



UCEDD Resource Center

A project of AUCD, in partnership with ADDO, to strengthen and support the network of UCEDDs.

A Webinar from AUCD's Early Intervention/Early Childhood (EIEC) Special Interest Group

Inclusive Early Childhood Program Models: The Waisman Early Childhood Program

June 28, 2016

Joan Ershler PhD, Director WECP
Waisman Center, University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities
University of Wisconsin-Madison



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Webinar Overview

- Introductions
- Presentation
- Q & A after presentation
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Presenter

Joan L. Ershler, PhD



I have a long-standing interest in young children's development and learning, and ways in which we can facilitate both in children with varying abilities, especially through play-based strategies in inclusive programs. My career has included teaching young children with special needs; teaching at the university level; providing pre-professional training in early childhood education; and consulting with Head Start programs. Since 1992, I have been the director of the Waisman Early Childhood Program, an inclusive program for approximately 90 children, a third of who have a developmental disability or special education need.

Inclusive Early Childhood Program Models:

The Waisman Early Childhood Program

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WAISMAN CENTER



Beginnings.....





Our history

- ▶ Waisman Center at UW-Madison opened in 1974
- ▶ Major research programs related to PKU and Down syndrome
- ▶ WI State Legislation authorized early childhood program at UW at the Waisman Center
- ▶ WECP began in 1979 as playgroup for 7 children with Down syndrome participating in research



Subsequent years:

- ▶ Other WC employees enrolled their children in WECP
- ▶ WECP became naturally occurring inclusive program
- ▶ 1/3 of enrollment reserved for children with varying developmental issues
- ▶ By 1980's enrolled 50 children
- ▶ Late 1980's hired full time SLP
- ▶ Early 1990's hired part-time OT
- ▶ In 2000, expanded to capacity of 100 children

What we look like now.....





Specifics.....

- ▶ 6 classrooms, ages 1 – 5; 80 children; up to 30% with special needs; open 7:30-5:30, 5 days/week
- ▶ Summer program for 4K – grade 1
- ▶ Staff
 - Program Director, Program Assistant
 - 17 degreed Teachers, most licensed in early childhood or special education or both
 - 6 part-time Assistant Teachers
 - Speech/language Therapist (100%)
 - Occupational Therapist (40%)
 - 2 adults with disabilities
 - ~ 20 part-time student assistants
 - ~ 12 student trainees (150 hours/semester; unpaid)

Mission

To provide an inclusive setting where all children can participate side-by-side, and

- ▶ feel competent and proud of their accomplishments
- ▶ learn through playing
- ▶ solve problems by communicating
- ▶ respect and appreciate each other's uniqueness

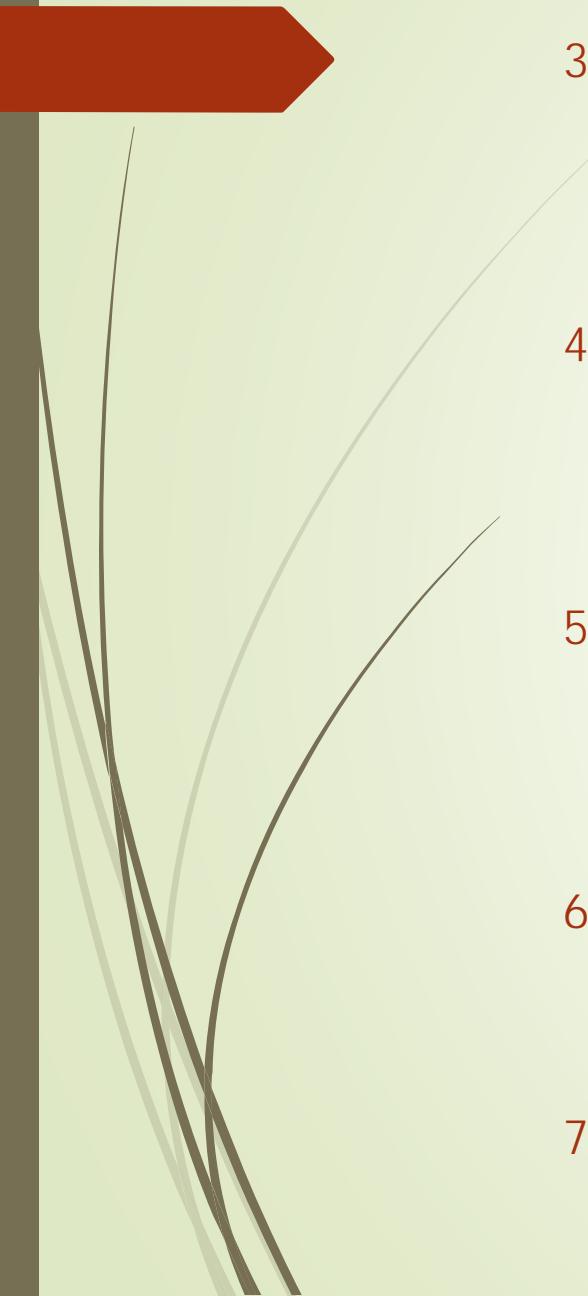


7 Core Principles

Joint Position Statement on Inclusion from NAEYC and DEC guides our practice:

