Some Practical Tips to Make Inclusion Work

NOAH'S ARK

NECIC
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Val Johnson

Where I come from.

Insert map

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Services for Children with a Disability in Australia

- *0-6 years old*
  - Early Childhood Intervention
    - Usually home based
    - Important component is inclusion into child care or pre-school
    - Some centre based early intervention programs
  - Inclusion support provided for child care and preschool

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Services for Children with a Disability in Australia

- *School age*
  - All children attend school to 17 years old
  - May be a special school or regular setting
  - All children have the right to attend the school of their choice
  - Inclusion support provided to the school
  - Limited support to families outside of school

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The Inclusion Elements Project

- An initiative of Noah's Ark – the largest provider of Early Childhood Intervention and Inclusion Support in Victoria Australia
- Consulted Teachers, families and Early Intervention Professionals about the benefits of inclusion and what is necessary to make inclusion happen

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The Inclusion Elements Project

- Based on the work on Sharon Hope Irwin from Canada, who developed a measure of inclusion

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Benefits of Inclusion - Children

- Language and social skills development
- Friendship with typically developing children
- Provides typically developing role models
- Typically developing children can learn to be more accepting of difference
- No discrimination
- Other families and teachers have opportunities to teach their children about individual differences and acceptance

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Benefits of Inclusion - Teachers

- Can learn new skills
- Develop positive attitudes towards inclusion
- Learn to focus on children's abilities and strengths
- Learn about other services in the area and form partnerships

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Benefits of Inclusion

- Inclusion in mainstream services is now recognised both as a right and as a major intervention strategy
- The location in which early childhood intervention services are provided has diversified accordingly, and increasingly occurs in settings with children without disabilities.

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Benefits of Inclusion

- There is solid research evidence that children with disabilities enrolled into mainstream settings make at least as much developmental progress as they do in special settings
- There is also evidence that children who are enrolled in mainstream settings actually have greater progress in the areas of social competence and communication
- There is limited evidence to suggest that inclusion does not impede learning for typically developing children. In fact inclusion likely helps these children to develop tolerance and acceptance of individual differences in their peers.

(Buysse, V and Hollingsworth, H.L. Research Synthesis points on Early Childhood Inclusion)

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Barriers to Inclusion

- Teachers in regular settings may not understand inclusion or know how to translate it into daily practice.
- Training on inclusion is often inadequate and may be non-existent
- Attitudes and beliefs
- Lack of confidence and fear of the unknown
- Inflexible services: the child and family need to fit into the program rather than the program adapt to meet the needs of the child

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Inclusion Elements Project

- Designed to give teachers and Early Interventionist tools to make inclusion work.

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Inclusion Elements Project

- Divided inclusion into three areas;
  - Resources to support inclusion
  - Program practices to support inclusion
  - Inclusion readiness

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Inclusion Elements

- Resources to support inclusion:
  - Families
  - Consultants
  - Training
  - Mentoring and Support
  - Funding Programs

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Inclusion Elements

- Resources to support inclusion: Families

- Families know about their child's interests, strengths and needs

- They also know about other services working with their child

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Inclusion Elements

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Inclusion Elements

- Resources to support inclusion: Consultants

- Consultants visit the service and provide support for a child or teachers

- They may be therapists, special education teachers or others

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Inclusion Elements

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Inclusion Elements

- Resources to Support Inclusion: Training

- Most teachers in regular settings are unfamiliar with children with disabilities and inclusion

- They may need training related to the inclusion of a specific child e.g. Autism training, or about inclusion in general and how to do it.

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Inclusion Elements

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Inclusion Elements

- Resources to support inclusion: Mentoring and Support

- Most professional need support to include children with additional needs.

- This can come from an experienced person within their service or someone from outside, such as the early intervention team

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Inclusion Elements

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Inclusion Elements

- Resources to support inclusion: Funding Programs
  - In Australia our Government provides funding for an additional staff member to work in the child care centre or school, where necessary
  - It is not always necessary to provide inclusion
  - It is worth trying to find out whether any Government, overseas aid, non government or private funding is available in your local area

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Inclusion Elements

- Program practices to support inclusion:
  - Transitions
  - Individualised Programs
  - Physical Environment
  - Equipment and Toys
  - Children's Relationships
  - Staff Teams

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Inclusion Elements

- Program practices to support inclusion: Transitions
  - Every child must learn to manage a number of transitions throughout the day and year
  - Transitions include getting to and from school or child care, between rooms and between routines and activities throughout the day

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Inclusion Elements

- Program practices to support inclusion: Transitions
  - Transitions can be stressful times for families and children but also provide opportunities for learning
  - Transitions are often the most difficult time for teachers, as children may become distressed or act out at these times
  - We need to prepare children for transitions and make them as smooth as possible

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Inclusion Elements

- Program practices to support inclusion:
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Healesville Sanctuary

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Inclusion Elements

- Program practices to support inclusion: Individualised Programs
- It is important to provide programs that meet the individual needs of each child
- The service needs to adapt to the child, not the other way round
- Individual Program Plans are just as important for children with additional needs in regular settings
- The family and the child's Early Childhood Intervention worker can help the school or child care to develop the individual program.

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Inclusion Elements

Program practices to support inclusion:
- Transitions
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Inclusion Elements

Program practices to support inclusion: Physical Environment

Programs may need to adapt the physical environment so that all children can access all activities, e.g. by providing ramps or bathroom adaptations, space for a child using a walking frame to move between activities, quiet spaces for children who become anxious, lighting etc.

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Inclusion Elements

Program practices to support inclusion:
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Inclusion Elements

Program practices to support inclusion: Equipment and Toys

Children with disabilities may need specialist equipment, e.g. specialised seating.
Toys and equipment should be able to be used by all children
Flexible and adaptable toys and equipment are best

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Inclusion Elements

Program practices to support inclusion:
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Inclusion Elements

Program practices to support inclusion: Children's Relationships.
Children learn through relationships and play
Services need to support the development of relationships between children, with and without disabilities. This means having children working together; avoid worksheets
Positive interactions between adults and children are also important for children's development and learning
Adults need to actively encourage friendships between children and also show that they like each child.

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Slide 1

Inclusion Elements

- Program practices to support inclusion:
  - Transitions
  - Individualised Programs
  - Physical Environment
  - Equipment and Toys
  - Children's Relationships
  - Staff Teams

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Slide 2

Inclusion Elements

- Program practices to support inclusion: Staff Teams

- It is important for everyone who works with the child to share information, plan together and to have regular meeting times

- The team includes all the staff in an inclusive service, and may also include visiting consultants, such as members of the early intervention team.

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Slide 3

Inclusion Elements

- Inclusion readiness:
  - Leadership
  - Quality
  - Enrolment
  - Full Participation
  - Parent Involvement

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Slide 4

Inclusion Elements

- Inclusion readiness relies on good management and a willingness to accept and embrace children with a disability
- The staff at the school or centre cannot achieve inclusion without support and preparation
- Inclusion means not just being in the school or centre, but also participating in all its activities
- Parents must also be involved

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Slide 5

Inclusion Elements - Putting it all together

Resources to Support Inclusion
Families
Consultants
Training
Mentoring and Support
Funding Programs

Practices that Support Inclusion
Transitions
Individualised Programs
Physical Environment
Equipment and Toys
Children's Relationships
Staff Teams

Inclusion Readiness
Leadership
Quality Programs
Enrolment
Full Participation
Parent Involvement

Quality Inclusive Children's Programs

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Slide 6

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Questions / comments

Thank you

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