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• INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES AND PROFESSIONALS

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Creating Inclusive Environments for Young Children

By Amy Watson, ECE ARC Coordinator
Charter Oak College, Hartford



This article is translated into Spanish on page 2. Ver la versión española de este artículo en la página 2.

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Inclusion is defined in various ways such as “any child is welcome in my program” or following an educational plan that “provide accommodations and modifications to help a child meet their IEP/IFSP goals.” Inclusion provides support to all children so that their experiences in educational settings encourage them to be as involved and independent as possible. Parents and providers can support inclusion by being proactive in their practices and ensuring that barriers to full participation are checked. Inclusion can be promoted by designing and supporting environments that encourage each and every child’s full participation. This is particularly critical in early childhood when learning through exploration, with peers and through the environment is so critical to a child’s future learning, growth and development.

Design and support inclusive environments by:

1. Communicating with parents on a daily or frequent basis, conducting parent/ teacher conferences on an ongoing basis and involving parents in their child’s development, learning and program.
2. Supporting parent preferences in care routines of their children such as feeding or dressing.
3. Teaching, modeling, encouraging and rewarding positive behaviors. Give more attention for positive behavior than for misbehavior.
4. Providing support for maintaining social skills.

5. Using developmental assessments and observation to modify and adapt teaching and learning strategies so that all children grow and learn.

Next, assess your program in terms of commonly overlooked barriers to inclusion. Does the program/environment include?

- Inaccessible areas such as: hard to reach items for some children but not others, platforms within the classroom or on climbing equipment? (Inaccessible areas leave a child excluded, frustrated and deny an opportunity for the child’s learning.)
- Unstable areas such as: changes in the level of flooring or landscaping surfaces as well as bookcases, tables, stools and/or chairs that are not on level surfaces? (Children with developmental disabilities need secured furniture to pull on or lean upon.)
- Adequate spacious areas such as: indoor and outdoor spaces that are uncluttered, and wide and long enough so that children with mobility equipment have room to turn around in (approximately 4-5 feet)? (Children with slower physical development or sensory integration issues may benefit from increased personal space.)
- Indoor and outdoor safety features such as: handrails at a child’s level in the bathroom by the toilet and sink and on all steps or ladders, soft flooring (and/or springy subfloors) to take the edge of falls?

- Areas designed for work, play and learning? (Children with special needs often benefit from frequently changing positions and activities.)
- Adequate room/space lighting? Is lighting evenly distributed? Does the lighting cast bright or harsh glares? Are there areas that are too bright or dim?
- Appropriate noise levels? How do voices carry in the room? Can you focus and listen to a child sitting next to you without being distracted by noisy children across the room?
- Multiple formats such as pictures, picture schedules, symbols and words? Print in a room should be in big, bold letters.
- A wide range of materials and activities for varying developmental levels?
- Interesting toys, activities and resources that promote multisensory experiences such as seeing, hearing, touching, tasting and smelling? This includes musical and movement toys and activities.
- Transition management? Do adults prepare children for change by using techniques such as: giving cues before any transition occurs, providing a timed count down before a change in the schedule, describing how activities end and new ones begin etc.?

Parents and providers can use these skills and ideas to help create more inclusive environments for young children. These practices promote and support welcoming environments that can help to maximize the potential of all our children. This perspective on inclusion is consistent with the Joint Position Statement of the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

