

Inclusive Learning Environments

Sample Syllabus

Course Description

This course helps students to understand how to measure, implement, and support inclusive learning environments for infants and young children with disabilities and their families. Students will be able to understand how to evaluate and implement evidence-based and data-based interventions to address systemic barriers (e.g., leadership, classroom design, placement decisions, etc.) to inclusion of infants and young children with disabilities.

Course Learning Objectives

As a result of active participation and successful completion of course requirements, students will be able to:

1. Evaluate and support inclusive early childhood environments using evidence-based frameworks.
2. Design family-centered advocacy resources to support inclusive education.
3. Analyze systemic and instructional barriers to inclusion and propose actionable solutions.
4. Understand and articulate how to collaborate with interdisciplinary teams to develop increase inclusive opportunities for infants and young children with disabilities.

Required Texts

Catalino, T., & Meyer, L. E. (2016). *Environment: Promoting Meaningful Access, Participation, and Inclusion*. DEC Recommended Practices Monograph Series No. 2. Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children. 40627 K99 Hwy, Wamego, KS 66537.

Barton, E. E., & Smith, B. J. (2015). *The Preschool Inclusion Toolbox: How to Build and Lead a High-Quality Program*. Brookes Publishing Company. PO Box 10624, Baltimore, MD 21285.

Readings:

Barton, E. E., & Smith, B. J. (2015). Advancing high-quality preschool inclusion: A discussion and recommendations for the field. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 35(2), 69-78.

Davenport, L. A., & Johnston, S. S. (2015). Using most-to-least prompting and contingent consequences to teach numeracy in inclusive early childhood classrooms. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 34(4), 250-261.

Lawrence, S., Smith, S., & Banerjee, R. (2016). Preschool Inclusion: Key Findings from Research and Implications for Policy. Child Care and Early Education Research Connections. *National Center for Children in Poverty*.

- Love, H. R., & Horn, E. (2019). Definition, Context, Quality: Current Issues in Research Examining High-Quality Inclusive Education. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 40*(4), 204-216. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0271121419846342> (Original work published 2021)
- Luo, L., Reichow, B., Snyder, P., Harrington, J., & Polignano, J. (2020). Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Classroom-Wide Social–Emotional Interventions for Preschool Children. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 42*(1), 4-19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0271121420935579> (Original work published 2022)
- Rudrabhatla, A., Morgan, L., & Siller, M. (2024). Attitudes About Inclusive Preschool Education Among Parents of Children Without Disability: Generalized Social Justice Orientation and Specific Inclusive Concerns. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 44*(3), 206-216. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02711214241242058> (Original work published 2024)
- Stoiber, K. C., Gettinger, M., & Goetz, D. (1998). Exploring factors influencing parents' and early childhood practitioners' beliefs about inclusion. *Early childhood research quarterly, 13*(1), 107-124.
- Weglarz-Ward, J. M., & Santos, R. M. (2018). Parent and professional perceptions of inclusion in childcare: A literature review. *Infants & Young Children, 31*(2), 128-143.

Accommodations

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the American with Disabilities Act of 1990 require the institution to provide academic adjustments or accommodations for students with documented disabilities. Students seeking academic adjustments or accommodations must self-identify with the Coordinator of Services for Students with Disabilities on the appropriate campus.

Attendance

Since many of the classes involve activities, videotapes, discussion, etc., regular attendance is vital to gain maximum benefit. Because this is a 15 weeks course, each class member needs to make every effort to be in attendance at each class. Anyone who misses more than one class will lose 5 points for each class missed after the first absence. Significant tardiness or early departure beyond 15 minutes will count as an absence. If you know ahead of time you will not be in class, please contact the instructor the day before the class.

Communicating with the Instructor

All correspondences from the instructor to the students by way of announcements, updates, assignments, and so forth, will be communicated via school email or online learning management system if not verbally in class. It is the student's responsibility to ensure their university e-mail is corrected, provided, and valid. Failure to do so may result in missing important information that could negatively impact your grade. Please be mindful of professionalism.

