (Grenier, 2008, p. 7, unofficial translated). Hence, inclusion promotes collective responses within a group in order to meet individual needs (Conseil supérieur

de l'éducation, 2017). This is essentially where the teacher's scope of action is located: in the use of simple but effective strategies that help further all students' learning, whatever their difficulties. **Figure 1** illustrates these two supportive approaches as they exist within our colleges.



* Source: Bruxelles-Integration, 2017.

¹ The definitions presented here are based on a review of definitions found in the literature (primarily in Rousseau [2015], Vienneau [2002], Conseil supérieur de l'Éducation [2017], etc.) as well as choices that take into account the realities of the college system and its associated practices. Inclusion within higher education is a relatively new field of research and has attracted relatively little explicit interest until recently. Most of the texts on the issue of inclusion discuss the primary and secondary levels within a context of mandatory schooling, hence the need to adapt the concepts.



COLLEGES' LEGAL OBLIGATIONS PERTAINING TO ACCOMMODATIONS

The various discourses in society today around the general concept of accommodation (religious, gender-related, etc.) do not always positively influence peoples' perception of accommodations in schools or their understanding of the pedagogical stance on inclusion. Whereas teachers believe that integration measures such as accommodations should guide their actions, the field of instructional possibilities related to inclusion remains obscure and is mistakenly associated with adjustment measures such as granting additional time to complete an exam.

Despite certain negative perceptions, accommodations come under a prescriptive legal framework: colleges are required to accommodate students who have a medical diagnosis and serious, persistent needs that require special measures. However, these accommodations do not affect teachers' scope of action per se:

"[Their role] in managing accommodations is limited to applying them; assigning accommodations is the job of professionals such as psychologists and special-needs instructors.... Hence, teachers' scope of action is not primarily in managing accommodations, but directly intervening in the educational environment within their own classrooms" (La Grenade & Trépanier, 2017, p. 5, unofficial translated).

ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS AND COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITIES RELATED TO INCLUSION

Given the challenges facing teachers who must teach students with sometimes very considerable needs, it is normal to question the admissions process. What was the basis for admitting such a student? Was it influenced by a wish to meet the institution's student-recruitment needs? It is important to recall here that all students are admitted on the basis of their academic record in accordance with the same admission rules, which are managed by regional admission services (in Montreal, Quebec City, and Saguenay–Lac-Saint-Jean), consistent with the College Education Regulations, ministry requirements, and the prerequisites of the college.² Medical diagnoses and special needs are not included in students' applications for admission. Hence, institutions have a duty to welcome the students who are admitted and to offer them the education

to which they are entitled under the college mission. While this might sometimes be a demanding context for teachers, we must take stock of students' strengths and difficulties when making educational choices to uphold inclusion.

Inclusion therefore gives precedence to collective responses within a group in order to meet individual needs.

MINISTRY SPECIFICATIONS AND THE REQUIRED STANDARDS APPLYING TO ALL STUDENTS

The ministry framework lays out a structure for students' education and teachers' work:

"The curriculum is an official Ministry publication and is standard in nature. It sets forth the targets and key requirements of an educational pathway, and, more specifically, the structured set of educational aims, goals, and standards" (MEQ, 2002, p. 9, unofficial translated).

Ministry specifications, just like the generic course outlines drawn up at each institution, therefore guide teachers in assessing the degree to which a student has mastered a competency. Accommodations, which primarily have to do with transversal or general skills (reading, language editing, notetaking, time management during an exam, etc.) as opposed to discipline-specific competencies, have no effect on the level students must reach by the end of a course or program (Phillion et al., 2016). For example, few targeted competencies include time-specific guidelines for completion or prescribe contexts for learning a competency (e.g., no notetaking allowed). Inclusion aims to make learning more accessible; it does not guarantee the success of every individual or entail lowering course requirements. The Conseil supérieur de l'éducation reminds us that inclusion:

"is not only compatible with a high-performing school system, but helps raise everyone up by promoting the development of each person's full potential, beyond the threshold for academic success" (2017, p. 123, unofficial translated).

² For details on admission requirements, see [www.sracq.qc.ca/admission/conditions-admission.aspx].



The idea is therefore not to smooth over difficulties in order to change the requirements, but rather to reflect, upstream, on ways to better meet them. Planning instruction, learning, and even assessment in close connection with ministry specifications enables teachers to avoid the excesses of 'success at all costs' or a 'cheap diploma', both of which raise concerns that students' education is being devalued.