Ambientes inclusivos para niños menores

por Amy Watson,
Coordinadora ECE ARC
Charter Oak Collage, Hartford

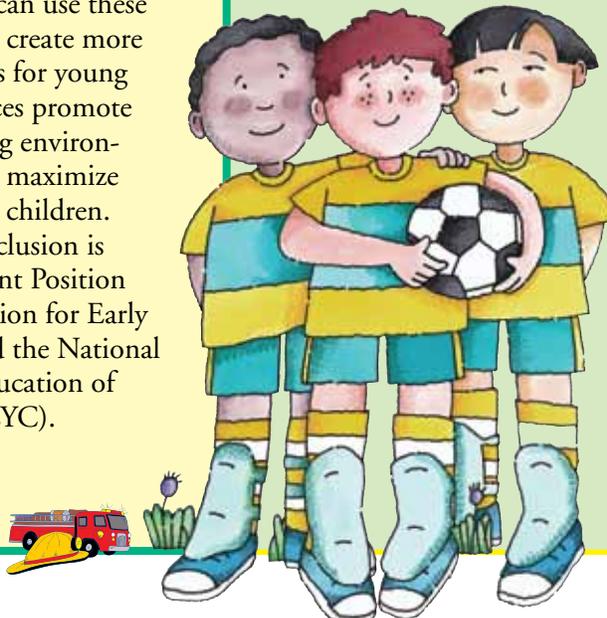
La inclusión se define de varias maneras tales como “cualquier niño es aceptable en mi programa”, o el seguimiento de un plan docente que “proporcione acomodaciones y modificaciones para ayudar al niño a cumplir las metas IEP/IFSP”. La inclusión brinda apoyo a todos los niños de manera que sus experiencias en el entorno escolar los estimule a participar y a ser independientes en lo posible. Padres y proveedores pueden apoyar la inclusión siendo proactivos en sus prácticas y superando las barreras a la plena participación. La inclusión puede apoyarse mediante el diseño y apoyo a los ambientes que estimulan a todos los niños a tener plena participación. Esto es particularmente crítico en la primera infancia cuando el aprendizaje mediante la exploración, con compañeros y en ambiente apropiado influyen en el futuro aprendizaje del niño, su crecimiento y desarrollo.

Se diseña y apoya el ambiente inclusivo mediante:

1. La comunicación diaria o frecuente con los padres, realizando conferencias con padres y maestros de modo continuo y haciendo que los padres participen en el desarrollo, aprendizaje y programa del niño.
2. El apoyo a las preferencias de los padres en cuanto a rutinas del cuidado como las relativas a alimentación y vestido.
3. La instrucción, el ejemplo, el estímulo y la recompensa de conductas positivas, prestando más atención al comportamiento positivo que al negativo.
4. El apoyo al mantenimiento de aptitudes sociales tales.
5. La utilización de evaluaciones del desarrollo y la observación para modificar y adaptar las estrategias de enseñanza y aprendizaje para que todos los niños crezcan y aprendan.

A continuación evalúe su programa en términos de barreras frecuentemente soslayadas en la inclusión. ¿Incluye el programa/ ambiente?

- ¿Áreas inaccesibles tales como: objetos difíciles de alcanzar por algunos niños pero no por otros, plataformas en el aula, equipo de trepar? (Las áreas inaccesibles dejan al niño excluido, frustrado, y le niegan oportunidades de aprendizaje).
- ¿Áreas inestables como: desniveles en el piso o en el terreno, y también estantes, mesas, banquetas y sillas en desniveles? (Los niños con incapacidades de desarrollo necesitan muebles apropiados para halar o apoyarse).



- ¿Áreas adecuadamente espaciales como: espacios en interiores y exteriores que estén despejadas, de longitud y anchura suficientes para que los niños con equipo de locomoción tengan espacio para maniobrar (aproximadamente 4 o 5 pies)? (Los niños con desarrollo físico más lento o integración de los sentidos puede beneficiarse de un espacio personal con más holgura).
- ¿Dispositivos de seguridad para exteriores e interiores como: barandillas a nivel de niño en el baño (por el inodoro y lavabo) y en todos los escalones, y alfombrado protector para el riesgo de caídas?
- ¿Áreas designadas para el trabajo, juego y aprendizaje? (Los niños con necesidades especiales suelen beneficiarse por el cambio frecuente de posiciones y actividades)
- ¿Luz adecuada? ¿Es el alumbrado uniforme? ¿Produce resplandor brillante o duro? ¿Hay áreas muy brillantes muy opacas?
- ¿Acústica apropiada? ¿Nivel de sonido apropiado? ¿Cómo se oyen las voces en el recinto? ¿Es posible concentrarse al escuchar a un niño a corta distancia sin que interfieran otras voces en el recinto?
- ¿Formatos múltiples tales como cuadros, símbolos y palabras? Todo letrero en el cuarto debe ser en letras grandes, que se destaquen.
- ¿Amplia variedad de materiales y actividades para los distintos niveles de desarrollo?
- ¿Juguetes, actividades y recursos interesantes que provoquen todos los sentidos - la vista, el oído, el tacto, el gusto, el olfato? Esto se aplica también a los juguetes musicales y de movimiento.
- ¿Manejo de transiciones? ¿Preparan los adultos a los niños para los cambios usando técnicas como darles alguna indicación o pie antes de una transición, avisando con tiempo el comienzo y la terminación de una actividad?