Course Outline

The following schedule is subject to change. For any course syllabuses posted prior to the beginning of the semester, the course instructor reserves the right to make changes prior to or during the semester. The course instructor will notify students, via e-mail or verbal announcements when changes are made in the requirements and/or grading of this course. ***The course instructor reserves the right to revise the schedule/assignments if needed.***

Week	Topics and Readings	Reading	Activities
1	Introduction to class LRE vs Inclusion	CONNECT Course	In-Class Activity: Have students reflect and share “My Commitment to Inclusion”, summarizing their personal philosophy and one actionable goal they will pursue in their future practice.
2	Defining Quality Inclusive Learning Environments	Barton & Smith, (2015) Ch 1 Grisham & Hemmeter (2017) Ch 1	Discussion Prompt: How do you define inclusion based on the readings for this week?
3	Policy and Law – Least Restrictive Environment	Barton & Smith (2015), Ch 3 Lawrence et al., (2016)	Discussion Prompt: What does 'inclusion' truly mean in the context of early childhood education, and how do federal laws and recent research shape our understanding of inclusive practices?
4	Measuring Inclusive Learning Environments	Barton & Smith (2015) Ch 6 Love & Horn (2019)	Bridging Research and Practice: Evaluating Inclusive Practices in Early Childhood Settings
5	Leadership in Inclusive Learning Environments	Barton & Smith (2015) Ch 4	Discussion Prompt: What does leadership need to

		Richardson-Gibbs & Klein (2014) Ch 3	know about early childhood and IDEA to support inclusion?
6	Family Voice in Inclusive Learning Environments	Weglarz-Ward & Santos (2018) Rudrabhatla et al., (2024)	Family Engagement & Advocacy Resource Binder
7	IFSP & IEP Planning in Inclusive Learning Environments	Barton & Smith (2015) Ch 7	<p>In-Class Activity: Team Talk: Placement Puzzle</p> <p>Step 3: Apply Barton & Smith Framework Teams use the handout to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify inclusion supports needed • Discuss placement options (inclusive, blended, specialized) • Consider system-level barriers and solutions • Make a placement recommendation <p>Step 4: Present & Justify Teams present their decision and explain how it aligns with Barton & Smith's recommendations.</p>
8	Teaming in Inclusive Learning Environments	Grisham & Hemmeter (2017) Ch 8	<p>In-Class Activity: Team Talk: Placement Puzzle</p> <p>Step 1: Form Teams Assign students to interdisciplinary teams with</p>

			<p>role cards.</p> <p>Step 2: Review Case Study Each team receives a child profile (e.g., 4-year-old with ASD, 3-year-old with speech delay). Include developmental data, family input, and current services.</p>
9	Itinerant Service Delivery Model	Pretti-Frontczak et al. (2014) pp 58-72	Classroom Consultation Plan
10	UDL in Early Childhood	Catalino & Meyer (2016) pp 33-66	<p>In-Class Activity: Apply UDL Principles & Gallery Walk A classroom learning center or routine (e.g., circle time, snack, block play)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> UDL strategies to support engagement, representation, and expression Environmental modifications and adult supports Teams display their plans and explain how they applied UDL principles.
11	Classroom Design: Universal Supports in Inclusive Environments	<p>Grisham & Hemmeter (2017) Ch 5</p> <p>Pretti-Frontczak et al. (2014) pp 21-38</p> <p>CONNECT Modules</p>	Classroom Design

12	Targeted Supports: Communication	Catalino & Meyer (2016) pp 127-136 Grisham & Hemmeter (2017) Ch 10	Discussion Prompt: Reflecting on Pretti- Frontczak et al. (2014), how can early childhood educators balance fidelity to evidence-based practices with the need for flexibility in diverse classrooms?
13	Targeted Supports: Pro- social skills	Grisham & Hemmeter (2017) Ch 9 Luo et al. (2020)	Discussion Prompt: Based on Luo et al. (2020), how do classroom-wide social– emotional interventions contribute to inclusive practices in preschool settings, particularly for children with disabilities? Reflect on how these interventions align with UDL and tiered support models (e.g., MTSS).
14	Targeted Supports: Problem Solving	Grisham & Hemmeter (2017) Ch 12 Davenport & Johnston (2015)	Discussion Prompt: Davenport & Johnston (2015) explored the use of most-to-least prompting and contingent consequences to teach early numeracy skills in inclusive preschool settings. How can systematic prompting strategies be used to support children with disabilities in acquiring foundational academic skills—without compromising the inclusive nature of the classroom?