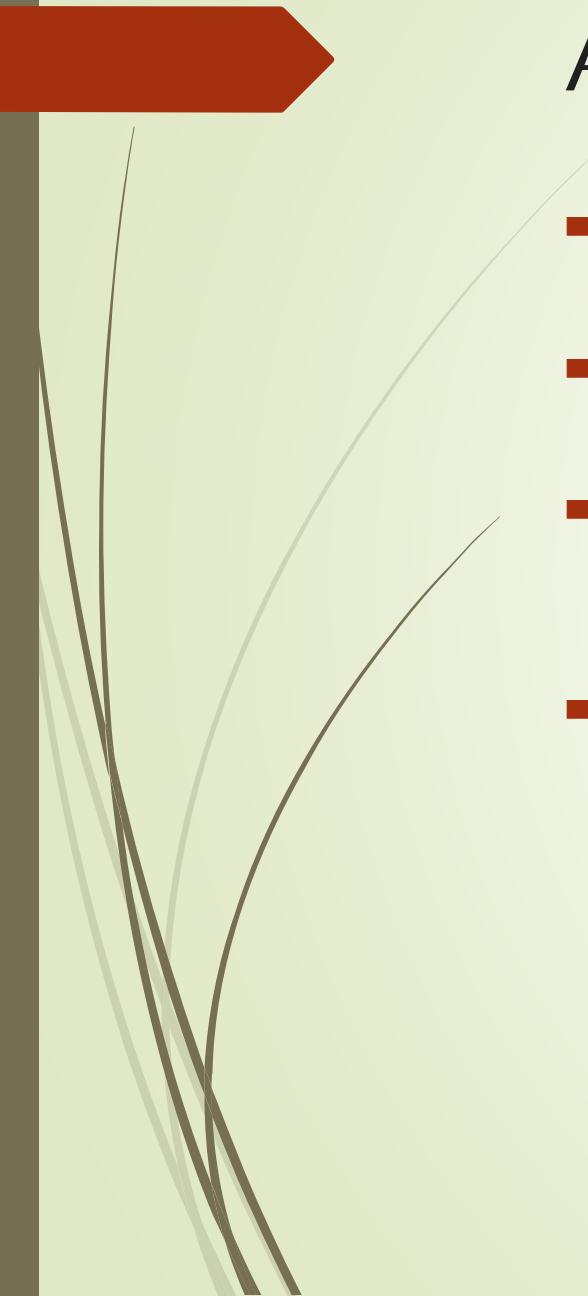
(https://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/DEC_NAEYC_EC_updatedKS.pdf)

1. All children (people) belong in the mainstream of life.
2. Early Childhood Education “curriculum” should focus on developmental domains:
 - ▶ Personal/emotional
 - ▶ Social development and Play
 - ▶ Language and Communication
 - ▶ Cognitive development (problem solving and pre-academic skills)
 - ▶ Physical/motor development



Beliefs (cont'd)

3. Children's learning occurs and is influenced by many contexts, especially home. Families and teachers should work together to promote the best outcomes for their children.
4. Play is the means through which children develop and learn. It is also an authentic reflection of their progress toward reaching developmental goals.
5. Early childhood practices should focus on building a foundation in emotional well-being: promoting resilience, positive self-esteem, feelings of competency, self-reflection and perspective-taking.
6. Teachers must plan intentionally, be participants in children's activities to scaffold learning, collaborate with other professionals, monitor progress.
7. Early childhood experiences should be designed to enable each child with his/her diverse needs to participate together, yet work on individual objectives.



Admission & Enrollment

- ▶ Priority given to siblings, children with special needs, WC and UW-affiliated (faculty, staff, students)
- ▶ Families given information about WECP mission and practices via website initially; all applicants must tour
- ▶ Written materials (Staff and Family Handbooks) include sections on inclusion, services to children with special needs, including special health care needs (example on next slide)
- ▶ Information about challenging behavior also included, including program and classroom strategies, and family involvement.