THE CONFUSION OF ROLES RELATED TO INCLUSION

Between the ministry specifications that define learning targets, the legal requirements pertaining to accommodations, and the context of admissions, what 'wiggle room' do teachers have left? What is their role? In response to this question, Figure 2 maps out the scope of action available to teachers.

For teachers, the challenge is to effectively assume their scope of instructional action related to inclusion, to understand their role, and to be thoroughly familiar with the instructional tools available to them.

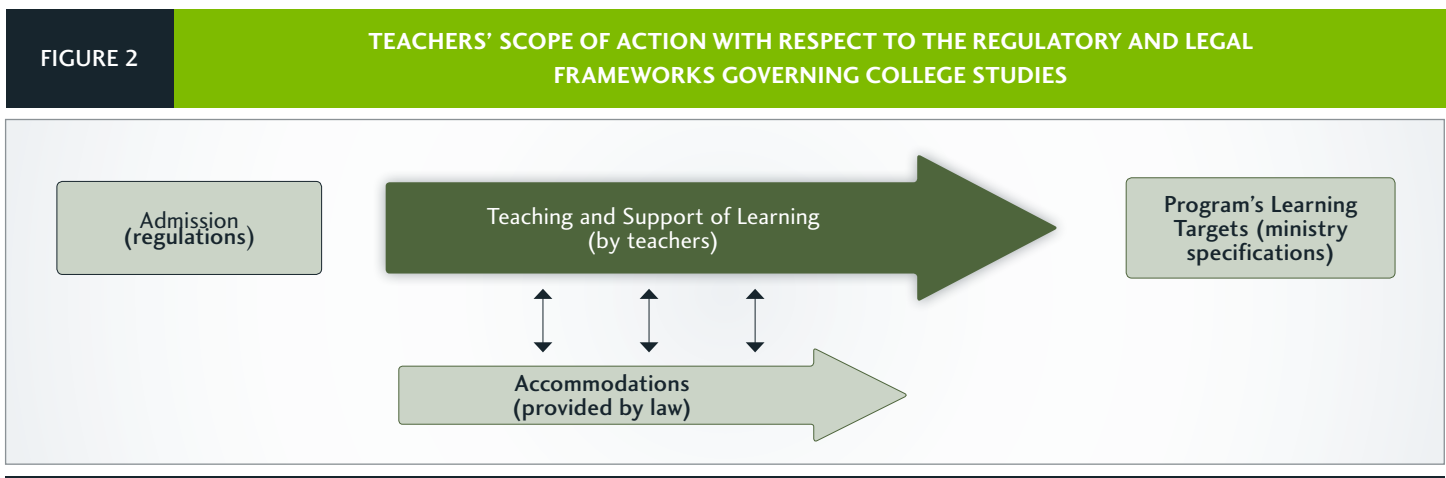
From time to time, teachers have been heard to say that you now need to be a specialist in a variety of learning disorders to be able to properly address the challenges posed by inclusion. This reading of the situation assumes that teachers' instructional tools are inadequate to meeting students' specific needs, or that they are not the key to doing so. Would teachers really need training in psychosocial interventions in order to teach classes

made up of students with such diversified profiles? The answer is no. Psychosocial and instructional approaches coexist in our colleges and are complementary. The nature and context of their intervention differs, and each, by its own approach, has a unique and essential contribution to make.

Assistance professionals in colleges (counsellors, psychologists, special-needs-services providers, special-education teachers, guidance counsellors, etc.) use psychosocial approaches to support college students in their academic role by taking account of all areas of their development. These interventions primarily take place outside the classroom during individual sessions. This type of support requires an advanced knowledge of learning disorders, an understanding of associated diagnoses, and expertise in helping relationships.

Does this mean that teachers should refer their students to support resources outside their class to help resolve certain issues, so they can return to the classroom more functional and 'up to level'? This way of seeing things negates the significant role the teacher can play in the educational response to students' special needs, specifically when difficulties arise during learning.

Teachers' actions are geared toward supporting students in their learning so that they develop the anticipated competencies, which the teacher will assess in accordance with the expected level of requirement. To this end, teachers can use a variety of instructional strategies in the classroom to promote inclusion, and which take into account, among other things, the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (CRISPESH, 2019). The idea is to apply, "collective responses that help meet individual needs" (CSE, p. 123, unofficial translated).





