Research Synthesis Points on Early Childhood Inclusion

This document is a summary of key conclusions or “synthesis points” drawn from a review of the literature or research syntheses on early childhood inclusion. For each synthesis point, we provide supporting references. We encourage you to reproduce this document for distribution and use it in a variety of contexts, including professional development, policy development, planning, advocacy, and grant writing.

It should be noted that synthesis points 1-7 derive primarily from the following key sources, selected because these authors summarized what was known about inclusion:


Based on our own review of the literature, we added synthesis points 8 and 9 to reflect emerging knowledge about quality inclusive programs and professional development related to inclusion.

1. **Inclusion takes many different forms.**


*A research review or synthesis. All other references represent primary sources.*
2. **Progress has been achieved in efforts to ensure access to inclusive programs, particularly for pre-kindergarten children (3-5 year-olds). However, in the U.S., universal access to inclusive programs for all children with disabilities is far from a reality.**


3. **Children in inclusive programs generally do at least as well as children in specialized programs. Inclusion can benefit children with and without disabilities, particularly with respect to their social development.**


4. A variety of factors such as policies, resources, and beliefs influence the acceptance and implementation of inclusion.


5. **Specialized instruction is an important component of inclusion and a factor affecting child outcomes.**


6. **Collaboration among parents, teachers, and specialists is a cornerstone of high quality inclusion.**


7. **Families of children with disabilities generally view inclusion favorably, although some families express concern about the quality of early childhood programs and services.**


8. Limited research suggests that the quality of early childhood programs that enroll young children with disabilities is as good as, or slightly better, than the quality of programs that do not enroll these children; however, most studies have focused on general program quality as opposed to the quality of inclusion for individual children with disabilities and their families.


9. Some evidence suggests that early childhood professionals may not be adequately prepared to serve young children with disabilities enrolled in inclusive programs.


Definitions

Inclusion
According to the DEC/NAEYC (2009) joint position statement on early childhood inclusion, “Early childhood inclusion embodies the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every infant and young child and his or her family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society. The desired results of inclusive experiences for children with and without disabilities and their families include a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and development and learning to reach their full potential. The defining features of inclusion that can be used to identify high quality early childhood programs and services are access, participation, and supports” (p. 2).


Primary source
A primary source is a publication reporting results of an original research study that typically appears in a peer-reviewed journal.

Research review or synthesis
A research review or synthesis presents the key conclusions that can be drawn from a review of the literature.

Specialized instruction
Specialized instruction consists of any intervention or instructional approach that is designed to scaffold learning or development for an individual child. Specialized instruction includes embedded interventions (those that occur within the context of daily routines and activities and build on a child’s interests and activities) and strategies that are more intensive and individualized (prompting, modeling, physical assistance, giving a directive and waiting for a response).

Specialized program
A specialized program is one that is designed for and serves primarily children with disabilities. In specialized programs, the majority of children enrolled are those with an identified disability who are eligible for special education or early intervention services.
The National Professional Development Center on Inclusion (NPDCI) works with states to help them achieve a system of high quality, cross-sector professional development to support inclusion of young children with disabilities in early childhood settings. NPDCI offers states an integrated, facilitated sequence of planning and technical assistance to develop, implement and monitor a plan for professional development and inclusion, along with tools and products to support state efforts. NPDCI is devoted to collective learning and system improvements in professional development for early childhood inclusion.

NPDCI is a project of the FPG Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and is funded by the Office of Special Education Programs at the US Department of Education.

Visit http://npdci.fpg.unc.edu for more information.

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