Moving Beyond Inclusion to Participation: Essential Elements
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Abstract
This paper discusses the evolution of the early childhood education system from excluding children with disabilities to fully including them in a manner emphasizing full participation. Evidence indicates meaningful participation in everyday activities is necessary for development to occur. The essential elements needed to bring about participation will be presented as well as specific evidence-based strategies used to promote inclusion and participation.

Keywords: Inclusion, Participation, Education

Introduction

The Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA), enacted in the United States in 1975, mandates that all children are educated in the "least restrictive environment" or LRE. Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) is the requirement that students with disabilities receive their education, services, and supports to the maximum extent appropriate, with nondisabled peers and that special education students are not removed from regular classes unless, even with supplemental aids and services, education in regular classes cannot be achieved satisfactorily (20 United States Code (U.S.C.) Sec. 1412(a)(5)(A); 34 Code of Federal Regulations (C.F.R.) Sec. 300.114).

Subsequent amendments to IDEA defined that services and supports to infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with disabilities and/or developmental delays to be provided in the "natural environment". Natural environments are defined as settings that children without disabilities spend time. These range from homes to child care centers and community environments like grocery stores, churches, playgrounds, etc.

The disability service field has evolved from a system that supported exclusion of people with disabilities to embracing the concept of inclusion and as such inclusion has been at the heart of policy, professional standards, and research for the last three decades (National Professional Development Center

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on Inclusion, 2009). Traditionally, inclusion refers to the placement and services of all children with and without disabilities in settings that foster and strengthen participation, social relationships, and learning outcomes (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & Department of Education, 2015). Although inclusion and inclusive education has focused on children with disabilities the concept has broad implications for all children and supports services and education that best meets all children's learning needs. Inclusive practices include activities, environments, and classroom experiences that ensure all children can access and participate in meaningful, interesting, relevant, and engaging learning experiences.

Inclusive educational services and supports provided in naturally occurring activities and routines, considered the preferred service delivery method, promotes participation of young children with disabilities. Research indicates that a) children develop skills, become independent, and form relationships through participation and b) with developing skills children can increasingly participate.

The purpose of this paper is to define inclusion and describe the essential elements necessary to promote full participation in inclusive early childhood education programs. Following a review of international policy in support of inclusion the author defines quality inclusion and participation and then describes specific evidence based practices that promote participation.

Policy Support for Inclusion

Inclusive education is recognized globally as not only critical for the education of children with disabilities but as a means to develop inclusive communities. The United States has implemented a variety of laws, regulations, and policy initiatives in support of including all people into the fabric of American society. Although the goal of full inclusion has not been met, there is a continuing emphasis on creating practices that support inclusion of people with disabilities beginning at birth. Table 1 describes the significant U.S. federal legislation affecting children with disabilities and their families.

In addition to country-specific legislation, the international community has a variety of initiatives in support of inclusion (Table 2).

Table 1 - Federal Legislation Affecting Children with Disabilities and Their Families

Date Enacted	Name	Description
1973	Rehabilitation Act, Section 504	Established civil rights protection for all people with disabilities by prohibiting all recipients of federal funds from discriminating against individuals with disabilities. Section 504 specifically relates to the provision of reasonable accommodations.
1975	Education for All Handicapped Children Act	Children with disabilities ages 6-21 should have access to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) designed to address their unique needs.
1986	Early Intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities amendment to Education of All Handicapped Children Act	States can elect to provide individualized early intervention services and supports to eligible infants and toddlers (birth to age 3) and their families. Mandates preschool services under Part B, Section 619.
1990	Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)	Protects all people with disabilities in the areas of employment, transportation, public services, public accommodations, and telecommunications regardless of how such services are funded (public or private). Stipulated that businesses of 15+ employees and merchants must make reasonable accommodations/modifications to ensure access.
1994	Technology Related Assistance for Individuals Act Amendments	Provided funding to support systems change and advocacy activities to assist each state in developing and implementing a consumer-responsive comprehensive statewide program of technology-related assistance, for individuals with disabilities of all ages.
2004	Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA)	Increases accountability for educating students with disabilities; expands methods to identify students with specific learning disabilities; ensures proper qualifications for special education and early intervention personnel.
2008	ADA Amendments Act	Broadened the definition of "disability"; included ADHD and dyslexia as examples of impairments; included major bodily functions (neurological, digestive, and respiratory) as major life activities.

