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Quality Inclusion of Young Children with Disabilities: Taking a Stance to Support Early Childhood Leaders

Sara Movahedazarhouli

Abstract

In the educational lexicon, inclusion is not a term, rather a philosophy that values and advocates for every child's right to quality education and learning to develop their skills and realize their full potentials. Research over the past 40 years has demonstrated that inclusive education is associated with improved outcomes for children and students with disabilities. In early childhood (EC) education, inclusive education is in the best interest of all young children to improve their sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and learning goals. As more EC programs, schools, and educational settings move toward including children with disabilities in general education settings, a need exists to better prepare EC professionals, most importantly EC leaders as gatekeepers of quality to better enhance and facilitate inclusive instructional opportunities for children with disabilities. This chapter focuses on EC leaders' role in developing, adopting, and supporting inclusive education with recommendations to implement and sustain quality inclusive education practices in EC programs and settings.

Keywords: early childhood, inclusion, inclusive education, young children with disabilities, early childhood leaders

1. Introduction

1.1 Quality inclusion of young children with disabilities: taking a stance to support early childhood leaders

There is no better time or place to implement and advocate for inclusive education and inclusive communities than in early childhood (EC) education. Inclusive education includes the vision that all children belong, are valued, and are celebrated can learn in the mainstream of their educational settings and their communities [1]. Research over the past 40 years has continued to demonstrate that inclusive education is associated with improved outcomes for children and students with disabilities and that self-contained settings fail to deliver on their promises of effective practices [2]. Quality inclusive education can help children and students with disabilities with academic [3, 4], communication [5], social and emotional [6, 7], and self-determination skills [8, 9]. Also, educating children and students with disabilities

in general education settings can increase learning expectations for everyone and results in greater empathy and acceptance of differences among all children.

Historically, children and students with disabilities were educated in segregated settings with little or no social or academic interactions with peers without disabilities [10]. In United States (US), federal legislation has supported the right of children and students with disabilities to be cared for and educated with typically developing peers since the passage of PL 99-457 of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1986. IDEA does not use the term “inclusion.” Instead, it requires school divisions to provide a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) and offer a continuum of placement and education options to meet the needs of children and students with disabilities [10]. This requirement is known as the least restrictive environment (LRE) and does not distinguish between school-aged and preschool-aged children. The regulations state:

Least restrictive environment (LRE) means that to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not disabled, and that special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (34 CFR 300.114 through 34 CFR 300.120).

The LRE requirements under Part B of IDEA support the education of children with disabilities in regular classes alongside their typically developing peers in a regular EC setting where most children are typically developing [11]. Children considered to be typically developing are not identified as having a disability and do not have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) [12]. In the US, the National Association for Education of Young Children and Division for Early Childhood (NAEYC/DEC) developed a joint position statement to emphasize the impact of quality inclusion for policy, practice, and potential outcomes for children birth through eight years of age and their families (DEC/NAEYC, 2009). The NAEYC/DEC statement defines EC inclusion as:

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 (p.2).

The Joint Position Statement (2009) highlights three main principles of inclusive education in EC, including (a) access: providing children with a wide range of learning opportunities, activities, settings, and environments, (b) participation: providing additional individualized accommodations and supports to children with more individualized needs to enable them to participate fully in play and learning activities with their typically developing peers and adults, and (c) supports: creating an infrastructure of systems-level supports to strengthen the efforts of individuals and organizations providing inclusive education services to children and families. These principles need to be utilized collectively to result in high-quality programs and services [13].

While the LRE requirement in IDEA is the same for eligible students of any age, providing inclusive EC education services is unique. EC inclusion differs from

inclusive placements and practices in K-12 grades. Some of the differences include the availability of EC programs that offer inclusive services than the K-12 sector, availability of different programs based on child's age (especially for two and three-year-olds), location of the programs that might happen in settings outside of the public schools (e.g., Head Start, child care, community preschool programs which creates wide variability in teacher training, education, and expertise and may impact program quality in programs settings outside of public schools), different teacher-child ratios and class size based on the type of the programs, and the curriculum in EC programs that differs from the educational curriculum for older children [14]. In contrast to the traditional K-12 curriculum, which is academically oriented and teacher-directed, the EC curriculum includes a balance of child-initiated and teacher-directed activities, focusing on all developmental domains [15].

