Early Childhood Inclusion:
The Validation Process

The Validation Process

for the

Joint Position

Statement of the

Division for Early

Childhood (DEC)

and the National

Association

for the Education

of Young Children

(NAEYC)

Background

Early childhood inclusion encompasses policies and practices that promote a wide range of learning activities, environments, and supports for young children with disabilities and their families. Because inclusion consists of a complex set of related practices at different levels (e.g., individual child and family, classroom and home settings, program and systems-level services and supports), and because implementation takes many different forms, reaching consensus on a single definition of inclusion has proven to be challenging, at best. Furthermore, the lack of a shared definition of inclusion contributed to misunderstandings in the early childhood field and hindered the creation of a common vision for high quality inclusive practices. An agreed-upon definition of inclusion is necessary to help families advocate for high quality services, to assist early childhood programs in adopting inclusive practices, to develop effective professional development on inclusion, and to inform public policies designed to support inclusive programs and services.

Through efforts to develop and validate a joint position statement on inclusion, DEC and NAEYC recognized the need for a clearly articulated definition of inclusion in both the early education and early intervention fields. Equally as important, the joint position statement provides general guidance to members of both fields regarding the specific components that can be used to define high quality inclusive programs and practices.

Description of the Validation Process

A key component of the development of the joint position statement was to

evaluate the document's social validity with input from a wide array of consumers within the early education and intervention fields (e.g., teachers, practitioners, families, faculty and professional development providers, administrators, specialists, researchers, policy makers). This was accomplished through a collaborative arrangement with the National Professional Development Center on Inclusion (NPDCI). Leading an effort to develop and validate a joint position statement on inclusion was consistent with NPDCI's mission of helping states achieve an integrated professional development system that supports high quality inclusion. State planning teams with whom NPDCI worked consistently mentioned the need for an agreed-upon definition of inclusion in conjunction with their efforts to improve professional development for the early childhood workforce.

Table 1 outlines the steps used to develop and validate the joint position statement on inclusion.

Table 1
Timeline and Methodology for Development and Validation of Joint Position Statement

Timeline	Methodology
Oct. 2007	NPDCI obtained approval from DEC and NAEYC to organize and lead the development and validation process
Oct.–Dec. 2007	NPDCI work group sought input from the field in sessions at national conferences sponsored by DEC and NAEYC
April 2008	Joint DEC-NAEYC work group was established with four of the eight members nominated by each organization
May–June 2008	NPDCI work group drafted joint position statement, based on a review of the literature, including existing definitions and position statements
June–July 2008	Joint DEC-NAEYC work group reviewed draft joint position statement and provided written feedback on a Web site provided by NPDCI
July–Aug. 2008	NPDCI work group revised draft joint position statement and submitted revised version to the DEC-NAEYC work group for additional review and feedback
Sept. 2008	NPDCI work group revised draft joint position statement before submitting to DEC and NAEYC governance boards
Sept.–Oct. 2008	DEC and NAEYC governance boards reviewed draft joint position statement and provided written feedback on a Web site provided by NPDCI
Oct. 2008	NPDCI work group revised draft joint position statement based on feedback from both DEC and NAEYC governance boards
Oct.–Dec. 2008	As part of a national field validation, DEC and NAEYC members and the general public were invited to a Web site provided by NPDCI to review the draft joint position statement, rate its quality and acceptability, vote on whether to endorse it, and provide written comments that were visible only to the NPDCI work group
Dec. 2008–Feb. 2009	NPDCI analyzed quantitative and qualitative feedback on the draft joint position statement from the field, used this information to create a final draft of the document, and created a written summary of the validation process
March 2009	The final draft joint position statement and a written summary of the validation process were submitted to the DEC and NAEYC governance boards for approval
April 2009	The DEC executive board and the NAEYC governing board approved the joint position statement

