

Are We Really Inclusive?

Rethinking Challenge, Contact and Culture in Outdoor Learning

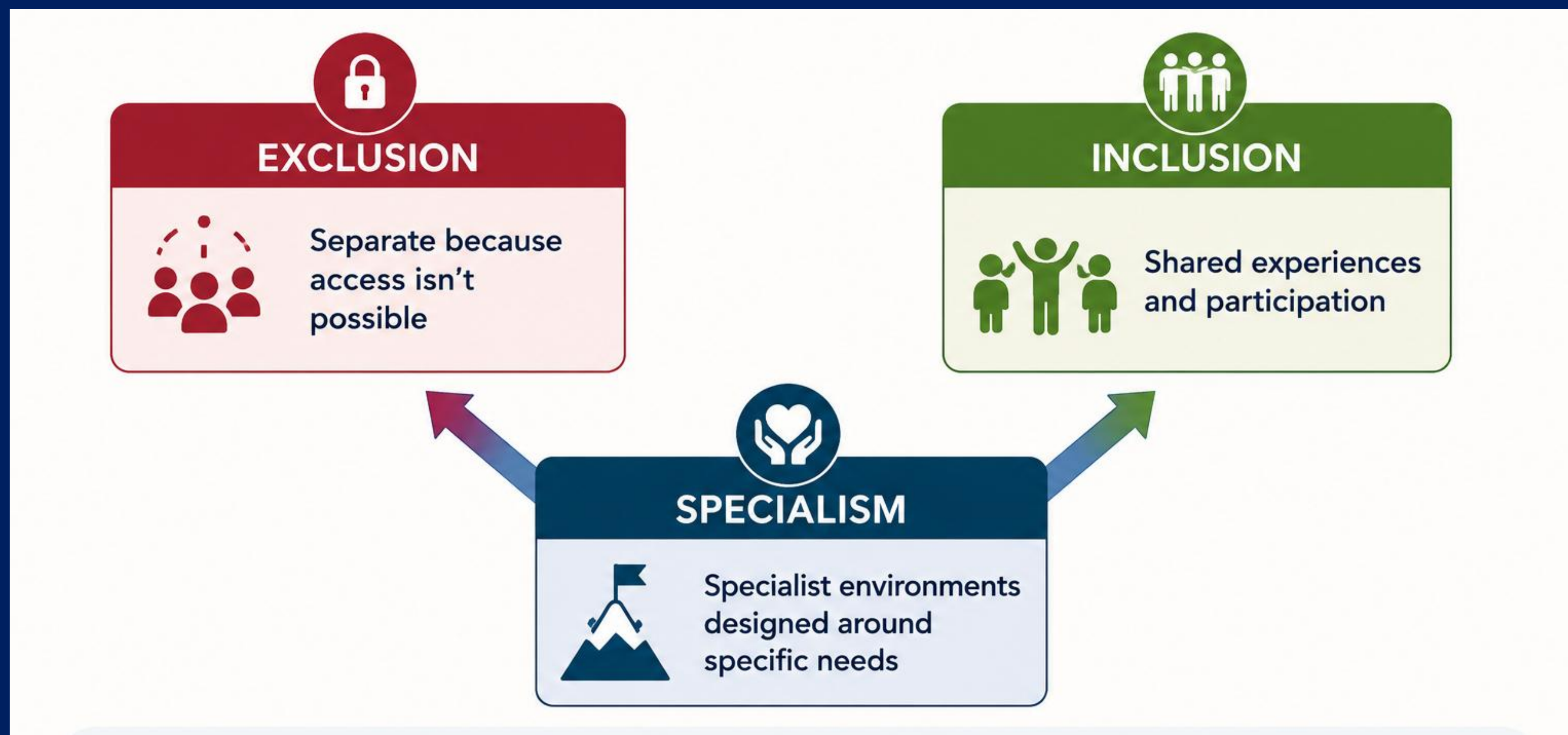
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Key questions

1. When we say someone is included – what do we actually mean?
2. Why participation is not enough?
3. What does the research tell us?
4. How do we intentionally design belonging?

An Inclusive Society



A genuinely inclusive society works to remove exclusion, strengthen inclusion and value specialist provision as an essential part of the continuum of choice.

