The Need for Skilled Inclusion in Out-of-School Time Programs: Kids Included Together Responds

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INTRODUCTION

President Barack Obama recently called for heightened funding to out-of-school time programs to increase the opportunities for all children to learn and grow. He has articulated that high-quality out-of-school time programs are necessary for child development. Private foundations, think tanks, advocacy groups, and support agencies also back such efforts. These efforts are not unfounded as research shows that the time youth spend home alone is the most critical factor relative to high-risk problem behaviors and missed opportunities. Involvement in high-quality out-of-school time organizations can provide opportunities for positive growth and enrichment. Quality programs allow children to explore their talents and build their self-confidence by facilitating mastery of their new skills. They give children the opportunity to build new friendships and understand diversity. Access to out-of-school time programs also allow parents and families to breathe easy and concentrate on their work and other responsibilities because they know that their children are safe and engaging in activities with their peers.

Extensive research has been done on the benefits of out-of-school time programming for all children and these findings have been well documented. Little systematic consideration, however, has been given to whether children with disabilities are being fully and meaningfully included in such programs. It is essential that, as professionals in the field, we examine whether children with disabilities are being provided access to quality out-of-school time programs. If they are not, it is important that we determine what the obstacles are and create systems for eliminating

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those barriers. Access to out-of-school time programming is important for all children. When children with and without disabilities are able to actively participate together in natural settings within their communities all children benefit.

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While the inclusion of children with disabilities into out-of-school time programming is moral and ethical, their rights are also protected by law. The federally mandated Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) addressed the national need for ensuring citizens with disabilities are given the opportunity to access the same workplace, government programs, public accommodations, transportation, and

telecommunication as citizens without disabilities. Title III of the ADA requires that all persons with a disability be granted access to public programs and that reasonable accommodations be made so that they can access and participate with ease. Included in this nationally recognized standard are children with disabilities in out-of-school time programs.

Significant lack of opportunity for children with disabilities to participate in out-of-school time programs has been identified and documented. Currently, there is a significant gap in the availability and, more importantly, the quality of child and after-school care opportunities for children with disabilities. The Maps to Inclusive Childcare Project reported that families of children with disabilities are frequently discriminated against when attempting to access programs. The barriers identified by the study included negative attitudes and perceptions, lack of training and fear of not having adequate skills or resources to support the child.

These findings were further supported by the Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council in a report published in 2004. The Barriers to Quality Childcare report documented the results of data gathered from over 400 families in Maryland describing their experiences securing out-of-school time care for their child with a special need or health concern. These data uncovered that the majority of respondents had difficulty finding or keeping childcare. Three of the most predominant reasons include unwillingness of the program to accept the child, the providers lack of knowledge of inclusion strategies, and the staff's inability to effectively respond to challenging behavior.

Of the same parents who responded to the survey, 42% indicated that they had been forced to quit their job to provide childcare, and another 14% reported that they had to accept a lower paying position to be able to care for their child with a disability. Overall,

76% of families reported a loss of income because they could not find adequate out-of-school time care for their child with a disability or health care need.

Especially in this time of fiscal uncertainty, it is important to ensure that parents can participate in the workforce, support their families, and contribute to the country's tax base. Further, it is imperative that children can participate meaningfully in their natural community setting with same aged peers, regardless of their diverse abilities. It is therefore necessary that organizations are molded and staff is developed to ensure that their programs can best serve the needs of all children. Many out-of-school time organizations can benefit from supports in these areas.

In a published report titled Child Care for Children with Special Needs, the Maryland Committee for Children found that 85% of group program providers agreed that providers do not have sufficient knowledge about accommodating children with disabilities. It was also found that 72% of group program providers agreed that children with challenging behavior cannot receive the attention they need in a typical child care setting.

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Further, in 2002, a focus group was held by the Coalition for Inclusive Child Care Committee. The committee gathered a staff of agencies that support children with special needs in out-of-school time settings to identify common barriers to inclusive out-of-school time settings. Three of the primary findings from this focus group were attitudes of providers, lack of knowledge, and behavioral issues. Provider's attitude was seen as the strongest barrier

to inclusion. Providers often have incorrect assumptions about children with disabilities and the effect on their workload. Staff further indicated that lack of knowledge was a concern. The report noted that child care providers need basic disability awareness training to reduce stereotypes, as well as training on developmentally appropriate care, specific disabilities, and successful strategies to include children, positive behavior supports, and information on community resources. Another important concern of staff was that caregivers are not trained in the use of positive supports for children who are displaying challenging behaviors, nor do they have behavioral support plans.