Results of the National Validation Process

DEC and NAEYC sent email messages and follow-up announcements to all members of their respective organizations, inviting them to review the draft joint position statement and to participate in the validation process. The email messages contained a link to a Web site managed by NP-DCI as part of the validation process. In addition to these invitations to all members of DEC and NAEYC, people who learned about the online validation process in other ways (e.g., by visiting the NPDCI Web site or by receiving a forwarded email message from a member of either DEC or NAEYC) also were included as respondents in the validation process. A total of 753 respondents completed an online validation form created through Qualtrics. Figure 1 displays the various roles of respondents. Figure 2 shows how many respondents were members of DEC, NAEYC, both organizations, or neither organization.
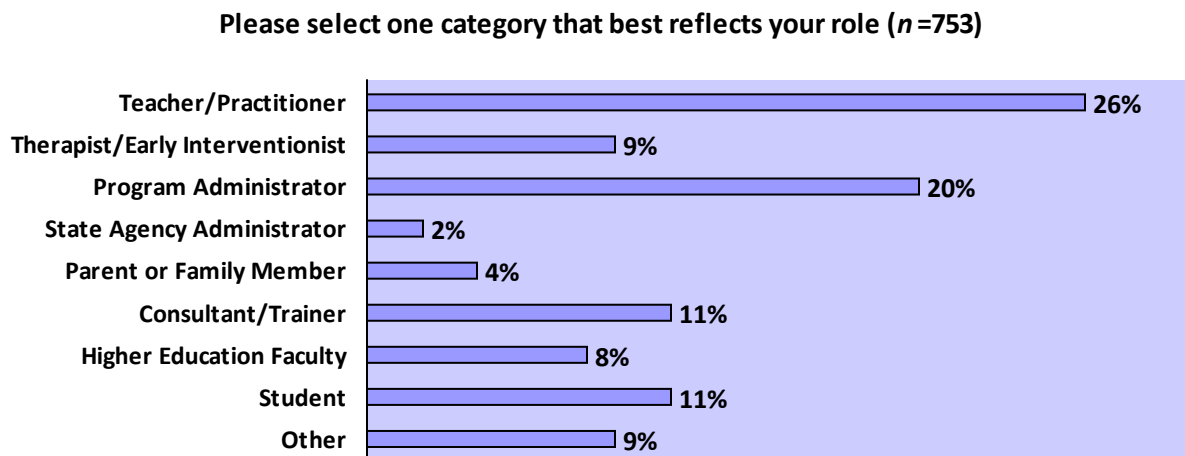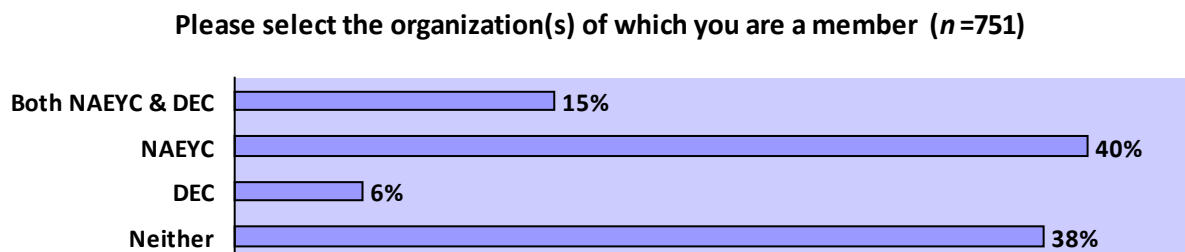
Figure 1
Online Survey Respondents' Roles

Please select one category that best reflects your role (*n*=753)

Role	Percent
Teacher/Practitioner	26%
Therapist/Early Interventionist	9%
Program Administrator	20%
State Agency Administrator	2%
Parent or Family Member	4%
Consultant/Trainer	11%
Higher Education Faculty	8%
Student	11%
Other	9%

Figure 2
Online Survey Respondents' Organizational Membership

Please select the organization(s) of which you are a member (*n*=751)

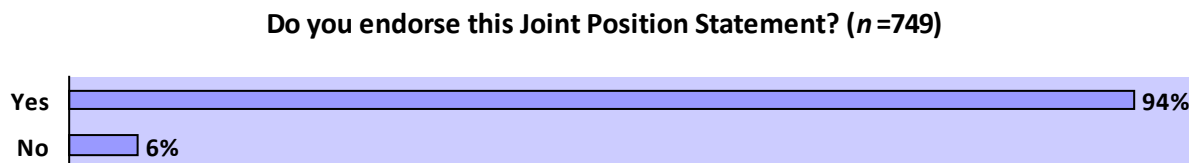| Membership	Percent
Both NAEYC & DEC	15%
NAEYC	40%
DEC	6%
Neither	38%

Respondents were asked to review the draft joint position statement and to rate the quality, relevance, and usefulness of the document on scale of 1 to 5 (1=not at all to 5=very high quality, relevance, or usefulness). Table 2 shows the results of these ratings. Respondents also were asked to indicate whether they endorsed the statement. Figure 3 shows the results for this question about endorsement.

Question	M	SD	n
Is this product of high quality?	4.40	0.81	749
Is this product a relevant resource to support early childhood inclusion?	4.40	0.82	751
Is this product useful for research, policy, professional development, and practice?	4.27	0.83	747

Figure 3
Online Survey Respondents' Endorsement Results

Do you endorse this Joint Position Statement? (n=749)

Yes	94%
No	6%

Respondents were invited to submit a comment on the draft joint position statement. A total of 457 written comments were submitted. Although most of the comments were submitted by individual respondents, others represented collective feedback from groups or professional organizations (e.g., the Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf, the Early Intervention Family Alliance, the American Physical Therapy Organization, the Ohio DEC Subdivision, the Idaho Early Childhood Coordinating Council, the National Association of the Deaf, the American Society for Deaf Children, and the Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities Family Faculty Group). The comments from all individuals and groups ranged from 1-2 sentences to 2-3 pages in length.