The importance of choice

Different approaches give different outcomes

Mainstream Inclusion	Specialist Provision
Diverse peer relationships Community participation Wider social networks Everyday inclusion	Shared lived experience Psychological safety Specialist expertise Confidence and identity

**An inclusive society is one that gives people genuine choice
- not one that decides where they should belong.**

The Inclusion Confusion

We often confuse mainstream with inclusion, and specialism with exclusion. Inclusion is not a place – it is an outcome.

People feel included when they experience:

- Challenge
- Contribution
- Belonging
- Choice

Belonging is when someone is not simply present, but is expected, valued and able to make a meaningful contribution.

The Participation Paradox



Participation is a milestone.
Belonging is the destination.

Can someone participate in an activity without ever feeling that they belong?

Contact Theory (Allport, 1954)

Prejudice between groups can be reduced through contact - but only if certain conditions are present.

The four key conditions for positive contact:

- 1. Equal Status** – participants perceive each other as having equal value and standing within the situation.
- 2. Common Goals** – participants work towards shared objectives.
- 3. Cooperation** – success depends on working together rather than competing.
- 4. Institutional Support** – the wider organisation, culture or leadership supports the interaction.

Contact does not automatically create inclusion. The quality, structure and culture of the interaction matter.

When inclusion is poorly designed:

- Stereotypes may be reinforced
- Dependency becomes visible
- Difference becomes highlighted

Simply bringing disabled and non-disabled people together is not enough. The quality, structure and culture of the interaction matter.

The way we design challenge, contribution and belonging needs to change.

Adaptive teaching

Education has moved from differentiation, where the approach was to change expectations, provide alternative activities or lower the level of challenge. The key question was “How do we include this person?”

To

An adaptive teaching approach where we maintain expectations, expect the same level of challenge and adapt access. The key question is now “What barriers are preventing this person from participating?”

Inclusion is not lowering challenge. It is changing access to challenge.



Illustrative AI-generated image

Three layers of inclusive practice

How to maintain challenge, remove barriers and design belonging.

Layer	Question	Purpose
Planning Process	How should we design the experience?	Intentional planning
Adaptive Teaching	What should I adjust right now?	Responsive delivery
Organisational Culture	Why do we work this way?	Inclusive culture

The Calvert Lakes Adaptive Challenge Model

Inclusive Outdoor Learning through Adaptive Challenge

Developed by Calvert Lakes through 50 years of inclusive practice



Adaptive Challenge

Challenge Accessed,
Not Reduced



Belonging First

Safe — Supported
→ Brave



Success For All

Progress, Effort, Confidence

1. Planning Process

Consider **P**articipants / **E**quipment / **A**ctivity
(John Crosbie, 2018)

Once you've established that the activity is operationally possible, there are still learning design questions to answer:

What are the learning outcomes?

What barriers might exist?

How will we adapt challenge?

How will we build belonging?

What will success look like?

How will this experience enable growth?



2. Adaptive Teaching

During the activity the instructor now has four adaptive teaching levers:

- Support
- Task
- Environment
- Communication

These are used continuously throughout delivery.

COMMUNICATION

- Clear Instructions
- Modelling
- Chunking Information
- Visual Supports
- Demonstration

SUPPORT

- Peer Support
- Adult Support
- Demonstration
- Encouragement Culture
- Structured Guidance

ENVIRONMENT

- Space And Layout
- Noise Levels
- Predictability
- Accessibility
- Transitions

TASK

- Flexible Success Criteria
- Alternative Roles
- Progression Steps
- Choice of Challenge Levels

3. Organisational Culture

Culture underpins everything and determines whether instructors naturally ask questions like:

How can this learner contribute?

How do we maintain challenge?

Are we building belonging?

How do we encourage independence?

Without that culture, the planning process simply becomes another checklist. Culture determines what becomes normal.



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Final Thoughts

The question is no longer -

“How do we enable disabled people to participate?”

The question is -

“How do we design outdoor learning so everyone can experience challenge, contribution and belonging?””

1. Planning creates access
2. Adaptive teaching enables contribution
3. Organisational culture creates belonging