Padres y proveedores pueden utilizar estas aptitudes e ideas para ayudar a crear ambientes más inclusivos para niños tiernos. Estas prácticas promueven y apoyan ambientes acogedores que pueden ayudar a incrementar al máximo el potencial de todos los niños. Esta perspectiva de la inclusión es consistente con la posición conjunta (Joint Position Statement) de la Division for Early Childhood (DEC) y la National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).



Birth to Three Update

By Linda Goodman, Director,
Birth to Three System

The state budget for the fiscal year that starts July 1 passed on May 5, 2010 and was signed by the Governor. It includes a \$7m increase for Birth to Three services in an otherwise austere budget. That should ensure that supports and services will continue uninterrupted next year.

I (along with 200 other people) recently attended a workshop on inclusion for young children with autism, but which certainly applied to all children with disabilities. Glen Dunlap and Phil Strain gave us a tag team morning on evidence-based practices both for instruction and

for preschool inclusion. I know that we often hear the question from providers, school districts, and parents, “but what is the effect on the typical children?”

Dr. Strain spoke of a study that he did specifically on that topic. He had two groups of three, four, and five year olds. One group had participated in an inclusive preschool with children who had autism spectrum disorders. The other group had little if any contact with anyone with disabilities. The children were shown video clips of a young child trying to complete a puzzle task, but either succeeding or failing. When seeing the child succeed, children were told it was a video of a child “like you.” When seeing the child fail, children were told it was a video of a child “not like you.” In all cases, the

children were asked to “tell me about what you just saw.” The overwhelming response from the children who had no contact with people with disabilities, when told they were seeing a child “not like you” fail at a task was, “He should be punished.” When told they were seeing a child “like you” succeeding, they most often responded “That’s baby stuff.” The children that had been involved in the inclusive preschool, when seeing a child “not like you” fail, said “I could have taught him to do that.” When those same children saw a child “like you” succeed, they said, “He put it together!” The attitudes that these children form at the preschool level will carry over into all their future interactions and opinions about other people.



Inclusion in the School Community

By Juleen P. Flanigan, Director of Early Childhood Services, Education Connection

The wonderful thing about children is that every one of them is special... this has been the guiding principle in the development of two preschool classrooms in Plymouth, a collaboration between Education Connection and Plymouth Public Schools. With the leadership of the Superintendent and the experience of the Preschool Coordinator, two quality preschool classrooms are now fully inclusive and enroll preschoolers with special needs. The district was challenged to find typical experiences for the children with special needs. They began to place their children in the preschool

classrooms within the school building operated through the Family Resource Center. The quality of the environment, the experience and education of the teaching staff, and the team effort among the special education teachers and administration combined to create a model pre-K experience. Class size is limited to 16 with a teacher, assistant teacher and an aide in each room. Both classrooms are NAEYC accredited.

ShawnMarie Dumond, Preschool Coordinator, reflects on the success of the learning environment: "All children benefit from the services of the special education personnel that enrich our classroom with activities and interactions. The techniques that we put in place to support children with special needs are successful with all children."

The school system benefits from the children being part of a typical quality early childhood experience. As these children develop the needed skills during their early years, many children do not require special services when they enter kindergarten. Parents appreciate that all children are special and the children show them that friendships are not limited because of differences. An inclusive community recognizes all possibilities, develops social responsibility and supports human dignity. Every child deserves to be seen as a unique and valuable member of the community. Every child has strengths and every child makes a unique contribution that enriches the lives of all. Plymouth's children are enriched for this wonderful experience.



