



# Me, Too! Inside Preschool Inclusion

The Early Childhood Research Institute on Inclusion

## How preschools promote inclusive practices: Lessons from two case studies

The number of preschool programs serving children with disabilities has grown considerably in recent years. Successfully providing appropriate services in these educational settings requires extensive planning, and the cooperation and collaboration of numerous professionals. This is particularly evident in inclusive settings, where children with disabilities co-exist with their non-disabled peers. In many cases, early education teachers and special education teachers must combine their unique skills to develop a mutually acceptable approach to teaching. An article by researchers with the Early Childhood Research Institute on Inclusion focuses on two preschool settings where inclusive practices have been successfully implemented.

*"None of us has any magic—through our collective work we can get something done"*

—an ECE teacher

**Jimmy's Classroom: A Collaborative Team Model** Jimmy, a child with autism, attended a community-based child care. In this setting, special educators, service providers, childcare center staff, and the family participated in the planning and implementation of Jimmy's IEP goals. The success of this model was based on several key factors:

- the staff viewed Jimmy's inclusion in the program as "a challenge" and "a big learning opportunity"
- initially, additional staffing support was provided by the school system to help train the team
- the child care teachers and early childhood special education staff were able to blend their different teaching philosophies into a working model
- through informal and formal meetings, and the use of a central notebook, communication between the team members was greatly enhanced.

**Sandy and Jane: A Team Teaching Approach** At the Winwood Early Childhood Center, children with disabilities and their non-disabled peers attended separate classrooms, but had some activities together. Then the principal asked one "buddy class" pair to combine classes for the majority of the school day. Sandy and Jane agreed, and formed a team-teaching partnership. The success of this model was based on:

- the teachers' ability to create and sustain a team teaching approach
- the teachers' willingness to relinquish "ownership" of their separate classrooms
- blending different expectations of the children and different teaching methods
- enhancing communication through informal meetings and joint planning

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- the teachers' leadership role in promoting similar inclusive strategies in other classrooms.

The success of both programs relied greatly on the flexibility of all the professionals involved, and their acceptance and incorporation of each others' skills, knowledge, and experience.

### **About ECRII**

The Early Childhood Research Institute on Inclusion (ECRII) is a national research project funded by the U.S. Department of Education for a five-year period to study the inclusion of preschool children with disabilities in settings with typically developing children. The goal of ECRII is to identify factors that help inclusion work, factors that hinder inclusion, and strategies that may support the inclusion of young children with disabilities in classrooms and communities. This comprehensive study of preschool inclusion is being done by researchers at five universities in different regions of the country: San Francisco State University, the University of Maryland, the University of North Carolina, the University of Washington, and Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee.

### **About this brief**

Information provided comes from an in-depth look at inclusion in 16 preschool programs across the country. The programs studied represent urban, suburban, and rural communities, culturally diverse adult and child participants, and many different ways of including young children with disabilities in typical settings. ECRII researchers have tried to describe and learn about inclusion from the viewpoint of the people most involved in it—children with and without disabilities, families, teachers, administrators, and policymakers. Data collection included interviews, classroom observations, and analysis of relevant documents. **This ECRII brief may be freely reproduced and disseminated, provided appropriate reference is given.**

### **Brief source**

Lieber, J. A., Beckman, P. J., & Horn, E. (in press). Working together to provide services for young children with disabilities: Lessons from inclusive programs. In S. Grahman & K. Harris (Eds.), *Working together*. Cambridge, MA: Brookline Books.

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