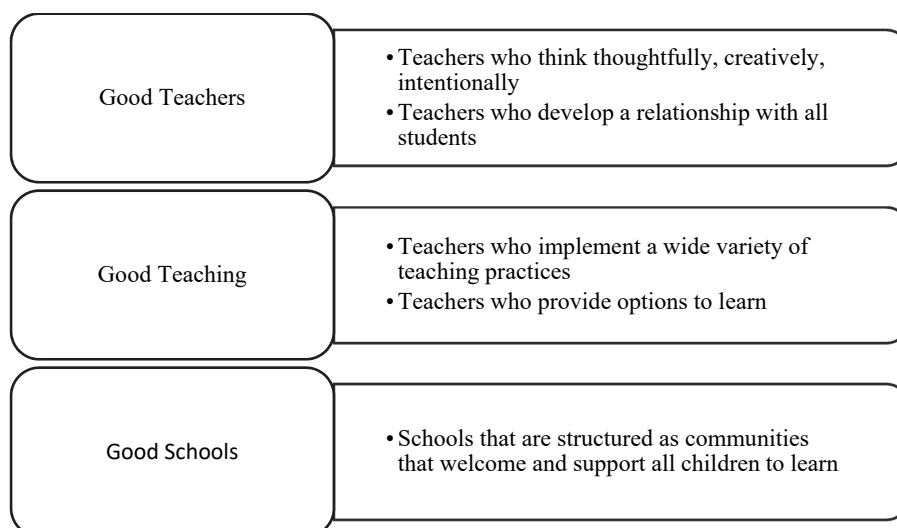*Table 2 - International Policies in Support of Inclusive Education*

Date	Name	Description
1989	UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNRC)	The UNCRC sets out the civil, political, economic, social, health and cultural rights of children. Ratifying states must act in the best interests of the child. Reinforces basic rights of children including the right to life, to their own name and identity, to be raised by their parents within a family or cultural grouping, and to have a relationship with both parents, even if they are separated.
1994	Salamanca Statement	Reaffirming the right to education for every person as outlined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and at the 1990 World Conference on Education for All. Five principles: • Every child has a fundamental right to education. • Every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs. • Education systems should be designed and educational programs implemented taking into account wide diversity of characteristics and needs. • Those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools that should accommodate them.
2000	Education for All Initiative (EFA)	Led by UNESCO (United Nation Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), EFA aims to meet the learning needs of all children, youth and adults. Was adopted by The Dakar Framework in April 2000 at the World Education Forum. The overall goal of EFA is that all children would receive primary education.
2000	Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4)	One of the 17 SDG established by the UN to: • Ensure access to early childhood development. • Increase the number of youths and adults with relevant skills for employmen.t • Achieve equal access for men and women to university education. • Ensure all youths achieve literacy and numeracy.

The Terminology of Inclusion

Traditionally, inclusion refers to as the placement of and services to all children with and without disabilities in settings that foster and strengthen participation, social relationships, and learning outcomes. High-quality inclusion (Figure 1) is related to positive outcomes for children with and

without disabilities (National Professional Development Center on Inclusion, 2009).

Fig.1 - Components of High Quality Inclusion

Good Teachers	• Teachers who think thoughtfully, creatively, intentionally • Teachers who develop a relationship with all students
Good Teaching	• Teachers who implement a wide variety of teaching practices • Teachers who provide options to learn
Good Schools	• Schools that are structured as communities that welcome and support all children to learn

Inclusive education requires that support, intervention, and specialized services are provided in natural environments with same age peers. As appropriate and necessary, lessons, materials, activities are adapted or modified to accommodate for every child's learning strengths and needs, and specialized services and supports are integrated into daily routines, activities, lessons, etc. Simply, inclusion is good teachers, good teaching, and good schools. The components of good teachers, good teaching, and good schools including access to the general curriculum, necessary supports for successful learning, and leadership will be discussed below.

Key to successful inclusion is the child's participation in activities and learning experiences offered to all children. According to the World Health Organization (2002) participation is defined as "involvement in life situations" and requires inclusion. Life situations include the family, same age peers, same age activities, and the community.

This definition, however, is vague and fails to capture the multidimensionality of participation. For the purposes of this paper, participation is described as engagement in the activity, independence in accomplishing the activity, and the social interaction that takes place during the activity (McWilliam, 2010).