Early Childhood Special Education Update

By Maria Synodi, Coordinator, Early Childhood Special Education

Phrases like "this is not for you," or "your need to go elsewhere," and "your child doesn't belong here," are sometimes what families hear or is a reflection of how families feel when their child cannot participate in a program, service, or activity designed for children without disabilities. These phrases or thoughts may also resonate with some adults who operate, manage or deliver a variety of programs, services or activities for young children and their families. Once a disability, special need, or special health care need is known, it can bring fear and trepidation. Adults may be concerned about whether they have the capacity, ex-

pertise, or resources to serve and support a child with a disability or special need. And the very thing parents are seeking to access seems to no longer be available if their child is disabled or has a special need.

When we talk about the inclusion of children, there are three basic considerations: access, participation, and benefit. We cannot even begin to discuss inclusion if children cannot get through the door. So access to any program, service or activity should be open and available to all children. That access is a right and is supported by federal laws that prohibit discrimination on the basis of a disability.

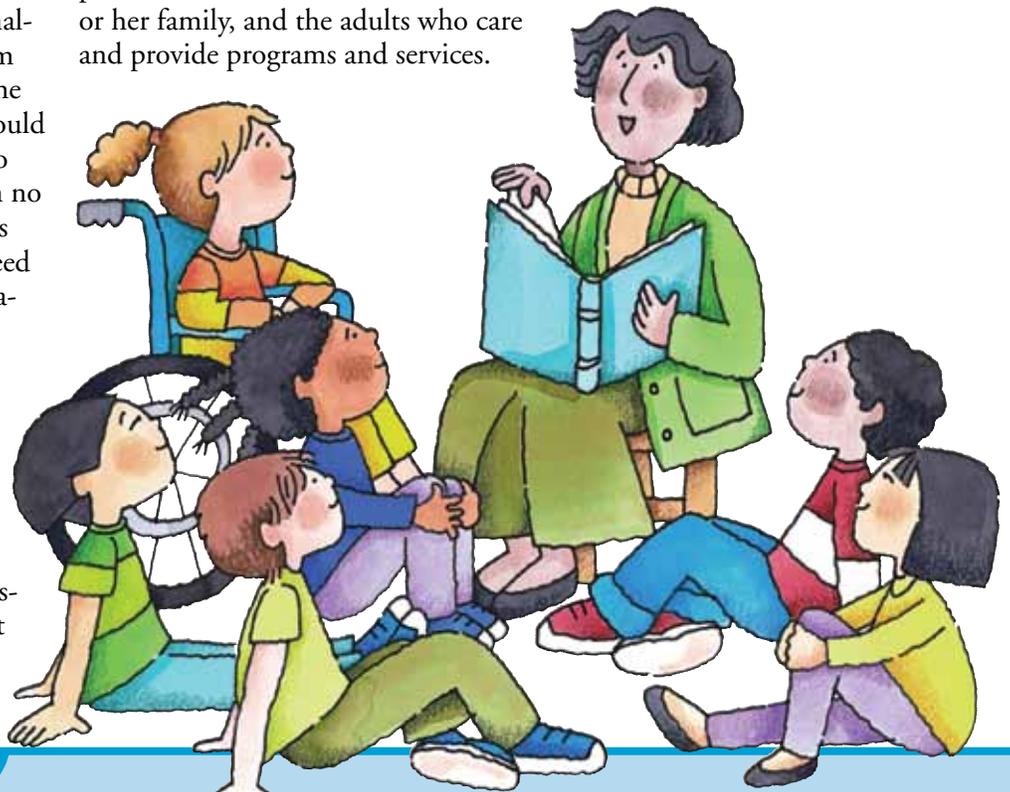
Once a child with a disability or special need is in the door, then what? The focus and attention should then be on how the adults can support a child's participation. Considerations can include a change in the environment, a change in the structure of a



classroom, new or different materials, and/or the manner in which adults interact with the child or facilitate interactions amongst children. An analogy would be if you broke your arm – How would you write? Answer the phone? Cook? Eat? Work? How would you need to do things differently to accommodate the fact that you can no longer do things in the same way as everyone else? That's how adults need to think about making accommodations or adaptations for children.

