Natural Environments and Least Restrictive Environment

Guiding Principles & Practices for Delivery of Inclusive Services for Iowa's preschoolers on IFSPs and IEPs

Developed September, 2005 by Iowa's Natural Allies State Team

Iowa's Natural Allies project is designed to work with Community Colleges and their early childhood partners to prepare personnel to provide quality services for ALL young children in inclusive environments.

Quality early care and education programs welcome all children and families. Children learn together in stimulating and developmentally appropriate environments that embrace diversity and exceptionality. Each child's needs are met individually by well trained staff.

What does an inclusive program look like?

- Program characteristics are the same as any other quality early care and education program.

- All children participate in the same routines and play experiences.

- Providers recognize all children as individuals with special strengths and needs.

- Creative modifications to routines and activities are continually made so that each child benefits from participation.

What are the benefits for children in an inclusive program?

- Children grow and develop through play.

- Children learn to accept similarities and differences.

- Activities and interactions help children understand that everyone makes an important contribution.

- Individual strengths and needs are embraced.

Natural Environments and Least Restrictive Environments

Both Natural and Least Restrictive Environments are the places and opportunities where the child learns, plays, and interacts with others on a routine basis, e.g., the kitchen, backyard, front steps, pool, community early care and education programs, etc.

Children 0-3

According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education ACT (IDEA), PART C, Natural Environments are settings that are natural for children of the same age who have no disabilities or developmental delays.

Children 3-5

According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part B, the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), is the environment where appropriate activities occur for children of similar age without disabilities or developmental delay.

Principles of Adult Learning

Adults Prefer Learning Situations Which:

1. **Are practical and problem solution-centered**
   - Give overviews, summaries, examples, and stories to link theory to practice.
   - Discuss and help plan for direct application of new information.
   - Use collaborative, authentic problem-solving activities.
   - Anticipate problems applying the new ideas and offer suggestions.
   - Create balance between theory and practice.

2. **Promote positive self esteem**
   - Provide low-risk activities in small group settings.
   - Build on individual successes.
   - Provide guided practice and establish routines to build confidence.

3. **Integrate new ideas with existing knowledge to capitalize on experience**
   - Relate learning to prior experience.
   - Collect needs data and match the degree of choice to learner's level of development.
   - Build in options within plan to easily shift to address needs.
   - Suggest follow up ideas and next steps for support and implementation after the session.
   - Allow time for planning next steps.

4. **Show respect for the individual learner**
   - Provide for physical needs through breaks, refreshments, etc.
   - Provide a quality, well organized experience.
   - Avoid jargon and don't "talk down" to participants. (Define acronyms.)
   - Validate and affirm learners' knowledge, contributions, and successes.
   - Request feedback and provide opportunities for input.
   - Start and end on time.
   - Allow choice and self direction.

5. **Capitalize on learners' experience**
   - Listen and collect data about participant needs before, during, and after the event.
   - Plan alternate activities and choices so learners can adjust process to fit experience level.
   - Create activities that use their experience and knowledge.
   - Provide for the possibility of a need to unlearn old habits or confront inaccurate beliefs.

Characteristics of Adult Learning

- Adults view learning as a social process.

- Adults have a specific reason for learning new skills or materials.

- Adult learners are motivated; they spend their own time, money, and resources to obtain new skills and knowledge.

- Adults may approach learning with some fear if past learning experiences have been negative.

- Adults may underestimate their own abilities to learn and need additional time to adjust to new learning conditions.

- Adult learners' stages of development, whether personal (cognitive, moral, ego, conceptual), chronological (early adulthood, mid-life, etc.), or professional (new or experienced teacher, etc.), profoundly affect their learning.

- Adults learn best when new information is tied to or built upon past experiences.

- The adult learner controls what is learned, selecting new information and deciding how to use it. This takes place at both the conscious and unconscious levels.

- Adults learn best in non-threatening environments of trust and mutual respect.

- New learning is followed by a period of reflection to facilitate integration and application of new knowledge and skills.

Additional Resources on Adult Learning

Alexander, Nancy. (2000). *Early Childhood Workshops That Work: The Essential Guide to Successful Training and Workshops.* St. Paul, MN: Redleaf Press.

Carter, Margie & Curtis, Deb. (1994). *Training Teachers: A Harvest of Theory and Practice.* St. Paul, MN: Redleaf Press.

Silberman, Mel. (1995). *101 Ways to Make Training Active.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer Publisher.

