



Me, Too! Inside Preschool Inclusion

The Early Childhood Research Institute on Inclusion

The culture of inclusion: How cultural and disability issues influence the implementation and effectiveness of inclusive classroom settings

"There are several aspects to this philosophy [of inclusion]... an appreciation of all children as unique individuals with varying abilities and needs [and] a belief in the correctness of including young children with disabilities"

One of the most important aspects of a positive early education experience is the recognition of each child in the program as a unique individual. Appropriately supporting young children in these environments includes accepting and being responsive to differing abilities and interests. In today's multi-cultural society, programs must also recognize the differences in language, social class, heritage, ethnic origins, geographic location, and religion of the preschool population. Adapting programming to accommodate this great diversity is a significant challenge to administrators, educators and service providers, especially where children with disabilities are concerned. An article by researchers with the Early Childhood Research Institute on Inclusion examines how early education programs acknowledge and support the particular interests and needs of children and their families.

Researchers discovered that culture is a central issue in preschool education, and has a considerable effect on:

- the views of families and educators about child-rearing, learning and education, disabilities, and the meaning of inclusion
- the ability of families and educators to gather and exchange information
- the communication abilities and social relationships of children and families.

Of great importance to a successful preschool experience is the ability of children to achieve a sense of belonging and membership in the peer culture. Researchers found that preschoolers typically approach peers who seem familiar and share a common interest in materials and activities. A major barrier to peer acceptance is the inability of children to communicate because of a disability or because the children do not share a common language.

Equally significant is the social and political climate in the larger communities where families live. Policies and practices related to inclusion are profoundly influenced by the history of special education in these communities. In addition, the cultural perspectives of families affect their expectations for children, social relationships, and beliefs concerning disability issues, education in general, and the value of inclusion.

The philosophies and practices of the community and classroom *can* have a positive effect on inclusive settings. Full inclusion is a possibility when communities and classrooms:

- recognize and celebrate diversity
- support the right of individuals to participate fully in society
- appreciate all children as unique individuals with varying abilities and needs.

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

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