For the majority of children with disabilities and special needs, the smallest support, accommodation or modification can make a world of difference and can ensure that children with disabilities can participate along with their non-disabled peers. And when children get to participate, when they have the ability to play, learn and develop

along with their friends, they obtain a benefit. The outcome and result is positive for all involved – the child, his or her family, and the adults who care and provide programs and services.



Parents' Perspective

Inclusion: A Positive Opportunity for All

By Amy McCoy

A child's third birthday is a time to celebrate all of the hard work of participating in Birth to Three. But now what? For some parents, it may be a frightening transition to pre-school and the mystery of Inclusion. For all parents, it is a time for many changes and we all know how difficult change can be for our children—and for us!

When it was time for my son, Matthew, to make this transition, I had a lot of questions going through my mind. Among them:

- What will this inclusion model look like?
- Where and how will my son fit in to this inclusive classroom?
- How will the other students relate to and understand my son who has a severe speech disorder and is not speaking at all?

One visit to the classroom eased my worries. Matthew's teacher had created an environment where everyone was comfortable, students were constantly learning in small groups and in one-on-one situations. The teachers, therapists, and paraprofessionals were constantly in synch. It was easy for me to see as a mom and a former teacher, that all the students' needs were being met in this inclusive environment. There was a seamlessness to the way the students with special needs and their typically developing peers experienced the classroom.

Matthew's teacher expertly provided a way for him to communicate with his teachers and peers. She created interactive communication boards specifically to fit his needs. He was feeling more successful in his communication attempts, but most of all, the other students readily accepted this as Matthew's way of talking. They would bring the boards over to him to help him find his words. My son was providing his typical peers with an opportunity to experience communication in an alternative way. These same peers were, and still are, role models helping Matthew learn appropriate ways to behave and yes, talk!

The transition to inclusion, like any change, can be seen as a positive opportunity for all!



ICC update

By Mark A. Greenstein MD,
ICC Chairperson

I was always taught not to use a word in its own definition, but when I look up inclusion in the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, they report that inclusion is “the state of being included!” How helpful is that? The fourth of four definitions is “the act or practice of including students with disabilities in regular school classes.” This starts me on a cascade of searches; How do you define who is a student? What is a disability compared to a difference? And what, these days, is regular? These are all-important questions and ones that require thoughtful and careful exploration. But I will leave those for a larger question about the value of inclusion.

I must admit, when I first heard of inclusion, it was under the title of mainstreaming, and at the time it often seemed more akin to perhaps incidental learning by exposure or learning to swim when thrown in the deep end. Children were included in gym, art and music as well as recess, with the hopes that there



might be social contact and growth, but I don't remember anything more, anything in what have now become Individualized Education

Programs (IEPs) and Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSPs). That was decades ago though, perhaps, for some, that is still what inclusion represents. In reality, research shows the benefits of inclusion, especially, and sometimes only when accompanied by two other concepts, communication and planning. Inclusion itself needs to be included with these two other tasks, neither of which are simple, and none of which are easy. Communication – true listening to parents, to children, to professionals and paraprofessionals, and all to each other, requires work and ongoing clarification. Planning requires not only thinking ahead, but also watching and looking back and then forward again. It is when these happen together that one finds the benefits of inclusion blossoming, not just for the child who has been included, who has not been excluded, but for everyone involved. So, inclusion is work, hard work, and

inclusion, when done well, can be rewarding and worthwhile. But it can also be a struggle; it can be frustrating and daunting and confusing. Inclusion does not mean that a child may not need specialized help or services;

it does not mean homogenization. It means that for many of us there are benefits to not being kept apart.

We need your help!

Please send your ideas or suggestions for future newsletter topics to Cathy.malley@uconn.edu or call 203-207-3267.

Thank you so much for your input.