The confusion of roles – whether to intervene in accordance with psychosocial or instructional parameters – can lead to several pitfalls, namely teachers feeling overwhelmed by their work, experiencing burnout, or grappling with ethical issues,³ not to mention the risks of intervention errors or potential union-related problems related to respecting stakeholders' differing areas of expertise.⁴ Hence, it is important to highlight that teachers are the experts when it comes to the classroom and educational success (from an inclusion perspective), and that other education professionals work differently, using other means and in other contexts, to support students (from an integration perspective).

In a college, collaboration between everyone is essential and is facilitated by a mutual understanding of each other's role.

For the teacher, the challenge is to effectively assume their scope of instructional action regarding inclusion, to understand their role, and to master the educational tools available to them. As the subject-matter experts, college teachers play the role of instructional practitioners on an everyday basis. As they develop professionally and accumulate experience with students, they are called upon to enrich, better pinpoint, and better understand their tools. The pedagogical perspective of inclusion brings teachers to observe and explore all the potential courses of action that they have at their disposal.

Table 1 sums up the differences between instructional approaches and psychosocial approaches aimed at supporting students.

| INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACHES | PSYCHOSOCIAL-INTERVENTION APPROACHES ⁵ |
|---|---|
| Teacher (inside + outside the classroom) | Guidance counsellor, psychotherapist/psychology, counsellor, special-needs-services providers, special-education technicians, etc. (outside the classroom) |
| Social model / inclusion | Medical model / integration |
| Educational relationship: intervention with a group (primarily) | Helping relationship: individual intervention |
| Instructional tools applied in an educational setting (learning strategies, instructional strategies, etc.) | Tools specific to helping relationships |
| Support with developing and assessing discipline-specific competencies | Support of students in their academic role |
| Response to school learning needs | Individual follow-up on all aspects of the person |

THE TEACHER'S SCOPE OF ACTION: BROADER THAN IT SEEMS

To address the challenges posed by the inclusion of students with diverse needs and profiles, teachers have many instructional tools available to them. When properly utilized, these tools can positively affect the quality of learning and the pedagogical relationship. The various tools covering the main aspects of the teacher's scope of practice fall under six instructional areas (see **Table 2**).

³ How should the teacher evaluate a student they have worked with in a manner resembling a helping relationship? How should they set limits with students exhibiting multiple issues that can consume all their energy?

⁴ Some professional bodies have restricted activities.

⁵ Guidance counsellor, psychologist, psychotherapist, counselor, special-needs-services providers, special-education technician, etc.



TABLE 2 TEACHER'S SCOPE OF ACTION REGARDING INCLUSION, IN SIX INSTRUCTIONAL AREAS

| | |
|--|---|
| 1 | <p>PLANNING THE LEARNING OBJECTS Specifications, contents, skills, competencies, knowledge, expertise, personal skills, etc.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determining the right taxonomic level of instructional activities in light of the competencies and the nature of the knowledge to be learned • Taking into account the progression of learning within a sequence of educational activities | |
| <p>Clearly defined expectations integrated gradually in the plan to foster students' attention, sense of competence, and cognitive engagement in their tasks.</p> | <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A well-defined standard expected to be achieved by the end of the course that is also announced to the students • A learning scenario consistent with the nature of the knowledge to be learned • Formative assessments planned to ensure gradual learning |
| 2 | <p>TEACHING LEARNING STRATEGIES Actions taken by the students to achieve the desired learning objective</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving students the tools they need to learn autonomously • Focusing on cognitive strategies that are suitable for the type of knowledge to be learned and that spark reflective questioning • Incorporating learning strategies into all instructional activities (most effective when used in 'authentic' situations) | |
| <p>Learning strategies promote attention, memory and information retention, abstract thinking, a sense of competence, autonomy, and better learning.</p> | <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concept maps or tables to help organize information • Review techniques to promote memorization • Reading and self-correction strategies • Note-taking strategies • Self-reflection on student learning strategies |
| 3 | <p>DETERMINING THE INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES Education methods used by the teacher to support the desired learning objective</p> |
| <p>Promoting a variety of instructional strategies (in accordance with the nature of the knowledge to be developed, discipline-specific nuances, and the progression of learning), in which students are cognitively active and the teacher closely supports learning and varies their teaching styles.</p> | |
| <p>Using a variety of instructional strategies helps meet a variety of needs (in terms of learning pace, feedback, and flexibility). When used soundly according to the nature of the knowledge to be learned, these strategies are conducive to lasting learning. Suitable strategies stimulate students' cognitive engagement, facilitate attention, support a sense of competence, and help learners feel secure.</p> | <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flipped classroom • Project-based approach • Case study • Reading circle • Debate • Explicit teaching and modelling • Lecturing with cognitive breaks to allow students to be active (summarizing, finding solutions, etc.) |



