



Me, Too!

Inside Preschool Inclusion

The Early Childhood Research Institute on Inclusion

How preschool teachers include children with disabilities

The challenge of fully including children with different abilities into the day to day routines of a preschool classroom requires flexibility, adaptability, and support. Since children with disabilities may have cognitive or physical conditions that limit the way they access materials, teachers must be willing to make modifications to classroom activities, routines, and learning areas. These adaptations are necessary to facilitate the child's participation, and in many cases, to successfully implement a child's goals from an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP).

An article by researchers with the Early Childhood Research Institute on Inclusion identifies the aspects of the classroom where modifications have most frequently been made. Numerous suggestions made by a pool of 104 practitioners have been pared down to eight categories, which include:

- **Environmental support** altering the physical environment to increase participation
- **Materials adaptation** modifying materials to promote independence
- **Activity simplification** breaking down a complicated task into smaller parts or steps
- **Child preferences** capitalizing on a child's favorite activities
- **Special equipment** using adaptive devices to facilitate participation
- **Adult support** employing direct adult intervention to support the child's efforts
- **Peer support** utilizing classmates to help children learn by modeling
- **Invisible support** arranging naturally occurring events to assist inclusion

Although teachers report the need to make these adjustments to materials and routines, certain factors may limit the degree to which educators can efficiently and effectively implement the necessary changes to provide a totally inclusive environment. Teacher attitudes, high child/teacher ratios, and lack of resources, adequate training and administrative support can negatively impact these efforts. Researchers hope that by identifying modification categories, educators can evaluate their current efforts and investigate other strategies to better include children with disabilities in the various aspects of the classroom routine, and to implement children's individual educational goals.

“Curriculum modifications used well can help achieve one goal of inclusion - active participation of young children with disabilities and typically developing children in the same classroom.”

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

Sandall, S. R., Joseph, G., Chou, H.Y., Schwartz, I. S., Horn, E., Lieber, J., Odom, S. L., & Wolery, R. (in press). Talking to practitioners: Focus group report on curriculum modifications in inclusive preschool classrooms. Journal of Early Intervention.

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