Inclusion is the principle that supports the education of children with disabilities alongside their non-disabled peers rather than separately. Both the Americans with Disabilities Education Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (Sec. 504) require schools and agencies to provide equal education opportunities for children with disabilities. Ever since Brown v. Board of Education held that separate was not equal, inclusion has been part of this requirement to provide equal educational opportunities. But the primary source for the inclusion requirement is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or IDEA. IDEA not only supports equal educational opportunities, it specifically requires schools to support inclusion of children with disabilities through the least restrictive and natural environment mandates. For preschool and school age children (ages 3-21), IDEA requires that children with disabilities be educated in the “least restrictive environment” (1412(a)(5) and 1413(a)(1)). For infants and toddlers (ages 0-3) with disabilities, IDEA promotes the use of “natural environments” for early intervention services (1432(4)(G)).

From: CONNECT Foundations of Inclusion Birth to Five (downloadable video) http://community.fpg.unc.edu/connect
Definition of 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.

Definition from the joint position Statement on Inclusion from Division of Early Childhood (DEC) and National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

What Is An Early Childhood Program?

According to the federal government, an Early Childhood Program is a program that includes children with disabilities and the majority of the children in the program are non-disabled.

These programs may include, but are not limited to:

- Head Start Programs
- Kindergartens
- Preschool classes offered to an eligible pre-kindergarten population by the public school system
- Private kindergartens or preschools; and
- Group child development centers or childcare

Early Childhood Programs should:

- Promote learning that is child-centered and active
- Provide learning activities on the developmental levels of the children
- Have activities that are relevant to the children in the program
- Offer a variety of hands-on learning activities and materials in learning centers
- Provide learning experiences that corresponds to the interest of the children and
- Include conversations and interactions between the children and adults throughout the day
Rigorous educational research consistently shows that at-risk children who attend high quality preschool programs demonstrate gains in early learning skills and throughout their K-12 years.

Research also shows that children with disabilities who attend preschool in inclusive environments demonstrate gains in social skills, self-regulation, language development and cognition.

Integrating children with disabilities into typical preschool programs does not simply improve the educational experience for the children with disabilities - preschool classrooms that utilize inclusive materials and curricula, along with appropriate supports and services, provide social and educational benefits to the general pre-k population as well.

Models of Inclusion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blended</th>
<th>Itinerant</th>
<th>Team Teaching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blends Preschool for All and early childhood special education into one classroom with a teacher certified to teach both groups</td>
<td>Provides itinerant special education teachers and related service staff to deliver support in the regular early childhood classroom</td>
<td>Provides two teachers, (regular and special education) working together to teach all children in the classroom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Models for Inclusion

The above models for inclusion can take place in a community childcare provider, a Head Start classroom, a Preschool for All classrooms or an Early Childhood classroom in a public school.

With each model the goal is to provide service to children with disabilities in the high quality program that includes children with and without disabilities.

REFERENCES & RESOURCES


CONNECT Foundations of Inclusion Birth to Five (downloadable video) http://community.fpg.unc.edu/connect


National Professional Development Center on Inclusion. (2011). Research synthesis points on practices that support inclusion. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, FPG Child Development Institute, Author. Available at http://community.fpg.unc.edu/npdc