I must admit, I don't have simple answers for complex questions; I don't have a simple answer for ANY child's needs and how to balance what may be competing needs, but I will share with you my own

definition; inclusion is to be made part of something larger, rather than to be kept separate. I think that covers it a bit better for me. What are your thoughts? Please let me know.

P.S. I sent this in to the editors and woke the next morning realizing I was missing an opportunity to talk about another chance for inclusion, that of parents on the State's Inter-agency Coordinating Council. As one of our parents wrote in the last issue of this newsletter, participation in the SICCC can be a way to help many others. The SICCC exists to advise and assist the Lead Agency, the Department of Developmental Disabilities in terms of its Birth to Three activities. We could not do this without the full participation and input of parents. As I wrote above, successful inclusion also requires communication and planning and I hope that you might consider helping us with these. If you are interested in learning more, please contact me or Anna Gorski RN at ICC Support at 860-418-8716 or anna.gorski@ct.gov.



BIRTH through 5 News

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Resources

The websites listed in this section are not endorsed or warranted in any way by the University of Connecticut Cooperative Extension System or by the Birth to 5 News advisory board. As with all information obtained from any source, websites should be used with caution. Not all information found on the internet is valid, useful, or accurate and one should not accept information as fact just because it appears on a website. Because so much information exists in such large quantities ranging in accuracy, reliability, and value, there is no one authority who approves the content before it is made public. It is the users' responsibility to evaluate the information. Selecting sources that offer author's name, title or position, author's organizational affiliation, date of page creation or version, and author's contact information helps with assessing the significance and reliability of information.

Training Institute:

The National Early Childhood Inclusion Institute, July 14-16, 2010, will be held at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, NC. For additional information contact www.nectac.org/~meetings/inclusionmtg2009/splash.html.



Position Paper:

A Position Paper on Inclusion issued jointly by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the Division of Early Childhood (DEC). The Position Paper can be found at www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/DEC_NAEYC_EC_updatedKS.pdf.

Websites:

The National Professional Development Center on Inclusion which focuses on preparing personnel to educate and care for young children with disabilities in settings with their typically developing peers – including access to the Inclusion Notes Newsletter, can be found at <http://community.fpg.unc.edu/npdci>.

Including Samuel is a documentary film produced by Samuel's father, Dan Habib. Information can be found on the Including Samuel website at www.includingsamuel.com/home.aspx.

Circle of Inclusion website with materials in different languages about including and accommodating all children can be found at www.circleofinclusion.org/english/accommodating/index.html

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This newsletter is available in English and Spanish. Visit the Birth to Three website at www.birth23.org and click on Publications, or the Department of Education website at www.sde.ct.gov, then click on the Early Childhood link.

Este boletín está disponible en inglés y en español. Visite el sitio del Sistema para Infantes a Tres Años en www.birth23.org y pulse a Publicaciones o el del Departamento de Educación en www.sde.ct.gov. Pulse entonces el enlace 'Early Childhood' (primera infancia).

Technical Assistance Alliance

website with information to meet the needs of parents of children with disabilities can be found at www.taalliance.org

National Association for the Education for Young Children

website is dedicated to improving the well-being of all young children, with particular focus on the quality of educational and developmental services for all children from birth through age eight. The site offers a host of resources and can be found at www.naeyc.org

Pacer Center website provides information to expand opportunities and enhance the quality of life of children and young adults with disabilities and their families. The center can be found at www.pacer.org

Policy Briefs:

The Education Law Center

recently released the following two policy briefs, with support from the Pew Charitable Trusts:

Including Children with Disabilities in State Pre-K Programs

(February 2010) www.edlawcenter.org/ELCPublic/Publications/PDF/PreKPolicyBrief_InclusionChildren-WithDisabilities.pdf Provides an overview of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and recommends policies to help ensure that preschool-aged children with disabilities receive an appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment.

Access to Pre-K Education Under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (February 2010) www.edlawcenter.org/ELCPublic/Publications/PDF/PreKPolicyBrief_AccessToEducation.pdf Provides an overview of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and discusses policies that can help to increase the number of homeless children in pre-k programs.

