

Seeds of Partnership Website Video Descriptive Text Transcription High Quality Early Learning Environment, HQELE

Key Element:

Students with Disabilities

<http://www.seedsofpartnership.org/hqele/video/disabilities.html>

(Center Director seated in front of a large window)

In thinking about the benefit of our program specific of our children with disabilities or with special needs, I think it can be defined as sort of a parts-whole relationship. You know, every part in my car has to work and when my oil's gone, or when my battery goes, I gotta fix them, I do. But I don't fix them just to have a good battery; I've got to fix them so that my car works and I can go somewhere with it. So, I think, in a sense, we have a lot to learn about the parts and their relationship to the whole. But the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. And so I think what parents value here and what children gain from being here all children, specifically perhaps children with special needs is that we must ensure that the parts are accounted for.

(A child with a visual impairment sits on floor with other children and adults)

It makes us better teachers, number one. When I have to know that level of detail about an individual child but I think they also value the wholeness, if you will, or the larger notion that their child is part of a group that they have friends, that they have to follow routines that they have a sense of belonging and that this is their place. This is their school. And I've watched our, I've watched all children account for difference in ways that we adults could only hope to do as well. Initial skepticism, uncertainty or worry but an immediate sort of matter-of-factness once they see how the parts relate to the whole then they're right there with them. So that's a pretty cool thing, overall. I can't imagine being a program that isn't inclusive. What would I be? Exclusive. Why would you not want to be inclusive? I think it only makes you a better teacher. I think I also have to recognize the limitations of what we do.

(Center Director seated in front of a large window)

We have parameters that we operate in and we can't provide all of the needs, the services in the program that children really do need and that's where the partnerships come in. No one should think that they can be a fully, all services, sort of one-stop shop because children may need other levels of programming that we simply can't provide in this kind of context. But we need to know what those are or how they complement or complete what we do here. As far as the classroom goes in supporting children with disabilities,

(Teacher Laura sitting on couch in classroom)

I think the same principles apply just to supporting all children. One of the important things about our classroom and our environment is the open-endedness, and again, it's one of those things where everyone can feel included because there's not a right or wrong way to do this. There's an openness to this and everyone can be successful doing this activity, whatever you do with it. It really, there's not a right or a wrong so having more of that open-ended aspect of materials and of activities is really important. Just thinking about, a lot of times you'll read in textbooks these are things that help children with these disabilities that are learning English as a second language, whatever it may be. They have little tips, and most of the time, those are things that are good for all children. Really. And so if you just do those things, naturally, to support children, it's going to support whoever walks through that door. Really. And the individualizing part is a big piece of that. But like I said, most of those things, those aspects of teaching or environments are really good for all of them. If you need something larger visually for some child,

(Two children moving clothespins with names written on them to an activity choice)

it's probably helping a lot of other children too. And so just remembering that that's helpful for children or people in general to have things that are easy to see, you know, whatever. Those are the kinds of things that sometimes people say are good for this particular child

(Teacher Laura sitting on couch in classroom)

but really, it's good for everybody. So, let's make sure that everybody has that. And I've actually seen that even working in some of the youngest classrooms. Maybe having picture cues is really helpful for one child but it's not going to hurt anyone else to have those pictures cues. So let's put it on each placemat at the snack table instead of one child's placemat and make it so that it supports everyone in their learning and in their interactions with the materials or the activities. I think the one thing above all else

(Program Specialist Katie sitting on couch in classroom)

that the children get from this experience and their parents aside from their IEP goals, aside from all those things that they are trying to clinically prove is that their child is just like any other child and that they can be in any type of setting with just a few accommodations or that adaptations need to be made that their child doesn't have to have this specialized everything. It can be done anywhere. And that their child's just like anyone else and that they leave knowing that my child was able to build a connection with other children. They don't have to be put away somewhere separate away from them because they're different in some way. They're just like any other child. They may just need to have a few accommodations made here or there and the benefit for the children in the program as a whole and their child are just huge. The compassion, the understanding, the whole acceptance and here, I mean we've had children who have not been mobile, we've had some pretty severe challenges. But we've just made the simple accommodations that need to be made and they're able to be in this type of a setting

and thrive. And their families are so excited to see that they can connect with children who they would otherwise think that they couldn't because they are different. And it's so meaningful for their families to have that experience. And to build in that, in some of those social interactions that they need so desperately

(Children sitting outside on blanket eating snacks with adult)

getting that here with a child who is able to regulate themselves so they can also help that child more so than, say, some of the teachers can. Remember, that the child is a person and their family is individual

(Child with a visual impairment putting on shoes)

and tends to be this large picture and clinically, and we're going to do these goals

(Program Specialist Katie sitting on couch in classroom)

and the child and the family get forgotten. And the family feels like, wait a minute this is my child. This is me. I'm involved in this process. My child is the one who has to go here every day. This is the place that they are going to have to be for a very long time. And we're a part of this too and this child has value, and they're an individual. That that gets lost in the whole we've got to make this goal and that goal and this person has this to say, and this person and the parent is sitting here saying, "I know my child better than any of you yet I have very little say in what's happening." I think that part of remembering is that it's individualized. That they are a person and that they do need to have that love, care and attention is a huge part of it because, a lot of time that gets forgotten. And the way in which they approach things makes parents feel sad, makes parents feel angry, makes them feel alienated when that's not the intent but that's what ends up happening. And so to remember that family, that that's their child that you're talking about and they are a person and that there is value there. It's really hard for me to distinguish between children with disabilities and traditional development, typical development

(Teacher Sarah sitting on couch in classroom)

because I think that so much of who I am and believe as a teacher is that every child is important and valued and that is just what I strive for in our classroom. Is to make a child feel like this is my space, it's safe here for me, I can learn without fear of rejection or shame, I can do whatever I want in the space. I can learn here comfortably.

(Smiling child sitting on floor playing with toy animals in block area)

And so it's such a hard shift for me to even think in terms of how does it specifically benefit a child with a disability?

(Teacher Sarah sitting on couch in classroom)

Because I think it benefits every single child.