Engagement is demonstrated by the child's involvement in an activity, persistence or concentration to complete a task, or interest in people or materials (McWilliam, 1992, ECTACenter, 2010). Independence is defined as mastery of skills to gain control over the child's own actions or environment (Davis, Reddihough, Murphy et al., 2017). Social interaction includes caregiver and peer relations, interactive communication, attachment, and positive interactions (Logan, 2016).

This paper argues that although inclusion is necessary for a quality education it is not enough. A meaningful education that brings about academic, functional, social, and adaptive learning requires meaningful participation. McWilliam (2010) describes participation as engagement in the activity, independence in accomplishing the activity, and the social interaction that takes place during the activity. In addition to active engagement, Booth and Ainscow (2002) also define participation as learning alongside others, collaborating in shared learning experiences and most importantly participation is about being recognized, accepted and valued.

When children of all abilities fully participate in education high expectations are met, friendships are created, and education benefits all children.

Who is Included?

Starting with the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) inclusive education for all children including those with special education needs (SEN) has been an international priority. One-hundred-ninety two countries signed onto the statement and since then reaffirmed its support through a variety of policies (see Table 2). It is unclear, however, how many children with disabilities are receiving inclusive education. The inclusion of children with disabilities in classrooms with typically developing peers varies considerably, most often related to the wealth of the country. However, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, estimates that one-third of the 58 million children who remain out of primary school world-wide have a disability (Sæbønes, Berman Bieler, Baboo, Banham, Singal, Howgego, McClain-Nhlapo, Riis-Hansen, and Dansie, 2015).

Students with disabilities in the United States are increasingly educated in inclusive classrooms. Sixty-three percent of all school aged children with disabilities who are receiving special education services and supports spend 80% of their day in a classroom with same age and same grade-level peers. (National Council on Disability, 2018). Children with more complex or severe disabilities, however, are far less likely to be included. Seventy-nine percent of students with severe intellectual disabilities or multiple disabilities continue to

be educated in special, self-contained, or segregated classrooms or schools (Kleinart et al., 2015).

More than 40% of students with special educational needs across 30 education systems in Europe are in special schools, but the share was more than 80% in Belgium and Germany and almost zero in Italy and Norway (GEM, 2016). UNESCO (2018) reports that across 49 countries persons with disabilities are less likely to ever attend school, more likely to be out of school, have fewer years of education than persons without disabilities, and are less likely to possess basic literacy skills.

Although it is unclear exactly how many children with disabilities are included in classrooms with peers without disabilities, the concept of inclusive education is increasingly being understood as a systemic approach to education providing all learners with meaningful, high-quality educational opportunities in their local community, alongside their friends and peers

Practices that Support Inclusion and Participation

For children with disabilities to meaningfully participate in classroom activities with their peers three components are necessary: a) access to the general curriculum and learning experiences, b) supports to ensure that all school personnel are competent, and c) meaningful life situations.

Access: If you cannot access you cannot participate

Accessing the general curriculum is necessary to participate fully in education and is critical to implement the least restrictive environment requirement of the American, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Accessing the curriculum requires the teaching staff to create an equitable curriculum that embraces learner variability (Meyer, Rose, & Gordon, 2014) by using a variety of evidence based practices.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a teaching approach that presumes competence and gives all students equal opportunities to succeed, no matter how they learn. Teachers who use UDL principles (Table 3) assume all learners are unique and all students may benefit from accommodations, adaptions, and modifications. The classroom physical environment is flexible and changeable based on the student needs and lesson requirements.
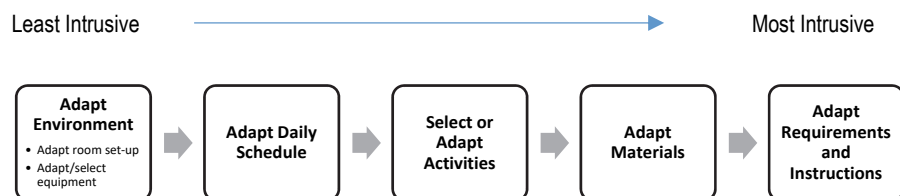
Tab.3 - Components of an Equitable Curriculum