However, despite the substantial body of evidence on the benefits of inclusive education for children with disabilities and the growing body of best inclusive practices, a large percentage of children with disabilities are still educated in separate classrooms or settings [2]. While the definitions of settings and reporting methods by states have changed over time, comparing the 1985 data to the 2015 data, the provision of special education and related services to children with disabilities ages three to five years in regular EC settings appears to have increased by only 7.2%. According to IDEA Part B state performance plan and annual performance report, for almost all IDEA disability categories, the percent of children, aged three to five years who receive the majority of their special education and related services in the regular EC settings in the programs is between 20–40% [16]. However, the goal for meaningful inclusion is that children and students with disabilities get to attend and receive the majority of special education and related services in a regular early childhood program and/or educational setting for 80% of their academic time.

2. Barriers to quality inclusion in early childhood

The primary challenges and barriers to inclusion in EC settings include EC personnel's knowledge, skills, and expertise, within and cross-agency collaboration, and beliefs and attitudes among EC personal and families regarding children with special needs [16]. Many EC professionals, especially those trained as general EC professionals and not dually endorsed in EC/ECSE, do not have the knowledge, skills, and resources to serve children with disabilities. IDEA requires that EC personnel either have the expertise or are supervised by someone who does [16, 17]. The other challenge deals with agency and cross-agency collaboration in EC programs, communities, and systems at local, state, and national levels [11]. The challenges include the agreements for EC programs to cooperatively provide services to children who meet the eligibility requirements to receive early intervention (EI) or ECSE services. Some examples of such collaborative arrangements involve shared responsibility, communication, shared assessments, and planning and shared resources [16].

Challenges of attitude and beliefs involve fears and inadequate or misleading information that can contribute to EC personnel and families' reluctance to include children in inclusive EC settings. EC educators and professionals with more positive attitudes toward teaching children in inclusive classrooms are more likely to implement evidence-based practices related to goals in children's IEPs, create accessible environments, and use appropriate strategies to promote positive developmental and educational outcomes for children with disabilities and their families [13, 16, 17]. Policies and procedure challenges including personnel policies (e.g., training, recruiting, and retaining personnel), fiscal policies (e.g., funding streams, state reimbursements, and legislations), and conflicting policies across programs

(e.g., Head Start, child care, state preschool, state quality ratings and improvement system, school district), are also among barriers to implementation of quality inclusion in EC.

Today, the common assumption for teaching children and students with disabilities is to consider their general education classroom presence. However, there has been a movement to emphasize the quality of learning taking place along with the quantity of time spent in general educational settings [4, 18, 19]. Placement in a general education setting alone does not guarantee improved outcomes. Adequate supports for learning and participation must also be in place [20]. The focal point in the current efforts to promote inclusion and access to the general education curriculum has shifted primarily from where children or students should receive their education to what and how they need to be taught and what outcomes should be achieved [21].

3. EC leadership and quality inclusion

EC leaders are best positioned to drive and bring about change in all children's education and lives and develop a vision and belief that inclusion is essential in their communities. EC leaders set the tone, manner and philosophy of EC programs [22]. The manner with which EC local leaders approach inclusion affects how personnel and families feel about inclusion and their capacity to provide quality inclusive education to children with disabilities. EC leaders are also best positioned to establish a unified purpose for quality inclusion in EC education by getting intentionally and strategically engaged in cross-agency collaboration and efficient and sustainable infrastructures across different EC settings. EC leaders can increase equitable opportunities for all children and their families by making the inclusion of children with disabilities a priority in their decision-making about program design and resource allocation. The EC leaders also play a pivotal role in quality inclusion by building and supporting a competent workforce with the knowledge, skills, and competencies to implement and sustain quality inclusive practices. In addition, EC leaders can deliberately shift policy to ensure the appropriate professional standards, embedded professional development, and dedicated system of supports that promote responsive practices, positive attitudes and beliefs about inclusion, and knowledge of disability among the key stakeholders that are so crucial to this effort [16]. Considering the pivotal role of EC leaders play in implementing and advancing inclusion, the recommendations below aim to help EC leaders better execute and sustain quality inclusion in EC programs and settings.

In this chapter, EC leaders refer to all change agents at local and program levels involved with leadership or administration positions to implement and provide educational and developmental services to young children from birth through 5 years of age in local educational settings. Local-level and program-level EC leaders' role in making quality inclusion happen is crucial and fundamental to young children and their families. No matter what higher-level decisions, policies, and procedures are available, the local leaders are the acting agents closer to practice and responsible for implementing, transferring, and translating the decisions, policies, procedures, and evidence-based practices into everyday practice settings.