TABLE 2 TEACHER'S SCOPE OF ACTION REGARDING INCLUSION, IN SIX INSTRUCTIONAL AREAS (SUITE)

| | |
|--|---|
| 4 | <p style="text-align: center;">DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING ASSESSMENT MEASURES Assessment sequence, instructions, and method management</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determining a scenario of formative and summative assessments that follows the progression of learning • Giving clear instructions in keeping with the nature of the competencies to be developed and that clarify the task to be completed and its associated criteria • Occasionally proposing choices regarding the means of assessment | <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formative assessment that encourages student self-reflection • Written instructions that provide a structure and support • A variety of assessment formats (role-playing, portfolio, integrative project, etc.) • Rubrics presented to students ahead of time (and even used for formative assessment) • Assessment scenario that spans the entire term |
| 5 | <p style="text-align: center;">SUPPORT OF LEARNING Teaching transversal and methodological competencies, supporting students in their academic role, directly assisting students inside and outside the classroom, and nurturing the pedagogical relationship</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offering tools that help develop autonomy (time and stress management, and tools for organizing learning) • Regularly following up on students' difficulties and varying follow-up means • Structuring and supporting teamwork | <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study techniques • Work schedules • Reading and writing guides • Various means of following up with students (individually or in teams, online or offline, etc.). |
| 6 | <p style="text-align: center;">IN-CLASS Carrying out and leading planned instructional activities, and classroom and behaviour management</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing a classroom climate that is conducive to learning (ground rules and classroom management) • Creating a climate of trust with students (sense of security, emotional bond) • Planning appropriate learning sequences (in terms of length, course pacing, transitions, and the prevention of undesirable behaviours) | <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear teamwork rules (attitudes, roles, tasks) • Varied pacing of learning sequences • Microstrategies to keep students cognitively active (review techniques, summarizing, etc.) |



Generally, teaching and assessment strategies are the elements that come to most readily to mind when thinking of instructional tools for teachers. These components are certainly essential when reflecting on inclusion, but it is all too often forgotten that thoroughly appropriating the ministry specifications and planning for the standard of competencies to be mastered (first component), for example, are also important in course planning and can have an impact on inclusion. Assessing a fairly straightforward competency (memorizing, knowing, or naming facts, dates, and places, for example) as if it were a very complex competency (making choices according to the weight of evidence, exercising judgment, evaluating, and comparing, for example) can put a student in the position of being unprepared for or struggling to meet the level of requirement of a given assessment (Carrefour pédagogique, 2019). Likewise, a student can feel demotivated and less attentive if the challenge associated with the proposed learning activities is insufficient in relation to the specifications. Discussions among teachers in the same subject area or program can be important in clarifying these requirements, which must be explicitly communicated to students in a context of inclusion.

The same is true of all learning strategies, classroom-management strategies, and student support: each is an instrument to be explored in order to meet the specific needs that arise in terms of inclusion. The guidelines that the UDL proposes to promote inclusion (offering several means of action as well as expression, representation and engagement) tie in with the various instructional components presented in the table, primarily those dealing with assessment and teaching or learning strategies.

These instructional components are not recipes or infallible strategies that apply to all contexts (especially in certain assessment situations). Instead, they give teachers an array of choices that they can adapt to the demands of their teaching (cohort, group dynamics, nature of competencies, laboratory or internship context, more anxious or disorganized class profile, etc.). It is up to the teacher to exercise their professional judgment on the means to use according to the situation.

Embracing an inclusive approach ‘because you have to’ for the good of students only makes sense when also considering the demanding realities that teachers face in their role at school. The nature of some discourse on inclusion can give rise to resistance or a sense of guilt that is counterproductive for teachers and students alike. If a teacher feels some discomfort or a sense of powerlessness when facing the challenges in their classroom, they might wonder if they are causing harm, refusing inclusion, being unfair toward their students, or properly

playing the role expected of them in their work. This pressure can be alleviated by looking at things differently, i.e., from the viewpoint of meeting the needs of teachers – which are all too often neglected – in order to help them respond to the needs of learners.

For teachers to feel concerned by reflections on inclusion and to want to commit to it and change their practices, they have to also find answers to their own everyday needs.

