Research Synthesis Points on Quality Inclusive Practices

In April, 2009, two national organizations working on behalf of young children—the Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children (DEC) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)—completed two years of historic and collaborative work with the release of a joint position statement on inclusion[1]. This document provides brief descriptions and supporting references for the evidence-based and promising practices that support early childhood inclusion. These practices are organized into three major sections corresponding to the defining features of high quality early childhood inclusion as described in the joint position statement:

- **Access**—removing physical barriers, providing a wide range of activities and environments, and making necessary adaptations to create optimal development and learning for individual children;

- **Participation**—using a range of instructional and intervention approaches to promote engagement in play and learning activities, and a sense of belonging for every child; and

- **Supports**—creating an infrastructure of systems-level supports for implementing high-quality inclusion.

Citations for each practice include best available research in the form of research reviews or syntheses or, when a summary of the research does not exist, the most recent and relevant individual studies evaluating specific practices. It should be noted that this document does not include an exhaustive list of existing research studies on every practice, nor do all promising practices have a supporting body of rigorous research evidence. This document may be used in a variety of contexts, including professional development, policy development, planning, advocacy, and grant writing.

Practices that Support Access

**Universal Design (UD)/Universal Design for Learning (UDL)**
UD and UDL support access to early care and education environments through the removal of physical and structural barriers (UD) and the provision of multiple and varied formats for instruction and learning (UDL).²


**Assistive Technology (AT)**
AT interventions involve a range of strategies to promote a child’s access to learning opportunities, from making simple changes to the environment and materials to helping a child use special equipment. Combining AT with effective teaching promotes the child’s participation in learning and relating to others.³


Practices that Support Participation

**Embedded Instruction and Other Naturalistic Interventions**
Embedded instruction and intervention strategies address specific developmental or learning goals within the context of everyday activities, routines, and transitions at home, at school, or in the community.⁴


---
² No research syntheses or published peer-reviewed studies are available for appraising the evidence related to universal design or universal design for learning prior to kindergarten. The citation included is a school-aged example.
Scaffolding Strategies

Scaffolding strategies are structured, targeted approaches that can be used with children who require more intensive supports across a wide variety of teaching and learning contexts, and in combination with other approaches. Scaffolding strategies include modeling, response prompting, variations of prompting and modeling, peer supports, and corrective feedback.\(^5\) \(^6\)


\(^5\) Recent and relevant individual studies evaluating specific practices are listed because research reviews, syntheses, or summaries are not currently available.

Tiered Models of Instruction/Intervention

Tiered models of instruction offer a framework that can be used in early childhood to help practitioners connect children's formative assessment results with specific teaching and intervention strategies.\textsuperscript{7, 8, 9, 10}


Practices Relating to Systems-Level Supports

Professional Development (PD)

PD includes teaching and learning activities designed to support the acquisition of professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions related to inclusion as well as the application of this knowledge in practice. The content of the PD should include evidence-based practices that define high-quality early childhood inclusion.\textsuperscript{11, 12}


\textsuperscript{10} No research syntheses or published peer-reviewed studies are available for appraising the evidence of tiered models of instruction/intervention and to monitor progress in young children prior to kindergarten. The citations included are school-aged examples.
\textsuperscript{11} National Professional Development Center on Inclusion. (2008). \textit{What do we mean by professional development in the early childhood field?} Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, FPG Child Development Institute, Author.
\textsuperscript{12} Because very few syntheses address professional development in early childhood, most of these citations are drawn from studies across different ages, disciplines, and content areas.
Models of Collaboration
A variety of approaches have been developed to support ongoing communication and collaboration in conjunction with quality improvement and professional development in early childhood (and education more broadly). These include technical assistance, consultation, coaching, mentoring, collaborative problem-solving, and communities of practice/professional learning communities.13


Family-Professional Collaboration
Family-professional collaboration builds opportunities for both relationship building and the active participation of parents and practitioners in achieving mutually agreed upon goals. The collaborative efforts build and strengthen family and professional capacity to provide or mediate the provisions of resources, supports, and services that ensure inclusion of children with disabilities in typical school and community activities.14,15


---

13 No research syntheses or published peer-reviewed studies are available for appraising evidence related to using models of collaboration with personnel serving young children prior to kindergarten. The citation included is a school-aged example.


Suggested Citation
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://npdci.fpg.unc.edu

NPDCI acknowledges and deeply appreciates the contributions of the following colleagues to this resource: Mary Jane Brotherson, Virginia Buysse, Pip Campbell, Judy Carta, Camille Catlett, Johnna Darragh Ernst, Shelley deFosset, Laurie Dinnebeil, Heidi Hollingsworth, Marilou Hyson, Ann Kaiser, Bill McInerney, Robin McWilliam, Suzanne Milbourne, Pat Snyder, Carol Trivette, Tracey West, Pam Winton, and Mark Wolery.

Permission to copy not required—distribution encouraged.