The NPDCI work group read each comment, sorting them by type and entering them into a table to aid in analysis. Comments fell into three broad categories: (1) those suggesting the need for clarification or revision of the document; (2) those sharing personal experiences and perspectives on inclusion; and (3) those expressing appreciation for the work or supporting the need for a joint position statement on inclusion.

For the purpose of revising the draft joint position statement, the NPDCI work group focused on the first category, comments suggesting the need for clarification or specific wording changes. Table 3 displays the specific wording changes and conceptual issues that required clarification, along with an explanation of how these suggestions were addressed in the final version of the position statement.

Table 3
Suggestions from Field and Corresponding Revisions

Wording Suggestions	Revisions
Numerous comments indicated a negative reaction to the use of the term "normal" in the document (e.g., "normal environments").	The term "normal" was removed from the document. "Normal environments" was replaced by "natural environments" in endnote 3. Furthermore, additions to endnote 3 clarified the distinction between natural environments and least restrictive environments (LRE).
Some respondents preferred the use of "children with special needs," whereas others preferred "children with exceptionalities" or "children with diverse abilities."	The phrase "children with disabilities" was retained, but alternative phrases suggested by respondents were noted in endnote 1.
The phrase "typically developing" was used four times in the draft position statement and respondents noted that this was inconsistent with person-first language.	In three instances, the phrase "typically developing" was replaced by an alternative. For example, in the *participation* section, "children with and without disabilities" replaced "children with disabilities and their typically developing peers." The original phrase was retained in endnote 3.
Some respondents mentioned that the use of the words "high expectations" in the *recommendations* section could result in unrealistic demands being placed on children, and "appropriate expectations" was suggested as an alternative.	The phrase "create high expectations for every child" was retained in recommendation 1 due to the individualizing qualifier, "to reach his or her full potential," immediately following the phrase.
Many respondents commented about young children's behaviors. Some felt that the term "appropriate" in relation to behaviors in the *participation* section was too subjective a term, with many possible interpretations.	The final sentence of the *participation* paragraph was revised to eliminate the term "appropriate."
Some comments suggested the need for stronger language, particularly in the *recommendations* section.	The word "should" replaced the word "can" throughout the *recommendations* section. Similarly, the word "can" replaced the word "may" in sections preceding the recommendations.

Conceptual Issues	Clarifications and Revisions
Some respondents commented on the lack of attention to young children with disabilities who are culturally and linguistically diverse in the draft position statement.	The position statement was revised to acknowledge that children with disabilities and their families vary widely with respect to their racial/ethnic, cultural, economic, and linguistic backgrounds, as do the general population of young children and families (endnote 2).
A number of respondents and several groups noted that the draft position statement lacked any mention of a continuum of services and placements, and the need to serve children with a wide range of disabilities.	The final document contains an additional recommendation (recommendation 3) that addresses a continuum of services and supports and also reflects a focus on children with a wide range of types of disabilities and levels of severity, including children at risk for disabilities.
A number of respondents commented on the need for guidance relating to recommended ratios of children with and without disabilities.	The principle of natural proportions was incorporated and defined in the added recommendation 3.
Several respondents noted a lack of distinction between Universal Design (UD) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in the draft position statement, and suggested that in many cases simple modifications are helpful.	The position statement was revised so that both simple modifications and universal design principles were mentioned in the *access* section. The distinction between UD and UDL also was clarified in the same section.
Respondents noted a lack of distinction between *access* and *participation*.	Revisions were made to the respective sections in order to distinguish *access* from *participation*, with *participation* including added emphasis on adults' roles in facilitating play and learning.
Many respondents offered comments relating to the systems-level supports needed for successful inclusion. Clearer language relating to how services and supports may be organized was requested.	Revisions were made in order to distinguish between practices that support individual children and systems-level supports that form the infrastructure for inclusion (see the first sentence of the *supports* section, as well as recommendation 3). The added recommendation 3 describes the establishment of a system of services and supports, and provides examples of these infrastructure supports (e.g., incentives).
Several respondents suggested the need to define the term "blended programs."	The term "blended programs" was defined in the added endnote 4.

Suggested citation

Buysse, V., Hollingsworth, H. L., & Catlett, C. (2009). *Early childhood inclusion: The validation process.* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, FPG Child Development Institute, National Professional Development Center on Inclusion (NPDCI).

Early childhood inclusion: A Joint position statement of the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is available at http://npdci.fpg.unc.edu/resources/articles/Early_Childhood_Inclusion