

Chapter 14

Truly Inclusive?

CASE 3: SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Crosscutting Themes: Communication, Relationships/Trust.

Leadership Competencies: Lived Experience of Students, Professional Learning, Problem-solving, Embodies Professional Standards.

Zahra's Perspective

My name is Zahra, and I'm starting grade eleven at Bayview High. Six years ago I was diagnosed with a learning disability that causes me to have a hard time with my "cognitive processing," but I'm not totally sure what that means. It takes me a really long time to write papers, and I don't always understand what the teacher wants from me. I use an iPad in my classes, which helps speed up my writing process, and I do practice activities and quizzes on it. All of my teachers and the school principal, Mr. Laird, have been pretty nice. They've always been accommodating and have let me use the iPad in all my classes.

In grade nine, everyone thought it was *so* cool that I was allowed to use an iPad in class. I think some of the other kids were jealous of me. Looking back, I think it honestly helped me to make a lot of friends. But now that I'm starting grade eleven, I feel like the iPad sets me apart from everyone else. I feel like the iPad totally labels me as the "student who needs extra help" and singles me out from my classmates.

I've lost some friends over the past couple of years because everyone knows I have a disability. I guess people don't want to be friends with someone who has a disability. It really sucks to lose friends.

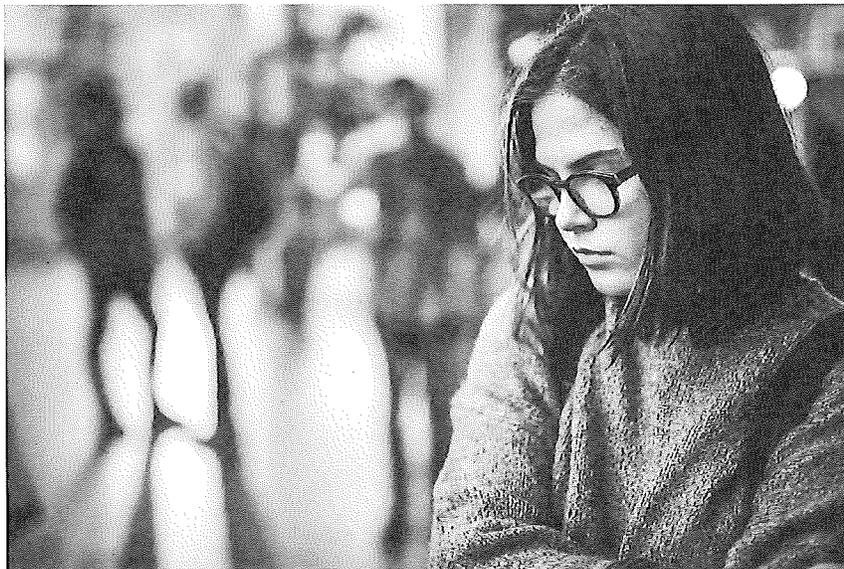


Figure 14.1 A Student Feeling Like They Do Not Fit In. *Source:* <https://www.istockphoto.com>. Credit: skynesher.

I've tried telling my parents that I don't need the iPad anymore but the conversation always ends with me slamming my bedroom door and shouting some choice words at my parents because they say I have to use it.

Mr. Laird's Perspective

I have been the principal at Bayview for the past four years. We pride ourselves on our excellent special education program. We have two classes for students with special education needs and have two paraprofessionals in each of the classes to provide extra specialized care to students. Many of our students with special education needs are in regular classes and may receive occasional support from one of our special education teachers. Our students have access to some of the best assistive technology in the region. For example, many of our students with disabilities have their own devices such as iPads and Chrome Books, which I'm particularly proud to offer.

I'm also proud that these students are a part of our school community; they attend assemblies, sports games, and holiday events. Bayview is truly an inclusive school!

Yesterday, Mrs. Carr, a grade eleven English teacher, mentioned to me that one of her students with a learning exceptionality had sworn at her during class and had run out of the room crying. The student was also refusing to use



Figure 14.2 Student Using Assistive Technology. Source: <https://www.istockphoto.com>. Credit: zoranm.

her support iPad. Mrs. Carr wanted some advice about how best to approach the situation.

Zahra's Perspective

Yesterday in my English class the teacher, Mrs. Carr, announced, "By Wednesday, everyone must hand in an essay featuring an alternative ending of *Macbeth*. Be creative." And then, as an afterthought, Mrs. Carr said, "Except Zahra, just send it to me by email by Friday night if you can. But don't stress if you can't get it done."

I was so embarrassed that she singled me out so obviously—no teacher had done that before. I could feel my face turning red like a tomato as the other students turned to face me.

"I'll get it done," I muttered. I was ashamed that she brought attention to the fact that I need more help than my classmates.

Then one of the guys, Kyle, muttered, "Or maybe go to the class for *disabled* kids and stay there." Some of the other students laughed at his comment.

My heart was racing. I couldn't take it. I screamed at Kyle and Mrs. Carr and began swearing up a storm. Then I ran out of the classroom, crying. I went straight to the girl's washroom to hide. I wondered if anyone would

come and find me; but no one did. Not even Mrs. Carr. I ended up staying in the washroom until the bell rang for the end of the day and then caught the bus home.

Mr. Laird's Perspective

Zahra came into my office very emotional and told me how embarrassed she was when Mrs. Carr singled her out in class the day before. My heart went out to her. I understood why she was so embarrassed. She told me that she didn't want to use her support iPad anymore. "The iPad shows the other students that I have a disability," she complained. "I don't want to be singled out anymore."

I told Zahra that she didn't need to use the iPad if she didn't want to. She looked relieved. She then went on to say that she didn't feel like she belonged at the school. She told me that she had hid in the washroom after the incident in Mrs. Carr's class and no one had come to find her. "It showed me that no one cares about me at this school," Zahra cried, tears streaming down her face. "No one even cared to check up on me to see if I was okay. Not even my own teacher."

I was shocked by Zahra's words. I had always thought that Bayview was an inclusive community for students with special education needs. But this was the first time I had actually sat down with a student and heard their perspective on what it is like to be a student with a special education need at the school. *I've been wrong this entire time*, I thought, feeling defeated. *How can I help students like Zahra know that they're a part of this school?*

Questions To Consider:

1. If you were Mr. Laird, how would you support Zahra? What would your next steps be?
2. What would be your approach to talk with Mrs. Carr about her actions?
3. How can you build an inclusive culture in a high school environment? How can you show students with special education needs that they are a part of a school community?
4. What are some examples of effective inclusive education practices that you have seen in high schools?