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. We encourage you to reproduce it for distribution and use it in a variety of contexts including professional development, policy development, planning, advocacy, and grant writing.

1. Inclusion takes many different forms; a single definition of inclusion does not exist.


*Research review or syntheses. 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.**


Definition of Terms

Inclusion
According to the Division for Early Childhood, “Inclusion, as a value, supports the right of all children, regardless of abilities, to participate actively in natural settings within their communities. Natural settings are those in which the child would spend time had he or she not had a disability. These settings include, but are not limited to: home, preschools, nursery schools, Head Start programs, kindergartens, neighborhood school classrooms, childcare, places of worship, recreational (such as community playgrounds and community events) and other settings that all children and families enjoy.”

The entire DEC position statement on inclusion may be accessed online at: http://www.dec-sped.org/pdf/positionpapers/PositionStatement_Inclusion.pdf

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

Research synthesis
A research synthesis provides a comprehensive, systematic review of research studies related to a particular subject. The synthesis typically includes a description, summary, and critical analysis of a specific line of research. A research synthesis may also include an appraisal of the research evidence and a description of the magnitude of the effects of an intervention under investigation.

Research synthesis points
Research synthesis points represent the key conclusions that can be drawn from a review of the literature or research synthesis. The synthesis points in this document derive primarily from two key sources:


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.

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).
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