The local-level EC leaders can affect financing, contracting, staffing, transportation, and curricular procedures that might affect EC inclusion. The program level EC leaders might include school district and community-based early childhood program officials such as child care, Head Start, school districts, and other early care and education settings that can impact financing, contracting, staffing, transportation, curricular procedures, and policies and procedures that either promote

or hinder EC inclusion [16]. The recommendations below aim to provide supporting strategies and initiatives for local EC leaders to build quality inclusive EC programs.

4. Starting with the vision

As the leader of an EC program, developing a vision statement for inclusion will help guide the leaders in designing and implementing his/her efforts toward more inclusive practices. It creates a consistency of purpose in the program. A vision by itself is generally vague. The leader articulates the vision in more specific terms through the mission and belief statements and establishes the goals, objectives, strategies, and action tactics [23]. For EC programs, as leaders reflect on the ideas, concepts, and values they have identified around EC inclusion, and their program's mission, they can use the vision and mission development results as guidance in developing an action plan to move forward toward implementing inclusive practices. Starting with the vision can be designed to help the EC leaders to:

- Think about specific strategies needed to meet the program's goals around inclusion.
- Decide who will take the lead on each strategy.
- Record the anticipated date of completion and note any progress made.
- Mobilize the resources of the program to enable the vision to be realized.
- Identify the major hurdles that are likely to be faced in implementing the actions.
- Monitor the progress toward fulfilling the mission and realizing the goals and objectives.

5. Effective determination of services

The LRE requirements under Part B of IDEA support the education of children with disabilities in regular classes alongside their typically developing peers in EC programs that provide early care and education to children birth through age five. Typically developing children are not identified as having a developmental disability/delay and do not have an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or IEP. IFSP is used in early intervention for children ages birth through two and their families and focuses on the child and family and the services that a family needs to enhance their child's development. IEP is used in special education for children ages three to 21 and focuses on their educational needs [24]. There are several settings where children may be placed to receive special education and related services that include home, regular EC classrooms, special EC classroom, service provider location, and/or community service provision settings. IFSP/IEP team must consider the continuum of placement options and determine the setting appropriate for the individual child. EC leaders need to monitor the process to make sure as a program:

- There is a multidisciplinary approach through collaboration and consultation during IFSP/IEP meetings between professionals from different disciplines and backgrounds, including ECSE teacher, EC teacher, educational assistant

or paraprofessional, Occupational Therapist (OT), Physical Therapist (PT), Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP), Developmental Specialist, Family-Service Coordinator, Interpreter, Case Manager, Psychologist, Vision Specialist and Deaf and Hard of Hearing Specialist.

- The child's present level of academic achievement and functional performance is developed and documented. In EC education, this includes how the disability affects the child's participation in age-appropriate activities.
- Annual IFSP outcomes or IEP goals and objectives are developed to address the child's learning and development needs. For goals and objectives which cannot be met in a general education setting, IFSP/IEP team should determine in which special education or community settings the goal(s) and objective(s) will be implemented.
- The IFSP/IEP team considers the goals/outcomes as they determine services and placement.
- When determining the child's placement, no single model for service delivery to any specific population or category of children with disabilities is determined. The determination should be based on the needs of the child and the family, not what placements are readily available.
- When the IFSP/IEP team is determining placement options, the team considers the regular EC settings and classrooms as a priority and determine what accommodations, modifications, and supplementary aids and services are needed for the child's success before a child can be placed outside the regular EC program.
- IFSP/IEP team determines settings or activities to provide additional opportunities for interaction with typically developing peers.
- IFSP/IEP team determines a method to evaluate the appropriateness of the service(s) through ongoing assessment of the child's learning and development.