Obvious trends emerge in the sparse research on barriers to inclusive out-of-school time programs. These trends, however, can be combatted by high quality training, effective resources, and appropriate supports.

THE NEED FOR INCLUSION TRAINING

The importance of including children with and without disabilities into programs is evident. What has been overlooked, unfortunately, is the important and necessary component of training out-of-school time providers to ensure that staff members are prepared to fully and meaningfully include all children. The importance of high quality professional development for out-of-school time providers is not lacking in the literature. Currently, however, the need for professional development focused specifically on inclusion is. It is vital that out-of-school time caregivers and programs, as a whole, first adopt the philosophy of inclusion and then learn skills and best practices to include all children meaningfully. In receiving high-quality professional development on inclusion and accommodations, staff will better the lives of children, families, and programs, and they will see a positive change in their own lives.

Possibly more significant, however, is that if staff is trained to include children with and without disabilities into their programs, then organizations are more likely to open their doors to children with varying abilities.

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In an exploratory evaluation conducted by Kids Included Together (KIT), 612 out-of-school time staff were surveyed to measure their beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions about serving children with and without disabilities. Findings from this study indicated that staff who had received training on inclusion were statistically significantly more likely to feel more comfortable providing accommodations in their program. Findings also uncovered that staff who had received training on inclusion were statistically significantly more likely to modify program activities to accommodate all children in the program. The same findings were true for staff's perceived level of knowledge. Staff who had received training on inclusion were statistically significantly more likely to perceive themselves as more knowledgeable on: inclusion strategies, behavior support techniques, supporting children on the autism spectrum, and supporting children with ADD/ADHD.

Unfortunately, the same barriers present in delivering traditional in-school professional development also exist in the out-of-school field. These challenges include: restricted budgets, a lack of necessary resources, time and geographical constraints, and inflexibility in caregivers' demanding schedules (Sawchuk, 2008).

KIT has developed a program to combat those barriers.

KIT is a non-profit organization located in San Diego, CA that specializes in providing best practices

training for community-based, out-of-school time organizations committed to including children with and without disabilities into their recreational, child development and youth development programs. KIT established the National Training Center on Inclusion (NTCI) as a state-of-the-art training facility dedicated to creating and disseminating best practice information and tools to all out-of-school time organizations. Utilizing a blended learning style with interactive eLearning components, KIT and the NTCI's services are expected to promote the full, meaningful, and successful inclusion of all children into out-of-school time programs.

BLENDED LEARNING STYLE

Effective professional development has been shown, in the literature, to be made up of training that is ongoing, reflective, supporting the construction of a professional learning community, based in program practice, and grounded in current research. Additionally, Sparks (2002) remarked that training should be tailored to providers' specific needs and embedded in their daily lives. Further, they argued that such professional development should come with strong support from the staff's administration. One-day professional development sessions often do not afford such capabilities as they deliver general, broad topics on teaching that do not offer teachers content specific training. Should administrators attempt to transform face-to-face professional development into a model of individualized, reflective, ongoing professional development, it would prove prohibitively costly and would most likely interfere with teachers' schedules.

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Distance learning has emerged as an alternative to the traditional form of training. Research has shown that eLearning offers unique benefits for training. For example, it is common for professional development researchers to note the advantage of "anywhere anytime" learning and the development of "lifelong learners" (Farrell, 2001; Abdal-Haqq, 1996; Carter, 2004; Dede, 2008). Yanes, Lowry, Anzie & Sumard (2003) conducted a review of research literature surrounding online learning that provided a bird's eye view of the characteristics that embody this new form of professional development delivery. Their review concluded that online training affords teachers the ability to select individualized training, to direct and manage their own learning, to engage in training that is reflective and ongoing, and allows teachers to develop a community of learners over time.

The debate about learner isolation as compared to the formation of learning communities, however, is found throughout the literature surrounding online training. While some studies have indicated that online learning promotes the formation of communities by allowing for synchronous and asynchronous discussion at any time participants are available, other research has found that online learning promotes isolation, which leads to learner frustration and a higher attrition rate in online training than face-to-face training (Sun et. al, 2008; Smart & Cappel, 2006; Brown, 1996; Hara & Kling, 2000; Picciano, 2002; Tyler-Smith, 2006).