Component	Definition	Examples
Multiple means of representation	Give learners various ways to acquire information and knowledge	• Provide written materials for all lessons delivered orally • Allow tape recording of lectures • Audiobooks • Use pictures and words on the daily schedule • Allow use of keyboards for written work
Multiple means of expression	Give learners various ways to demonstrate what they learned	• Allow oral test taking • Allow art work to demonstrate content knowledge • Allow oral spelling "bees" in addition to spelling tests
Multiple means of engagement	Provide a variety of materials, strategies, etc. that build upon learners' interests, offer appropriate challenges, and increase motivation	• Allow student to choose medium of expression • Allow group work • Incorporate digital content

Along with Universal Design for Learning, helping children to fully participate in the general curriculum may require the use of assistive technology. Assistive technology ranges from low technology solutions like pencil grips, picture boards to highly sophisticated computerized communication systems and powered mobility. Assistive Technology (AT) is a tool, device, piece of equipment, or specific material that is used to support what children do to participate in everyday activities. Most children benefit from the type of assistive technology that is readily available like smart phones, tablets, lap-top computers and the range of software available.

Adaptations and accommodations is another key strategy promoting access to the curriculum. Campbell, Milbourne, and Kennedy (2012) suggest a continuum of adaptation to promote successful participation (Figure 2).

Fig.2 - Adaptation Continuum

Least Intrusive → Most Intrusive

Adapt Environment
• Adapt room set-up
• Adapt/select equipment

Adapt Daily Schedule

Select or Adapt Activities

Adapt Materials

Adapt Requirements and Instructions

Responsive teaching practices also include multitiered models, differentiated instruction, and positive behavior support. Like universal design for learning these strategies are whole-class strategies and benefit all students (National Council on Disability, 2018) (Table 4).

*Tab. 4 - Evidence Based Practices that Promote Inclusion*

Practice	Description
Accommodations, Adaptions, Modifications (AAM)	Changes to environment, curriculum, activities, expectations to match student learning needs (Campbell, Milbourne, & Kennedy, 2012)
Assistive Technology (AT)	Availability of a variety of technology to facilitate access to learning activities, physical environment, and independence (Edyburn, Rao, & Hariharan, 2017)
Differentiated Instruction (DI)	Teaching strategies that facilitate mixed ability learning based on strengths of student, current level of performance, and on-going data informed decision-making (Huebner, 2010)
Multitiered Systems of Support (MTSS)	Data based decision making to design appropriate levels of support for individual students. Requires a wide variety of instructional services and supports to be embedded into general curriculum and classroom (Shogren, Wehmeyer, Lane, & Quirk, 2017)
Positive Behavioral Support (PBS)	School wide approach providing an equitable, positive, strength-based strategies to facilitate positive, socially appropriate behavior and prevent and eliminate non-productive negative behavior (www.pbis.org)
Universal Design for Learning (UDL)	Design of classroom environment, lesson plans, activities, and materials that remove or reduce barriers to effective learning and access (Pilgrim & Ward, 2017)

Life Situations: If it is not meaningful it is not important

Meaningful life situations are necessary to encourage full participation in learning activities and inclusive classrooms. The World Health Organization (2002) emphasizes participation in meaningful life situations as the critical component of function. For young children, McWilliam (2010) describes participation as requiring three interactive components, engagement in the activity, independence in accomplishing the activity, and the social interaction that takes place during the activity. Engagement is demonstrated by the student's involvement in an activity, persistence or concentration to complete a task, or interest in people or materials. Independence is defined as mastery of skills to gain control over the child's own actions or environment. Social interaction includes caregiver and peer relations, interactive communication, attachment, and positive interactions. These components will often be, the

individualized outcomes on an individualized education plan. Teachers and other personnel supporting children with disabilities in inclusive classrooms will create activities, lesson plans, and materials that promote these three components and assess for accomplishment (Figure 3).