6. Establishing collaborative and cooperative partnership

Early childhood professionals are from diverse professional backgrounds such as general EC education, early childhood special education, occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech-language pathology, and psychology that requires them to use multidisciplinary approaches to draw on the skills and expertise of their peers to be able to provide better support to children and families. Effective collaborative and cooperative partnerships with professionals within multidisciplinary approaches emphasize the need for EC professionals from various backgrounds and collaborate to achieve the best outcomes for children and families [25]. Such approaches can only be realized where professionals communicate and plan in partnership, sharing their expertise and developing systematic and comprehensive approaches to children's learning and development. Professionals themselves also benefit from working in collaboration [26]. Collaboration provides opportunities for professional development through formal and informal learning from peers with diverse experience and expertise. EC leaders can facilitate EC professionals' collaboration opportunities by

creating communities of practice and learning communities that include a shared vision and understandings to achieve best practices. In communities of practice, EC professionals can find opportunities to build knowledge by participating in collaborative reflection about their methods and connecting with others who share a commitment to continual reflection and improvement. These opportunities arise from what EC professionals have in common with one another, a focus on the child's learning and development outcomes, and a commitment to provide quality services to children and their families. EC leaders need to make sure that as a program, they:

- Work collaboratively to share information and plan to ensure holistic approaches to children's learning and development.
- Understand each other's practice, skills, and expertise, and share their informed opinion when appropriate.
- Recognize the importance of transitions for children and their families within and across EC services and settings, and ensure that they understand the process and are prepared for these transitions.
- Ensure continuity for children's learning and development by building on their prior learning and experiences and share knowledge and expertise through collaborative partnerships with other practitioners, and contribute to new knowledge about EC learning and development.
- Understand the importance of communicating and planning in collaboration to respond to the needs of children with disabilities and their families and to ensure comprehensive, holistic, and continuous approaches to their education and development, and
- When sharing information, are careful to respect and preserve the privacy of children and families.

7. Implementing evidence-based inclusive models, frameworks, and practices

EC inclusive practices can be implemented in various settings where children with disabilities are included alongside their typically developing peers. EC Leaders need to put considerations for staffing, classroom configurations, and service delivery that have guidelines for class size and staffing standards, procedures for the ECSE classrooms' caseload, requirements for teacher licensure and/or endorsement in each program, physical space in the classroom, and other factors impacting teaching and learning practices. That way, they can ensure that all children's needs are met, including the unique needs of children with disabilities.

There are several classroom considerations for providing special education and related services in inclusive settings. Below is a list of common models recommended for inclusive education. EC leaders need to make sure collaboration among professionals and paraprofessionals, including related service providers, happens smoothly and professionally. Team members from different disciplines work together to plan and implement an appropriate educational program for the child with a disability. Below some of the current inclusive instruction models are presented. These inclusive instructional models apply to children with disabilities between three to five who transition to preschool settings.

7.1 Individual teacher model

In the individual teacher model, one teacher has a classroom including children both with and without IEPs. The teacher needs to be licensed and endorsed in either ECSE and EC for three and four-year-olds (add-on endorsement), early/primary education, PreK-3. The teacher is skilled in meeting the needs of both groups of children. Careful consideration is given to the class size/caseload, and the number of children with IEPs, including the level of support required [27, 28].

7.2 Reverse inclusion

In reverse inclusion, typically developing children are placed in ECSE classrooms so that both typically developing children and the ones with special needs can learn together in an inclusive environment. This option provides a way for children with disabilities to learn alongside their typically developing peers as role models when quality regular EC settings are not available. To qualify as a regular EC classroom, at least 50% of the children must be typically developing to provide peer models to enhance engagement among all children, provide peer interaction, and develop friendships. Providing only a few typically developing children may not give the same opportunity for learning, friendship, and growth and development. Further, the typically developing peer models must regularly attend the program to keep the class dynamic, consistency and frequency. However, it should be noted that implementation of this model is subject to the local education agency (LEA) rules and regulations [27, 28].

7.3 Co-teaching

In the co-teaching model, a general EC teacher and an ECSE teacher combine their knowledge, skills, and expertise and meet all children's needs in the classroom. Both EC or ECSE teachers may be in the classroom for all or some of the school day. Both teachers' goal is to share responsibility in the implementation of children with special needs' IEPs. Co-teaching includes several options for managing teaching time that includes:

Team teaching. Team teaching happens when both teachers (general EC and ECSE) deliver the same instruction simultaneously, with both teachers being responsible for the planning and implementing the instruction through separate lessons throughout the day. Team teaching helps clearly define each teacher's responsibilities and thus prevent misunderstandings and confusion in sharing responsibilities.

Parallel teaching. Parallel teaching includes both teachers delivering the same instruction at the same time with different groups of children. Creating instructional groups facilitates more individual participation and more direct teacher supervision.

Alternative teaching. In alternative teaching, one (either EC general teacher or ECSE teacher) takes responsibility for a large group of children. Simultaneously, the other teacher works with a smaller group who may need specialized attention and or instruction.