Teeters, Jim. (2001). *Teach with Style: A Comprehensive System for Teaching Adults.* St. Paul, MN: Redleaf Press.

Wolfe, B. (1993). *In-service Best Practices: Research on What Works and What Does Not.* Minneapolis, MN: author.

Principles of Inclusion

"Inclusion as a value, supports the right of all children, regardless of their diverse abilities to participate actively in natural settings within their communities." (Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children, 1993).

Principles that Support Inclusive Practices:

1. **All children are unique**
   - Recognize that children have individual characteristics and personalities
   - Recognize that children have strengths
   - Recognize that children have needs

2. **All children are valued**
   - Treat children with dignity and respect
   - Welcome children as themselves

3. **All children can learn**
   - Recognize children's individual progress
   - Recognize children's unique learning styles

4. **All children have the right to an education in a natural setting**
   - Environment is warm, inviting, and safe
   - Children learn from each other
   - Children actively participate
   - Environment is adapted to meet the needs of individual children
   - Environment is accessible to all children

5. **All children receive individualized education**
   - Curriculum is based on individual needs
   - Children are evaluated on individual progress
   - Teaching is based upon ongoing assessment
   - Learning activities are based upon the unique needs of children

6. **All children are taught by educated, responsive staff**
   - Instruction matches individual learning styles
   - Developmentally appropriate curriculum is implemented
   - Instruction supports all children in reaching their full potential

7. **All children benefit from a diverse and culturally rich environment**
   - Diversity is celebrated
   - Diversity includes ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and ability
   - Diversity within cultural groups is recognized

8. **All children benefit from families working in partnership with program staff**
   - Need for mutual trust, respect, honesty, and open communication is recognized
   - Families are active participants when planning for their children
   - Staff acknowledge families' hopes, dreams, and wishes for their children.

Selected Bibliography Support Inclusive Practices

The following are materials that promote well-designed, integrated environments and programs that support the development of all young children in inclusive settings.

Web Sites:

1. www.circleofinclusion.org
   Offers demonstrations of and information about the effective practices of inclusive educational program for children from birth through age eight.
2. www.nectas.unc.edu/topics/inclusion/default.asp
   Offers a wealth of information regarding federal policies, research, resources, conferences, etc. regarding Natural Environments and Inclusive Practices.
3. http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~scpp/pdfs/rguide.pdf
   Identifies and describes teaching, training and staff development materials that meet three basic criteria: good,, readily available, and inexpensive.
4. http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~publicationsoffice/pdfs/AdmGuide.pdf
   Supports administrators who are responsible for setting up, monitoring, supporting, and maintaining inclusive programs for preschool children.

Print Materials:

1. *An administrator's guide to preschool inclusion*
   Wolery, RA & Odom, SL (2000). Chapel Hill, NC: FPG Child Development Institute. Supports administrators who are responsible for setting up, monitoring, supporting, and maintaining inclusive programs for preschool children.
2. *Adapting curriculum & instruction in inclusive early childhood classrooms*
   Cross, A.F. & Dixon, S.D. (2004). Bloomington, IN: Indiana Institute on Disability and Community. Provides a clear framework for planning & implementing adaptions for young children in any early childhood setting.
3. *Including preschool-age children with disabilities in community settings*
   Deosset. S. (Ed). (2004). (3rd ed.). Chapel Hill, NC: NECTAC. Addresses perspectives on inclusion, information about inclusive strategies, and legislative foundations.
4. *Natural environments and inclusion* (Young Exceptional Children Monograph Series #2)
   Sandall, Sl, & Ostrosky, M. (Eds.) (2000). Denver: Sopris West. Focuses on aspects of inclusion that include strategies for implementing inclusive environments within natural settings, ways to ensure that preschools nurture positive attitudes and provide valuable experiences, and examples of state and federal regulations.

Videotapes:

1. *Child care and children with special needs*
   National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). (2000). Washington, DC: Author. Describes how the Americans with Disabilities Act applies to childcare programs and documents the experiences of four families and programs that are currently making inclusion work and provides information about how childcare programs can interact with parents and special services providers to insure that children with disabilities receive the best possible care.
2. *Welcoming all children: Creating inclusive childcare*
   Freeman, T., Hutter-Pishgahi, L., & Traub. E. (2000). Bloomington, IN: Indiana Institute on Disability and Community. Designed to support childcare providers in making their programs responsive to children of diverse abilities.