



Me, Too!

Inside Preschool Inclusion

The Early Childhood Research Institute on Inclusion

Part of the community: Factors that influence the way children with disabilities participate in society

For a child with a disability, being included in a classroom setting with typically developing peers provides an opportunity to experience a full range of social, expressive and receptive skills. Much has been written about the benefits of inclusive preschool environments. However, the quality of a person's life depends on participation in the world beyond the classroom, in the neighborhood, in the community and in society at large. Developing enduring relationships in those settings is integral to a person's sense of belonging.

Many factors promote and limit a child's involvement in his or her community. The same factors may help or hinder the family's inclusion in society. Several of these conditions exist for all families, whether or not they include a member with a disability. An article by researchers with the Early Childhood Research Institute on Inclusion examines the issues affecting participation in, or isolation from, the community.

The following circumstances can inhibit a family's involvement in the community:

- neighborhood instability and safety issues
- lack of neighborhood peers
- concern about negative peer influences
- limited financial resources and lack of transportation
- hectic family schedules
- certain aspects of a child's disability
- lack of environmental accessibility

The following conditions can promote a family's participation in the community:

- social contacts and a support system
- family's sense of community
- proximity to peers
- school-community connections
- appealing child characteristics
- accessibility of environmental adaptations

The families who feel the most involved in their communities participate in a variety of social situations, including attending organized school, neighborhood and religious activities, visiting community parks and swimming pools and having regular interactions with extended families.

"...kids are constantly saying, 'Hi Henry,....' ...I've gotten to know everybody.... But Henry is becoming as popular as I am. He gets to know so many people. It really amazes me."
 -- Henry's father

When peers play together and families connect across a multitude of settings, the family's sense of community is much stronger. In addition, many families actively encourage their children's involvement by creating opportunities for social interactions with peers. All of these approaches promote enduring social relationships, which is the foundation for being part of a community.

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

Beckman, P., Barnwell, D., Horn, E., Hanson, M., Gutierrez, S., & Leiber, J. (1998). Communities, families, and inclusion. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 13, 125-150.

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