Station teaching. When using station teaching, co-teachers divide both the content and class. Each educator teaches the same content to one group first, and the second group receives the instruction later. Station teaching allows teachers to offer individualized instruction to smaller groups of children who need more individualized attention.

One teach-one observe. With this model, one teacher delivers the instruction, while the other educator completes student observation. The co-educators agree on the behaviors they will be observing and the method they will use to record their observations. Once the observation is conducted, they analyze the findings and plan or modify their instruction accordingly.

One teach-one drift. In this approach, one teacher takes the primary responsibility for delivering the instruction, while the other teacher circulates among the children providing targeted assistance where necessary [27, 28].

7.4 Itinerant model of collaboration

In an itinerant model, an ECSE endorsed teacher travels between classrooms or programs to consult with EC general teachers and/or to provide direct services to individual children as needed. Consultation is an essential element of an itinerant service delivery model and can be used to address children's physical access within settings, support for children's social inclusion, support for children's active engagement in activities, identification of and implementation of children's Individual Family Service Plans (IFSP) outcomes/Individual Education Program (IEP) goals, and modifications of supports [27, 28].

No matter what specific model of instruction delivery is chosen, based on the feasibility of the existing situation, EC leaders need to monitor to make sure as a program, they:

- Choose the best model to deliver the instruction and implement the model with fidelity.
- Plan and outline their instructional and organizational decisions and routines, know what the program's instructional content will consist of, how it will be delivered, by whom, and discuss what expectations they have for the children with disabilities' learning and development.
- Agree on how and when instructional planning will be done.
- Assist teachers in set-up the space for inclusive classrooms.
- Identify what will be evaluated in terms of children's learning and development, how will it be evaluated, who will do the evaluation and what criteria will guide their interpretation of the results, and
- Seek families' perceptions about the effectiveness of the implemented approaches.

8. Pre-service preparation and in-service professional development

EC workforce needs several experiences that promote their education, training, and development opportunities (Frantz et al., 2020). Professional development (PD) refers to how professionals move from awareness (knowledge) to action (practice) and the adoption of particular dispositions in their professional repertoires [29]. In general, professional development efforts have traditionally taken five forms: (a) formal education; (b) credentialing; (c) specialized, on-the-job in-service training; (d) coaching and/or consultative interactions; and (e) communities of practice (CoPs) or collegial study groups [30]. The preparation programs for preservice EC and ECSE

professionals provide knowledge and skills related to EC education within multiple coursework to prepare preservice educators in fields that involve education and development of young children (e.g., child care, developmental psychology, special education, or early childhood education). The in-service preparation or professional development programs for EC and ECSE professionals are provided while the educators are working in their career at EC/ECSE settings to support their professional practice and services for children and their families [31]. EC leaders must do their best to make sure that as a program, they:

- Provide high-quality professional development opportunities to enhance systems and individuals and engage the workforce in activities that are self-sustaining and growth-producing.
- Provide opportunities for workshops, program-based conferences, in-service presentations, live or Web-based lectures or discussions, live or video demonstration, behavior rehearsal, manuals, tutorials, and a host of other modes, synchronous and asynchronous, that impart knowledge and information of the workforce and attempt to affect professional practice.
- Reinforce evidence-based skill development and application practices through coaching, consultation, and collaborative partnership. Coaching opportunities might include independent and/or shared observations, action (demonstration, guided practice), self-reflection, feedback, and evaluation of the coaching process/relationship. Consultation opportunities might include systematic problem solving, social influence, and provision of professional support for immediate concern,
- Create communities of practice where groups of EC professionals come together based on a common professional interest and a desire to improve their practice in a particular area by sharing their knowledge, insights, and observations.
- Establish a positive, constructive professional development relationship with the workforce in the programs such as trust, shared goals, respect, flexibility, and commitment in planning professional development events and activities.
- Consider providing professional development opportunities that are useful for certain practitioners and professionals across distinctive and unique work settings and conditions (e.g., school-based early childhood center, home-based services, stand-alone private child care, federally or state-funded preschool program), age of children served (e.g., infants, toddlers, preschoolers), number of other adults in the setting, and adult-to-child ratio.