15	Challenges and Solutions to Inclusive Learning Environments	<p>Barton & Smith (2015) Ch 2</p> <p>Catalino & Meyer (2016) pp 1-18</p>	<p>Discussion Prompt: The readings identify several challenges to achieving meaningful inclusion for young children with disabilities in early childhood settings.</p> <p>What do you see as the most persistent or complex barriers to inclusion in practice today?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do systemic issues (e.g., funding, policy, professional development) impact inclusion efforts? • What role do educator beliefs and attitudes play in either supporting or hindering inclusion?
16	Final's Week		<p>Presentation: Create a 10-15 minutes presentation in video format to highlight what you have learned about Inclusive Learning Environments. Include the assignments/work you have done. It will be in class or online presentation.</p>

Major Assignments

1. Bridging Research and Practice: Evaluating Inclusive Practices in Early Childhood Settings

- a. Students are required to integrate current research on high-quality inclusive education with practical observation and analysis using the Inclusive Classroom Profile (ICP). Students will conduct a real-world observation in an early childhood classroom, apply the ICP framework, and reflect on how research-informed practices can enhance inclusion.
 - b. First: Read *Love & Horn (2019)* and write a 3–4 page critical analysis that addresses:
 - i. How do the authors define high-quality inclusive education?
 - ii. What are the key challenges and contextual factors influencing inclusion?
 - iii. How do the ICP items and indicators reflect or diverge from the quality dimensions discussed in the article?
 - iv. What implications does this research have for evaluating and improving classroom practices?
 - c. Second: Field Observation & ICP Application
 - i. Review the ICP items and indicators from the seminar slides.
 - ii. Select three items to focus on during your observation.
 - iii. Spend 2–3 hours observing the classroom. Use the ICP indicators to rate the observed practices (occurrence, frequency, consistency, context, individualization). Provide evidence for each rating.
 - iv. Conduct a brief (15–20 min) structured interview with the lead teacher using ICP-aligned questions.
 - d. Third: Based on your observation and research analysis, develop a 2-page improvement plan that includes:
 - i. Two evidence-based strategies to enhance inclusive practices in the observed classroom.
 - ii. A rationale for each strategy grounded in the Love & Horn (2019) article and ICP indicators.
 - iii. A reflection on your role as a future educator or researcher in promoting inclusive education.
- 2. Family Engagement & Advocacy Resource Binder**
- a. Students will develop a Family Engagement & Advocacy Resource Binder designed to support families of infants and toddlers with disabilities to advocate for inclusive opportunities in community-based early childhood settings. This binder should be a practical, research-informed toolkit that early

interventionists, educators, and family support professionals can use to foster meaningful partnerships and build advocacy capacity among families.

b. Understanding Family Perspectives

- i. Tools for assessing family priorities, values, and concerns.
- ii. Cultural and linguistic considerations in family engagement.
- iii. Develop sample interview or intake forms to gather family input.

c. Advocacy Skill-Building for Families

- i. Strategies for coaching families to advocate for inclusive placements.
- ii. Sample scripts or talking points for IEP/IFSP meetings.
- iii. Role-playing scenarios for navigating community settings.

d. Community Navigation Toolkit

- i. Directory of inclusive community-based programs (can be localized).
- ii. Tips for identifying inclusive environments and asking the right questions.
- iii. Templates for letters/emails to providers requesting accommodations or inclusion.

e. Collaborative Partnerships

- i. Strategies for building trust and shared decision-making with families.
- ii. Sample family-professional partnership agreements.
- iii. Resources for conflict resolution and collaborative problem-solving.

3. Classroom Design

- a. Students will design a comprehensive classroom environment for toddlers or preschoolers that promotes engagement, independence, and positive behavior by addressing the physical layout, social interactions, and temporal organization of the classroom. The design should reflect evidence-based practices from the IRIS module and the provided readings. Students will present their classroom design in the form of an oral presentation in class.

b. Physical Environment

- i. Create a floor plan for your classroom that includes:
- ii. Clearly defined play areas (e.g., art, blocks, dramatic play, quiet reading).
- iii. Visual boundaries and traffic flow to prevent running and overcrowding.
- iv. Placement of furniture and materials to promote independence (e.g., low shelves, labeled bins).
- v. Explain how your design minimizes distractions (lighting, noise) and supports accessibility for all children.

c. Social Environment

- i. Describe strategies to:
 - 1. Foster positive peer interactions (sharing, turn-taking, problem-solving).
 - 2. Incorporate adult and peer supports (e.g., transition buddies, role modeling).
 - 3. Build a sense of community and inclusion for children with diverse needs.
 - 4. Include at least two proactive strategies for teaching social skills (e.g., puppets, role play).

d. Temporal Environment

- i. Develop a daily schedule that balances:
 1. Active vs. quiet times.
 2. Large group vs. small group activities.
 3. Teacher-directed vs. child-directed learning.
 4. Include transition plans:
 5. Visual schedules and cues.
- ii. At least two strategies for smooth transitions (e.g., songs, countdown timers, staggered movement).
- iii. Justify how your schedule reduces downtime and supports independence.