To curb challenges associated with online learning and combat the barriers realized when only face-to-face training is utilized, KIT utilizes a blended learning style when training out-of-school time professionals to include all children in their programs. A blend of eLearning, face-to-face training, printed materials and verbal distance communication combines the any time, any place, at the participant's pace advantages of online facilities and materials, with the opportunity for trainer support. Blended learning is about developing skills and knowledge by engag-

ing and challenging the learner in different ways. It benefits a variety of learners by providing them with the ability to collaborate but also receive individualized learning experiences. Further, throughout their training, learners also receive personalized learning support and wide access to digital resources, shared tools, and information systems.

KIT delivers professional development through live training, eLearning modules, webinars, print materials, Support Center phone calls and emails, and one-on-one assistance. When participants complete live trainings, eLearning modules, or webinars, they are eligible to receive Continuing Education Units (CEUs). KIT's National Training Center on Inclusion is an Authorized Provider of CEUs through the International Association for Continuing Education and Training (IACET). The primary purpose of the CEU is to provide a permanent record of the educational accomplishments of an individual who has completed one of more significant non-credit educational experiences. Awarding the CEU approved by IACET also provides a quality indicator for our continuing education and training programs because it means the content has been reviewed and approved for complying with the internationally recognized standard.

Face-to-Face Live Trainings
KIT trainers travel both domestically and overseas to deliver two-hour live trainings to out-of-school time staff. Prior to the visit, an Inclusion Specialist discusses the needs of the program with a director and determines the training that will best meet the needs of the staff. Trainings are interactive, include a great deal of movement, and allow for collaboration between participants.

The *Opening Doors to Inclusive Programs* curriculum consists of KIT's four core modules. The series provides participants with an overview of the philosophy of inclusion, an introduction to the principle of respectful accommodations, a foundation in learning to set up the environment and design accommodations to support behavior, and an appreciation for establishing partnerships with families.

Introduction to Inclusion is an overview of inclusion, generally presented as a first module in a four-part series. This course reviews the history of support services for children with disabilities (medical model vs. empowerment model), the philosophy of inclusion, person-first language, and the benefits of inclusive programs.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) addresses the necessity of making accommodations for children with disabilities so that they can participate in community programs. The *Respectful Accommodations* course provides an overview of the philosophy of inclusion, insight into what constitutes a "respectful accommodation", and practical techniques to use immediately in a program.

Supporting Positive Behavior addresses the fact that all children display some type of behavioral challenge. However, some children have a more difficult time managing their behavior, and often times this may be related to their disability. This course focuses on how to prevent negative behaviors before they occur and how to create environments that offer positive behavior support to children with behavioral challenges.

When children come to an out-of-school time program, they come attached to a family unit. Learning to create partnerships with children's families will help staff provide the best service to all children. The course *Partnering with Families* teaches learners how to communicate successfully with parents, how to set up a relationship for success, and what to do when challenges arise.

In addition to the four core modules included in the Opening Doors to Inclusive Programs curriculum, KIT offers 13 specialized live training modules.

Accommodations for Children with Autism, Calling all Camp Directors, Ready Set Summer, Early Literacy Strategies for all Children, Examining the Physical and Sensory Environment, Facing your Fear Factor, Make and Take Accommodations, Making Connections and Fostering Friendships, On Common Ground: Activities that Foster Inclusion, Success with Challenging Behavior ADHD, Supporting Social Emotional Needs, Accommodations for Children with Developmental Disabilities, and Behavior Support Techniques.

Between January 1, 2010 and December 31, 2010, KIT delivered 55 live trainings to a total of 3,211 participants. In general, the trainings are met with overwhelming success. Overall, 89% of participants reported that they received individualized ideas, suggestions, or comments from the trainers. Further, 90% indicated that the trainer was knowledgeable on the topic and 96% reported that he/she was effective in delivering the material. Possibly more significantly, however, is that 96% of all respondents reported that they perceive the content to be useful in their work with children with and without disabilities.

eLearning Modules

KIT also offers their training modules through interactive, self-paced online modules that are designed to take about 30 minutes to complete. KIT tracks participant progress on the eLearning modules and provides certificates for completion of the *Opening Doors to Inclusive Programs* series. Completers can, in addition, apply to receive CEUs for the successful completion of the four core modules. Since the inception of KIT's eLearning modules in 2008, 8,029 participants have registered to complete the *Opening Doors to Inclusive Programs* curriculum. Of the over 8,000 that registered, 7,911 completed all four core modules.

Webinars

KIT also offers bi-monthly, 30-60 minute webinars that are presented on a variety of topics related to including children with and without disabilities into out-of-school time programs. All are recorded and are accessible to view at a participant's convenience. Topics include, but are not limited to, *1-2-3 Transition, Supporting Children with Downs Syndrome,* and *Supporting Children with Developmental Disabilities.* KIT has successfully delivered 85 webinars to over 2,500 participants.