9. Parent partnership

A family-centered approach is a necessary component of a successful parent-professional partnership. The importance of involving parents as partners in their children's educational journey cannot be overestimated [32]. An effective partnership between home and educational settings benefits children, families, and programs to achieve positive academic and developmental outcomes for young children, their families, and communities. EC program leaders must understand the barriers that keep parents from being effectively involved in their child's education

and develop multiple avenues to work together so that everyone benefits and feels valued [33]. Quality family partnership is more crucial for children with disabilities, as parents of children with disabilities are a vital partner in the team to facilitate their child's learning, advocate for their child's unique needs, and communicate information that may benefit their child's learning [34]. The EC leaders need to build upon the strengths of families and support the efforts of parents to become more involved in their children's learning and make sure that as a program, they:

- Involve parents in setting goals for their child's learning program during the IEP/IFSP meetings.
- Value parents' opinions, concerns, ideas, and visions.
- Recognize that parents care very much about their children's learning and development.
- Recognize parents as critical contributors to their child's learning experiences.
- When planning learning activities for children, include parents' resources and talents.
- Find ways to know more about parents and the family by collecting information from parents (e.g., home visits, interviews, phone calls, and contributions to the child's portfolio). This information can be used to develop the child's learning experience.
- Keep parents informed about the educational status of their child by sharing information about how children learn and child development as it relates to the classroom setting.
- Communicate regularly with parents through print materials, phone calls, home visits, informal parent gatherings, and parent education workshops.
- Use problem-solving strategies when conflicts arise with parents.
- Appreciate and respect family values which may be different from their own.
- Maintain a warm, friendly, open, and responsive program climate that encourages parents to spend time there and feel belonged.
- Provide opportunities for parents to interact with other parents and program personnel (e.g., family rooms, parent discussion, and support groups).

10. Community partnership

The unique cultural, ethnic, and language aspects of each community and its rural or urban nature offer both opportunities and challenges for establishing responsive community partnerships in EC education [35]. Effective community partnerships establish mutually beneficial relationships for children, families, communities, and EC programs. Within community partnership, the EC program functions as a support center for the network of agencies and institutions committed to meeting community needs and expanding learning opportunities for all community

members [36]. Using the EC program as community centers is also a cost-effective, practical way to use one of the community's largest investments, and can result in increased academic achievement, improved learning climate. Besides, by tapping the tremendous expertise that exists in any community, community education helps bring the concept of inclusion closer to reality. Some examples for community EC partners include early intervention services, preschool special education services, Head Start and Early Head Start, Pre-K services, child care, family home care providers, private preschool, and families. EC leaders need to make sure that as a program, they:

- Identify agencies in their community that can interact with or could potentially interact with serving young children with disabilities and their families and establish ideas on how to strengthen the connection, build a more cohesive partnership, improve the process, leverage the strengths that exist, and any other areas of potential growth.
- Develop a process of ongoing communication and dialog between collaborating community partners to gain an understanding of the requirements each partner needs to meet, the procedures each partner follows to meet those requirements, and the agreement each partner makes to support efforts to provide inclusive services.
- Reach out to the community partners and communicate the importance of inclusive education for the children, families, and the community itself, and encourage their active involvement.
- Establish rapport and coordinate access to resources and services with businesses, agencies, and other groups, such as health care, cultural events, and tutoring or mentoring services for the EC inclusive programs.
- Identify, develop and use the leadership capacities of local partners for ongoing program and community improvement efforts.
- Use the physical, financial, and human resources that exist in the community to establishing close working relationships with community partners and fulfill the program's vision and mission regarding inclusive education.
- Modify the program's strategic goals to respond to the continually changing needs and interests of the community.

11. Conclusion

Quality inclusion of young children in early care and education settings requires assistance from a variety of agencies, disciplines, and partners. EC program leaders are critical agents closer to practice and responsible for program implementation and for supporting and guiding quality service provision to children with disabilities and their families.

This chapter aimed to assist EC program leaders in identifying, developing, and sustaining inclusive opportunities within high-quality early childhood programs for children with disabilities by addressing program factors that impact the service provision for young children with disabilities eligible for special education services. Although this chapter focuses on the inclusion of young children with disabilities

in educational settings, it is the shared vision of an ideal society that all people be meaningfully included in all facets of society throughout their lives. This can begin in EC education and care programs and continue into schools, workplaces, and the broader community and society.

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Author details

Sara Movahedazarhouligh
Department of Early Childhood, Elementary, Middle, Literacy, and Special
Ed., Watson College of Education, University of North Carolina Wilmington,
Wilmington, NC, USA

*Address all correspondence to: movahedazarhoulighs@uncw.edu

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