

Promoting an Inclusive Classroom Community

According to a joint position statement from the Division of Early Childhood (DEC) and NAEYC, inclusion promotes “a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and development and learning” for all children and their families (2009). Additionally, inclusion helps to ensure that all children participate meaningfully while learning and interacting within a classroom community that acknowledges each child and family’s interests and strengths. Brillante (NAEYC, 2017), states that we must see the child first; before we see the disability. Best practices for young children are best practices for *all young children*.

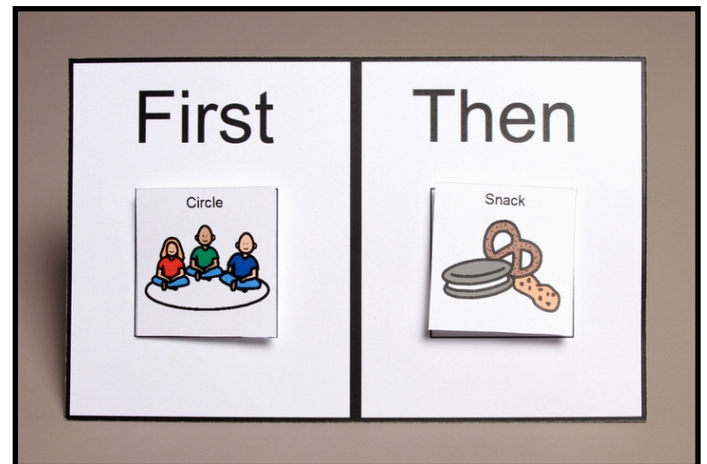
Teachers with B-K licensure have course work and background knowledge of child development and familiarity with various strategies and accommodations to support the success of all children with and without identified disabilities in their classroom. Teachers are encouraged to continue to seek out research based strategies and literature, pursue on-going professional development opportunities; and communicate and collaborate with specialists to support their growth and confidence to effectively support children with varying needs.

Guiding questions to ask teachers might include:

- How do you provide for the needs of all children, even those children who do not have an identified disability or are in the process of referral?
- How do you support children with identified special needs and developmental delays in your classroom?
- How do you modify and adapt lessons for children in your classroom?
- How might the classroom environment/arrangement (noise level, clutter, stimulation, materials) hinder the success of all children?
- What priorities do you have for your children with special needs? What are families’ goals for their child? And how do they align with each other and the goals of your curriculum?
- How do you prepare and provide information for the (IEP support) team?
- What resources are available in your community to support children with special needs and how might you access these resources?
- How do you use Foundations to support children with special needs and/or determine if referral needs to be made?
- How do you and your co-teaching team collaborate to support all children throughout the day?
- What plan do you have for collaboration with specialists and what does this look like?
- What does your collaboration with families look like?



This calm down area includes a variety of strategies and materials with varied sensory inputs



A "First-Then" card is used as a visual support for transitions and/or to engage children in less preferred activities

Mentor Minute (cont.)

Classroom strategies to promote inclusion include:

- Creating a safe, risk-free environment that supports children's attempts (i.e.-breaking down routines and directions into smaller steps as needed)
- Creating a caring classroom community that promotes children's independence and success
- Providing a schedule that is structured , but predictable
- Developing social stories, visual schedules, intentional transitions, and predictable routines
- Providing individual schedules and individual guidance as needed (i.e.-"First, Then" strategy)
- Accommodating for preferential seating with varied input (close proximity, personal space, concrete boundaries)
- Modifying the environment so that it is accessible to all (materials low, room for wheelchairs, additional easels)
- Promoting authentic friendships with peers and social competence
- Using children's books to promote children's understanding of others
- Providing support/objects to aid in conversation with others
- Planning modifications and accommodations based on individual need(s)



A laundry basket provides concrete boundaries for personal space



A personalized social story helps support a child through daily routines



Individual visual schedules are created for children as needed

Mentor Minute (cont.)

Teacher strategies to promote inclusion include:

- Learning from specialists, asking questions, seeking input/resources
- Engaging in professional advocacy for child by starting referral process
- Being familiar with the referral/IEP process and time line and community resources available
- Advocating to be part of IEP team; asking families and specialists to share IEP
- Collaborating with referral/IEP team to share strategies of specialized support
- Utilizing NC Foundations for Early Learning and Development as a resource: using developmental indicators to guide instruction, assessment, and referral
- Celebrating all successes (big & small) with family and support team
- Knowing each child, his/her individual strengths, interests, and needs (i.e.: noise level comfort, level of stimulation, environment/routine needs)
- Advocating for specialists to provide services in the classroom so that a model of integrated therapy can be provided to teacher
- Using a variety of methods for instruction (visuals, modeling, pairing with a peer)
- Making strong connections with families
- Having high expectations for all children



Inclusive classrooms allow for engaged learning for all children

Additional resources about Promoting Inclusion can be found below:

- [Every Child Belongs: Welcoming a Child with a Disability \(NAEYC article\)](#)
- [Division for Early Childhood: The Council for Exceptional Children \(website\)](#)
- [Connect Modules \(from the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute\)](#)

Please be sure to also visit the [EESLPD Useful Resources](#) tab of our website to explore the Inclusion section under Mentor/Evaluator Additional Resources

Special thanks to Gail Hicks whom served as a guest contributor to this month's Mentor Minute