Fig.3 - Dimensions of Participation: Interactions between components of participation demonstrate the complexity of defining participation for young children
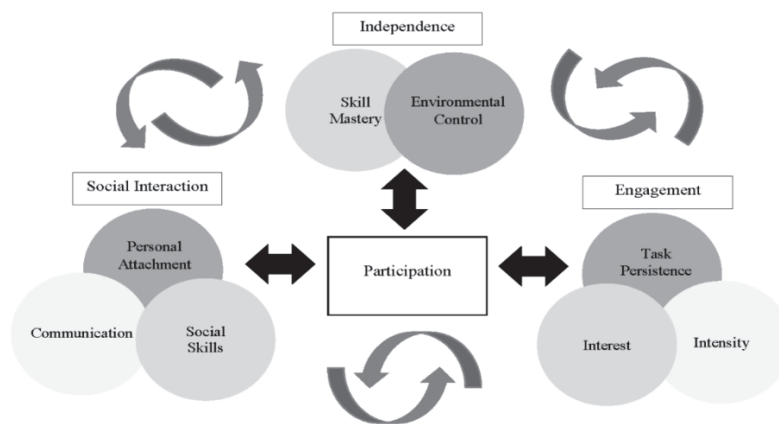
Supports: Special education supports the inclusion and participation of children

Teachers are most often concerned that they are not trained to teach children with disabilities thus the need for support is critical. Professional development, collaborative instruction, and school leadership are required for inclusive education is to be effective and for all school personnel to be competent and confident.

Traditionally the pre-service education of general educators and special educators has been quite different leading to distinct educational, philosophical, and pedagogical approaches to teaching (Spear, Piasta, Yeomans-Maldonado, Ottley, Justice, & O'Connell, 2018) as well as certification, licensing, and qualification requirements. Thus, for inclusive education to be successful on-going professional development to both regular education and special education is crucial. Also, pre-service education of teachers must evolve to a system that all teachers demonstrate competency to teach the full range of diversity seen in today's classrooms. The Teacher Education for Inclusion (TE4I) project (Watkins & Donnelly, 2013) has identified a Competence Framework for Inclusive Teachers (CFIT). A variety of teacher training programs have been

developed based on these competences which have been found to be effective improving teachers ability to design inclusive lesson plans (Navarro, Zervas, Gesa, & Sampson, 2016). Until teacher training programs evolve to build the capacity of all teachers to teach all students, close collaboration between teachers and student support personnel like related service providers (ie: physical therapists, occupational therapists, etc.) must take place.

Collaborative teaming is often cited as a critical component for serving children with disabilities (Coufal & Woods, 2018; Tzivinikou, 2015) Collaboration means that all classroom team members (teachers, special educators, therapists, paraprofessionals, specialized instructional personnel) work together to design and deliver learning activities to all children not just the special education students included in a classroom (Vandercock, Kleinert, Jorgensen, Sabia, & Lazarus, 2019). Collaboration, however, requires a system that allows for team planning, co-teaching, and on-going capacity building of all team members. Collaboration is most successful when there are regular, scheduled opportunities for face-to-face team interactions dedicated to classroom-wide problem solving (McDaid, Saunders, Wakemann, Ryndak, 2019).

The third critical support needed for effective inclusion is leadership from a strong effective school principal. Successful inclusion is a whole-school approach to education that requires a visionary principal who supports inclusive practices (Roberts, Rupper, & Olson, 2018). Although leadership can come from anyone within the system, the principal is the link among the classroom education team, school services, district administration, and the community. Shogren, McCart, Lyon, & Sailor (2015) found that all successful inclusive schools had a committed principal who was passionate and devoted to all children's learning success. Principals who establish a culture of inclusivity, support a collaborative approach to classroom activities, and encourage shared decision-making create a welcoming environment valuing each student's contribution to the school, building a positive school culture.

Conclusion

This paper described the key components necessary for educators to move beyond the inclusion of children with disabilities into the general education classroom to creating a system of inclusive services and supports that foster successful participation. To be a successful learner it is critical to participate fully in the curriculum and all other classroom and school-wide activities. Although being included is necessary for a quality education it is not adequate. Quality education requires that all children be participate in academic, social,

and extra-curricular activities on a regular basis. Teachers, student support personnel, classrooms, and schools that are most successful at fostering an inclusive community are committed to operationalizing the requirements of practice. Inclusion requires all school personnel to:
* presume all children are competent to learn;
* know what we want the child to learn;
* think creatively on how best to help the child meet learning expectations;
* make sure services and supports are equitable not necessarily equal;
* integrate not separate.

Creating inclusive learning environments that are sustainable intentionally support a learner's sense of belonging, values each learner, provides opportunities for each learner to demonstrate competence, and builds a system leading to inclusive communities. This paper has defined inclusion and participation, described international policies in support of inclusive education, and discussed a range of evidence based practices that are necessary to build sustainable, inclusive learning environments.

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