WHEN THE NEEDS OF TEACHERS CONNECT WITH THOSE OF STUDENTS

For teachers to feel concerned by reflections on inclusion and to want to commit to it and change their practices, they need to also find answers to their own everyday needs. To enjoy teaching, a teacher generally requires the following (among other things):

- An appropriate classroom climate;
- Students who actively engage in activities and demonstrate motivation;
- Educational activities that help students develop their competencies;
- Autonomous and responsible students;
- A realistic and balanced workload.

While teaching, teachers must constantly be vigilant about what is going on in the classroom. This means they are always scanning for specific situations that must be managed through continuous adjustments: students whispering, looking elsewhere, being disruptive, sitting down to take a test without having studied the right concepts or having noted down the wrong date, those who do not know how to study, who constantly ask questions, who isolate themselves, who express psychological needs that go beyond the teacher’s competence, etc. Whether the situation is rooted in diagnosed or undiagnosed learning disorders, disabilities, mental health disorders, or personal issues that momentarily influence a student’s learning capability, all of these factors produce impacts that result in many attitudes and behaviours commonly observed in



classrooms (Université Laval, 2019). The most frequent special needs of students, in connection with learning and academic success, can be grouped together as follows.

Needs tend to be related to:

- attention capabilities;
- organizing and planning abilities;
- memorization;
- language and abstraction-related skills;
- social integration and behaviour management;
- motivation.

After teachers detect such needs, whether they are associated with a specific diagnosis or not, they intervene by using relevant strategies to resolve the situation and enable learning to take place. Regardless of the underlying problem, teachers work with the same educational tools to address situations related to student inattention or disorganization, both of which are very frequent among students in a classroom. However, this approach requires teachers to be skilled in decoding student behaviours in order to pinpoint problems, apply classroom management strategies to be able to swiftly meet needs, adjust their planning according to the difficulties they observed, etc.

In looking for solutions to these challenges, would it be possible to identify educational strategies that take into account not just the needs of students, but also those of the teachers who must handle the situation with which they are confronted? Would not this approach help develop teachers' sense of confidence and competence, take some weight off their shoulders, help them readapt to their role, and spark their curiosity on matters that could enrich their instructional practice?

To achieve this goal, it can be helpful to examine the challenges of inclusion from a standpoint of problem-solving within the teacher's instructional context. At a key moment in a class, a teacher will identify a need that they have often detected among students in the same context, or a need that they themselves feel with respect to this teaching situation. Most often, the two are connected. In the face of the diversity of needs that can be present in the classroom, it is important to define what seems to be predominant or the highest priority for resolving the situation, so as to then be able to reflect on solutions from the standpoint of an inclusive pedagogy.

INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY AS A TOOL FOR PROBLEM-SOLVING IN THE CLASSROOM

Inclusive pedagogy sets itself apart from the usual teaching practices, not by the use of especially new or different instructional strategies, but rather by the identification of a very specific need that is circumscribed in a specific time and educational context to which a variety of solutions or tools can be applied, whether in isolation, combined, or in varying proportions according to the teacher's wishes or situational needs. When it comes to inclusion, what matters is not so much the quantity of the strategies to employ as their relevance. **Figure 3** presents an example of problem-solving that simultaneously takes into account student needs and teacher needs, and that leverages several instructional strategies to support inclusion.⁶

The pedagogical perspective of inclusion brings teachers to observe and explore all the potential courses of action that they have at their disposal.

