

"It isn't the same for everyone": Early childhood educators' lived experiences with cultivating social inclusion ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

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Abstract

Children with disabilities are less likely than their peers without disabilities to exercise their rights to education and participation in their communities. Early childhood educators play a crucial role in ensuring that all children are included in daily activities and interactions to foster children's wellbeing. However, educators receive minimal training on fostering social inclusion in early childhood settings. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore thirty-seven early childhood education professionals' experiences and perceptions of cultivating social inclusion in the context of a training program called Building Friendships. The program involved participation in a series of training workshops aimed at fostering play and friendships in diverse and inclusive child care settings. Interviews were conducted to explore participants' perceptions and experiences with social inclusion before and after training workshops. Educators delineated a range of issues pertaining to the quality of social inclusion, and additional training appeared to serve as a catalyst for reflection and practice changes which improved the social experiences of children with disabilities in their care. This study underscores the diverse understandings and experiences of educators with regards to social inclusion and benefits associated with providing opportunities for professional development which can promote best practices.

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