e. Reflection and Rationale

- i. Write a 2–3 page rationale explaining:
- ii. How your design addresses challenging behaviors proactively.
- iii. How it aligns with principles from the IRIS module and readings.
- iv. How it supports children from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

4. Classroom Consultation Plan

- a. In groups of three, students will design a consultation plan for delivering itinerant early childhood special education (ECSE) services in a community-based childcare setting. The plan should reflect best practices for collaborative consultation, family engagement, and inclusion, as outlined in the assigned readings. Students will submit a written plan.

b. Consultation Framework

- i. Outline the consultation model you will use (e.g., coaching, collaborative problem-solving).
- ii. Define:
 1. Roles of the itinerant ECSE provider, classroom teachers, and families.
 2. Communication strategies (frequency, format, documentation).

c. Professional Development Component

- i. Propose two strategies for building teacher capacity (e.g., modeling, feedback, joint planning).
- ii. Explain how these strategies align with adult learning principles discussed in the readings.

5. Discussion Group Participation

- To prepare for the discussion sessions, students will be required to complete the readings leading up to the discussion session. Students will be asked to respond to the discussion prompt by Friday evening and give substantive feedback to 2 (or more) classmates by Sunday evening. Submit the discussion questions by 5 pm the day before the discussion. Students receive x points for timely and in-depth discussion responses. Evidence of integrating reading and applying theory

to practice is necessary to receive full points. Students will receive x point based on the quality of feedback given to peers.

Course Grading

Assignments are due by 11:59pm on the indicated date. Late assignments without previous written approval of the instructor will incur a 50% penalty for the first time and lost all points beyond. This instructor and learners are required to adhere to the University's Academic Integrity policy. Any plagiarism will not be tolerance and referred to the Academic Integrity Office. And the learners will be given an "F" in the course and be recommended to the Student Conduct Office.

Learners will be evaluated based upon the assignments described below. The plus/minus grading system and scale is as follows:

Letter Grade	Grade Range
A	93 and above
A-	90-92
B+	88-89
B	83-87
B-	80-82
C+	78-79
C	73-77
C-	70-72
D	60-69
F	59 and below

Course Grading Systems

Component	Weight for final grade
Bridging Research and Practice: Evaluating Inclusive Practices in Early Childhood Settings	30%
Classroom Consultation Plan	20%
Discussions	10% (including responding to other peer's posts)
Classroom Design	20%
Family Engagement & Advocacy Resource Binder	20%

Resources

Resources to supplement the Syllabus:

- [IRIS Evidence-based Practice Summaries](#)
- [What Works Clearinghouse](#)

- [National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorder](#)
- [National Center on Intensive Intervention](#)
- [Evidence--based Instructional Practices for Young Children with Autism and Other Disabilities](#)
- [Evidence Based Intervention](#)
- [Center for Early Literacy Learning \(CELL\)](#) - Research syntheses (no quality review or classification)
- [Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center](#) - Links to both EBP review sources and other reliable sources
- [The University of Kansas Life Plan Institute](#)
- [Vanderbilt University](#)
- [Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center](#)
- [Family-Guided Approaches to Collaborative Early Intervention Training Services \(FACETS\)](#)
- [Family Guided Routines Based Intervention](#)
- [Natural Environments](#)
- [Siskin Children's Institute](#) Early Intervention in Natural Environments
- [Embedded Instruction for Early Learning](#)
- [EPIC Intervention](#)
- [SS-OO-PP-RR Framework for Home Visiting](#)
- [CONNECT Module 1: Embedded Interventions](#)
- [Foundations: Routines Based Interventions: Supporting Families](#)
- [Embedded Instruction for Early Learning](#)
- [Milieu Teaching](#)
- [Natural Environments](#)
- [Vanderbilt KidTak](#)
- [Peer-Mediated Instruction and Intervention \(PMII\)](#)
- [Applied Behavior Analysis Programs](#)
- [Kansas University](#)
- [Kentucky Autism Training Center](#)

Journals in EI/ECSE

Below are examples of journals that publish topics about EI/ECSE. Faculty may want to explain how to use articles to support practice and to examine current research. Clarify the difference between practitioner-based journals and research-based journals.

- *Child Development*
- *Journal of Early Intervention*
- *Journal of Pediatrics*
- *Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability*
- *Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities*
- *Journal of Pediatric Nursing*
- *International Journal of Early Childhood Special Education*
- *Pediatric Research*
- *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*
- *Young Exceptional Children*

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