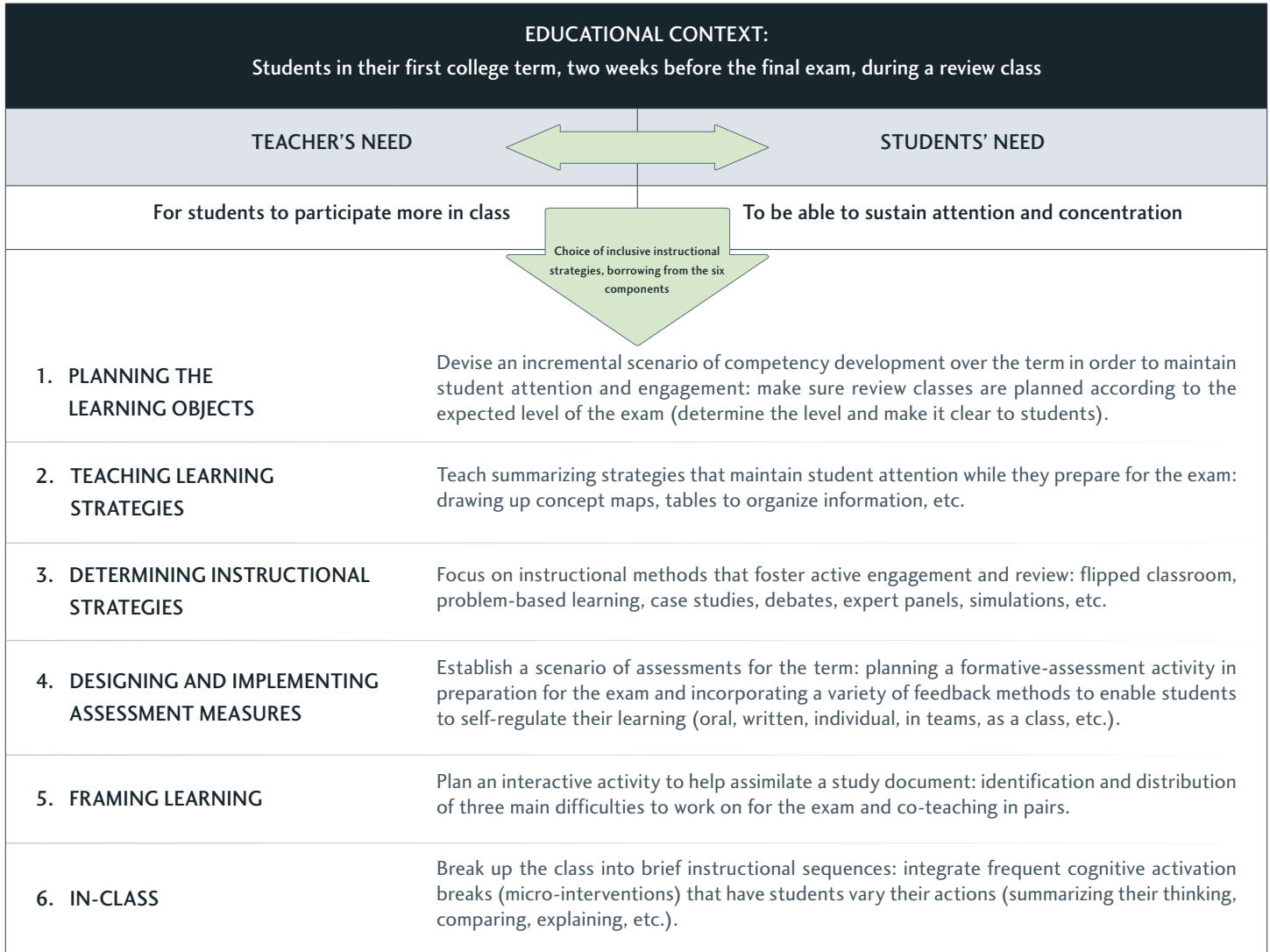
The idea is not necessarily to put into practice all of the strategies proposed in our example for one single situation; this could be burdensome. Instead, the idea is to enrich and guide teachers' search for solutions by providing a variety of instructional components from which they can pick and choose one or two. Depending on teacher personal preferences, or habits related to the culture of certain programs or educational contexts, some lesser-used components may offer very interesting options to address problems that previously seemed insurmountable. The instructional strategies determined by the teacher in this example enable them to fully assume their scope of pedagogical expertise, one strategy at a time; to leverage their experience and that of their colleagues; and to boost their sense of competence and satisfaction in their teaching. Brainstorming between teachers can also, of course, be a rewarding opportunity for collective enrichment and for sharing practices from a standpoint of inclusion and supporting all students in their learning.

⁶ In this situation, other teacher needs or student needs relating to study or memorization strategies could be identified. Only rarely will a situation involve only one need. It is recommended to select what seems to be a priority to better meet established goals. It should also be noted that some solutions cannot be applied immediately, but require reflection in order to plan for the following term and nip the problem in the bud.



FIGURE 3

EXAMPLE OF PROBLEM-SOLVING FROM AN INCLUSIVE-PEDAGOGY PERSPECTIVE



CONCLUSION

Making room for teachers' own educational realities appears crucial to help them better support their students in their various needs. Moreover, better understanding the nature of inclusion helps teachers juxtapose their own role with respect to those of other specialized professionals who also support students, and with respect to the requirements of teaching and the frameworks governing the college mission. Being more familiar with these guideposts helps mark out the teacher's own scope of action, in turn offering instructional possibilities that

are feasible, stimulating, and easy to work into the teacher's daily practice. What is more, this instructional outlook on inclusion encourages collective information-sharing and helps eliminate isolation in addressing many of the often major – yet also essential and stimulating – challenges teachers face in the classroom. ●



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