



# Me, Too!

## Inside Preschool Inclusion

The Early Childhood Research Institute on Inclusion

### **Working together: Professionals develop new roles and relationships in inclusive settings**

Early childhood programs support the inclusion of young children with disabilities in a variety of ways. In some settings, early childhood special education and early childhood education teachers may work more directly with each other than they have in the past, perhaps coteaching a single class. In other settings, special education teachers may consult with teachers and work with children in several different classrooms. This collaboration and direct participation in a variety of settings may also be a new role for related service providers such as speech and occupational therapy professionals.

No matter how a program supports preschool inclusion, teachers and other professionals often must learn new roles and develop new relationships with each other. An article by researchers with The Early Childhood Research Institute on Inclusion identifies essential elements in the development of positive roles and relationships by adults working in inclusive early childhood programs.

#### **Elements of positive professional roles in inclusive settings**

**Investment in the program.** Participants are actively involved in developing the inclusive program and feel a personal interest in its success.

**A shared philosophy.** Adults working together have common goals and share similar beliefs about how to reach those goals.

**Shared responsibility for all children.** Each adult in the program is responsible for each child in the program. Every adult supports every child's educational goals.

**Communication.** Through planned meeting times and informal conversations early childhood educators, early childhood special educators, related service providers, and families discuss the program and the needs of individual children.

**Flexibility in redefining roles.** Staff members are able to let go of some aspects of their role, assume new roles, and allow others to share in their role. "I am not just a special educator in our model," says a coteacher of an inclusive class.

**Stability in staffing.** "All these different people get to know each other because they stay here. So when something like an inclusion effort comes along... There's a built-in and positive atmosphere..." explains a special education director.

**Initiative.** Individuals start the process of collaborating with others and developing new roles and relationships.

**Administrative support.** Administrators listen to and show confidence in staff. Resources are provided for training, team-building, and program planning.

"As I look across the building the inclusion experiences that have been really positive have been those outgrowths of people that want to work together, are committed to working together..."  
*an early childhood center principal*

### **About the ECRII**

The Early Childhood Research Institute on Inclusion (ECRII) is a national research project funded by the U.S. Department of Education (Grant # H024K40004) 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 conducted by researchers at five universities in different regions across 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**

Lieber, J., Beckman, P. J., Hanson, M. J., Janko, S., Marquart, J. M., Horn, E., Odom, S. L., (1997). The impact of changing roles on relationships between professionals in inclusive programs for young children. Early Education and Development, 8, 67-82.

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