Print Materials

KIT has a series of training booklets. The booklets: *Supporting Children with Developmental Disabilities, Helping Children Understand Their Peers with Autism,* and *Supporting Social-Emotional Needs* contain instructions on supporting inclusion, tips for facilitating friendships, suggested accommodations for the disability ,and recommended book lists for staff and children. The booklet, "What is Inclusion", is designed for parents of all children in military child care programs and is designed to help communicate the philosophy and benefits of inclusion.

Further, KIT distributes a job aid, *"Communication Journal for Parents and Providers".* This job aid is designed to facilitate communication between program staff and parents of children with disabilities and challenging behavior.

Support Center

KIT provides Support Centers to its partners that are made up of a dedicated telephone help line and an email address. These modes of communication are made available so that all staff can have an outside support system to contact when they have general or specific challenges in their classroom. Call or emails may include specific issues with children's behavior, or necessary accommodations for different types of disabilities, communication with families, adherence with policies regarding child care and inclusion, adapting the physical, sensory and emotional environment for children with disabilities, training and coaching staff, and supporting positive behavior. Inclusion specialists will call the staff member back

three weeks after the initial contact to follow up on the call, determine if the challenge has persisted, and provide further recommendations.

KIDS INCLUDED TOGETHER (KIT)

Mission

The mission of KIT is to provide learning opportunities that support recreation, child development and youth enrichment programs to include children with and without disabilities.

Values

KIT believes that inclusion fosters self-determination for children with disabilities. All children have the right to meaningfully participate in community activities. The organization believes that learning about inclusion enriches the lives of all who participate and increases understanding and acceptance of disabilities as a natural part of life. All children's lives are enhanced through shared experiences and friendships with peers who may or may not have disabilities.

Goals

KIT's blended learning approach is designed and developed to promote 5 areas of support: participant satisfaction, participant comprehension, organizational integration, application, and the inclusion of all children.

One of KIT's foci is ensuring that staff is receiving training and resources of highest quality. However, KIT also strives to ensure that all participants enjoy and value the training. Participant perceived satisfaction is measured by post training evaluations. Participant actual satisfaction is measured by a follow-up questionnaire.

A second goal of KIT's is participant comprehension. It is important to KIT that participants not only value the material they are being trained on, but equally that they fully comprehend the content and learn skills necessary for applying the content.

It is also important that participants learn and value the importance of the content. This second goal is measured through cognitive items on a pre-, post-, and follow-up questionnaire, using time as the dependent variable.

KIT also strives to help programs realize organizational integration. We determine whether the program values KIT's participation and whether there are mechanisms provided for implementing the training. This goal is measured by an in-depth look at organizational cultural change, as well as a study of non-intervention classrooms prior to KIT's participation and following KIT's participation.

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Application is another area where KIT has set a goal. KIT, as an organization, expects that through their intervention, participants will extend the services to other caregivers. Training extension is measured through pre-, post-, and follow-up questionnaires and observations in non-intervention classrooms.

Finally, at the core of KIT's mission is the inclusion of all children. To that end, the final and most important goal, is child benefits. KIT measures the extent to which children in the caregiver's program are positively impacted within and outside of their program. KIT also measures students' demonstration of advancement toward and achievement of individual desired outcomes. Child observations, as well as caregiver, child, and parent communications, measure student achievement goals.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR US?

Ensuring that all children with and without disabili-

ties are meaningfully included in out-of-school time programs, is vital to their development into active members of society. Children receive numerous benefits by participating in out-of-school time programs including the ability to interact with a diverse population, understand difference, and develop tolerance.

While substantial research has been done on professional development for out-of-school time providers, very little research has been done on effective professional development for including all children with and without disabilities into out-of-school time care.

Research has shown that one of the most significant barriers for including children with disabilities into out-of-school time programs is lack of staff knowledge and training. It was further proven that staff who receive training on inclusion are more likely to provide accommodations to children with disabilities. It is vital that we open the doors in our communities to all children of varying abilities and allow them to succeed in out-of-school time programs by training staff to most meaningfully support this effort.

Kids Included Together is an organization that provides training and resources for meaningfully including children with and without disabilities into community based out-of-school time programs. KIT's blended learning style allows for differentiated instruction so our skills and best practices can most effectively be transferred to a wide audience. By utilizing KIT's training and resources, management and staff at numerous out-of-school time programs are promoting the full and meaningful inclusion of children with and without disabilities.

Selected Sources

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