Inclusion of All Children

Embedded throughout our curriculum is the notion of inclusion. This involves providing a visual environment, materials and activities that demonstrate a respect for diversity represented by cultural/ethnic backgrounds, age and varying ability levels. We believe that all members of the WECP community contribute to and are important to its identity.

Successful inclusion of all children does not happen incidentally. It requires carefully thought-through plans and strategies. Several factors that contribute to this include:

Positive Attitudes

- Teachers value diversity and cooperation and incorporate these values into activities.
- Each child is unique, and children benefit from learning about the special qualities, events and customs of others. Becoming a member of a global community and valuing that membership begin in the early years.
- Young children enjoy helping each other; assisting someone who needs it is very natural and should be encouraged. It is important that all children have the opportunity to be helpers, including those with special needs.
- Teachers give all children the opportunity to demonstrate their strengths and special skills. Our emphasis is upon the contributions each child can make to her/his classroom community.



Knowledge and Understanding

- Children are often curious about differences, and teachers provide information at each child's level of understanding. For toddlers and preschoolers, being as concrete as possible through activities promotes understanding.
- Understanding is a gradual process that occurs by example through small daily interactions. The important concept is that people are different in some ways and alike in some ways, that we all have the same basic needs, and that each of us is special.

Behaviors

- Children sometimes need adult guidance in learning the skills necessary to play with one another. Areas in which teachers can assist children to develop peer relationship skills include complementing play skills, modeling verbal exchanges, interpreting behaviors and labeling feelings.
- Teachers acknowledge and discuss children's negative feelings and behaviors in a supportive and understanding manner. In a classroom where differences, similarities and feelings are discussed, respect for each other is likely to occur.

Monitoring Children's Progress

As part of our Changing, Learning, Growing curriculum, the WECP uses performance monitoring to keep track of children's growth and development. Sometimes referred to as "authentic assessment" or "portfolio development", this approach involves documenting examples of development in each of the five domains over time for each child. Rather than a pull-out, one-time assessment or checklist, performance monitoring is a process. During the course of a semester, teachers write down illustrative anecdotes, collect art work, take photos and gather other items to place in each child's portfolio. Documentation strategies are determined by classroom teams, and examples may be found in the Changing, Learning, Growing Manual, which is located in your child's classroom. This documentation is used in preparing a written parent-teacher conference form, which is the child's portfolio, and is given to the family at the time of the conference.

Funding



- ▶ Somewhat diversified:
 - ▶ Tuition is primary source of revenue; contributes to 80% of operating costs
 - ▶ Public school reimbursement per child for 4K program
 - ▶ Funding from UW/WC and UCEDD
 - ▶ Therapy reimbursement from third party billing

Strategies to Facilitate Inclusion

- ▶ Engaging families
- ▶ Supporting children
- ▶ Teaching strategies
 - ❖ Working in teams
 - ❖ Setting a foundation in the classroom for social emotional competence and resilience
 - ❖ UDL & Developmental Plans (DP)
 - ❖ Communication
- ▶ Administrative role



Strategies to Facilitate Inclusion:

Working with Families`

- ▶ **Informing and engaging families**

- ▶ Examples:
 - Written materials (website, handbooks)
 - Personal tour before enrollment
 - Classroom sponsored activities (potlucks, child-of-the-week, mystery cooler; parent helpers)
 - Parent-Teacher Organization
 - Classroom Open Houses before school year begins
 - Ongoing classroom newsletters
 - Family “work days”
 - Parent discussions on relevant topics
 - Ongoing communication



Encouraging Family Input

The story of the “Birthday Party Predicament”

Families with children with special needs asked the question, “Why isn’t my child invited to birthday parties”?

They were invited to come to the next PTO meeting to ask other parents directly, and they did.



At the PTO meeting, families with typically developing children also had questions:

- ▶ How many children with special needs are in my child's classroom?
- ▶ How can you serve children with very different needs in one program?
- ▶ What is the benefit of having my child in a program like this?
- ▶ What are the special needs or disabilities that the children may have?

The Resolution

Parents worked together to answer each others' questions.

Answers were recorded and are now part of our Family Handbook:

- ▶ All children are children first; a diagnosis doesn't define the child.
- ▶ A challenge in one developmental area doesn't mean a challenge in others.
- ▶ "Special" means that we must figure out ways to facilitate each child's participation. "Fair" means getting what you need.
- ▶ A multidisciplinary approach and a commitment to "Universal Design for Learning" contribute to creating and implementing activities in which everyone can participate and experience success.
- ▶ Each child is working on his/her relevant developmental and learning objectives even though everyone may be participating in the same activity.
- ▶ The benefits are an expanded curriculum and learning opportunities, as well as perspective-taking.

