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Title of Presentation: Welcome/Bienvenido: Facilitating Initial Inclusion of Elementary Students

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Initial inclusion of exceptional students into established classes occurs regularly and while, this first interaction is highly significant, little if any planning or preparation is given to it. Federally mandated policies require such student movement throughout the school year; yet too often little if any attention goes into this transition.

The first impression is critical and is only made once. The initial contact the newcomer has with the new teacher and class establishes the tone for their relationship. Frequently the new student is apprehensive, uncertain, self-conscious, anxious, and perhaps frightened. The teacher, surprised by the unexpected arrival, is faced with a situation of how to make the new learner feel welcome while maintaining instructional momentum. Not an easy predicament for either party. This is where the welcome module comes to the rescue by helping to facilitate the induction process.

The Welcome Module is designed to create a positive and productive first meeting whenever it occurs. It can offer the new person a warm greeting, a brief orientation and an opportunity to share information, while the class instruction continues. By employing this strategy, the teacher says to the new person, "You're welcome here, I'm prepared for you and I'm glad you're here."

Contents of the module, as developed by the teacher, permit a highly individualized approach. Sample items may include: class rules, lunch & bus schedule, textbook information, class demographics, teacher biography, evaluation system and classwork to date. It may also be designed to assess academic strengths and weaknesses, potential reinforcers, learning style, talents and interests. Lastly, it can permit the student to share health needs, medical and family information as well as voice questions or concerns.

This concept offers advantages to both teacher and student. It enables the teacher to:

- *create a positive initial contact with the newcomer while continuing to teach
- *begin to gather diagnostic information
- *provide an orientation to the class
- *send a message that the teacher is prepared for the new arrival and wants to welcome this person as a member of the class
- *actively engage the student in meaningful work thereby allowing him/her to assume the appropriate role of the learner
- *increase the comfort level of the new student

With respect to the new student, this approach enables the new learner to:

- *feel wanted and welcome
- *begin to develop a sense of belonging
- *become familiar with the new environment
- *increase his/her comfort level
- *communicate with the new teacher
- *assume the student role and not be the center of attention

This approach's flexibility enables teachers to exercise creativity to design modules that meet their needs and take a variety of forms from web pages, pictures, printed material, video, audio, computer program, and Braille. Clearly this can be done using a variety of languages. Students' responses may be in writing, drawing, speaking on audiotape or typing on a computer. Buddies may easily be an integral part of this process. Implementation may be achieved through printed material, a computer program, a videotape, audiotape, etc.

Having a welcome module ready when the new student arrives, permits the teacher to begin the integration process in a positive, productive manner increasing the probability of getting the transition off to a good start.