



# Me, Too!

## Inside Preschool Inclusion

The Early Childhood Research Institute on Inclusion

### **Respecting diversity: the effect of language, culture and disability on children's preschool experiences**

Educators and administrators in preschool settings face many challenges incorporating children with special needs. The issue of inclusion becomes more complex because children differ with respect to linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The interaction among culture, language and disability can have a tremendous impact on a child's sense of belonging in the classroom and school community, and can influence educational goals, such as developing social competence and increasing receptive and expressive skills.

These basic goals are greatly affected by a child's ability to communicate. Children with disabilities can have a more difficult time forming friendships and participating meaningfully in the full range of classroom activities. The obstacles may be even larger when the child's native language and culture differ from those of the majority of children at the preschool. A language and cultural barrier can also affect a program's ability to address a family's needs, and for families to communicate their concerns.

Adequately serving children with disabilities from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds is a tremendous challenge. An article by researchers with the Early Childhood Research Institute on Inclusion presents three family profiles, and the degree to which each family has been incorporated, or isolated from the classroom experience. The following issues were identified from this research:

**Lack of identified or defined educational goals.** Many IEPs and curricula lacked educational goals that addressed communication and bilingual issues, even though this was a priority identified by most families.

**Participation in classroom activities affected by language and disability issues.** The effects of language differences and disability conditions may interact to form barriers to children's participation in classroom activities.

**Interactions and abilities to form friendships influenced by language.** Effective communication systems are important to children in forming friendships and social interaction.

**Communication between home and school compromised.** When professionals and parents do not share a common language, communication between home and school may not be established or may break down.

**Lack of translation/interpretation and training in cultural/linguistic issues.** Both parents and professionals expressed the need for appropriate translation and interpreter services, and training for personnel related to cultural and language issues.

(over)

*"For children with disabilities, not speaking the dominant culture[s] language may further erode their social and learning opportunities, unless supports are provided."*

In the most successful circumstances, comprehensive and coordinated planning, collaborative efforts between families and professionals, increased interpretation services and staff training in language and multi-cultural issues have been shown to significantly improve a child's chances for meaningful inclusion in the classroom, and the family's involvement in the community as a whole.

### **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**

Hanson, M. J., Gutierrez, S., Morgan, M., Brennan, E. L., & Zercher, C. (1997). Language, culture, and disability: Interacting influences on preschool inclusion. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 17, 307-337.

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