Strategies to Facilitate Inclusion

Supporting Children

- ▶ Placement of children in classrooms is deliberate.
- ▶ Provide individual support for part or all of the day.
(e.g., physical support; shadowing; evidence-based practices such as prompting, coaching, modeling; visual supports)
- ▶ All teachers support and work with all children.
- ▶ Whenever possible, individual therapies are provided in the classroom. Video:balance beam

Supporting Children (cont'd)

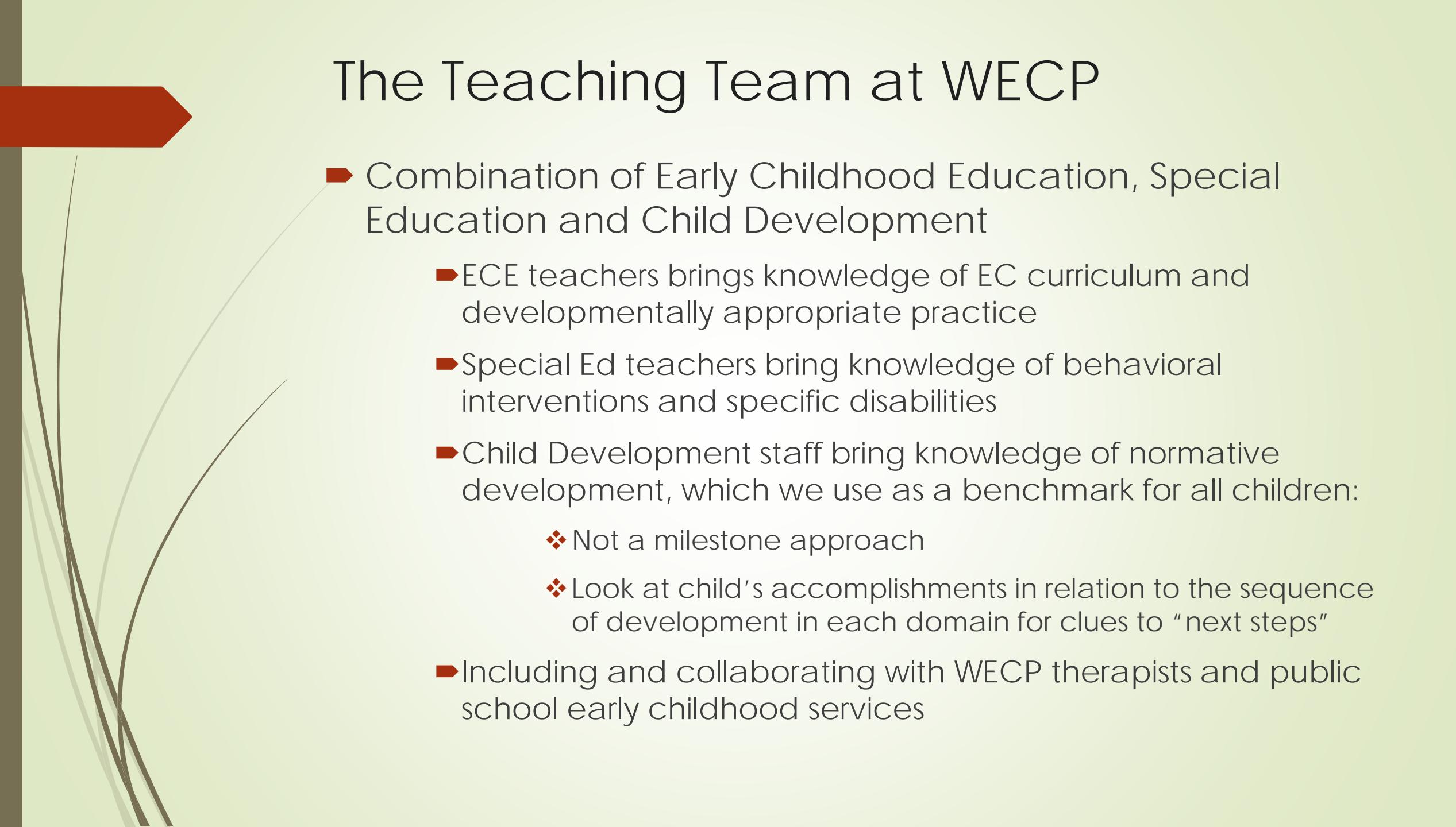
- ▶ Working with typically developing peers to help them interpret intentions/communication of children with special needs. Video: soccer



Strategies to Facilitate Inclusion

The Role of Teachers

- ▶ Maintaining a Team Approach
 - ▶ 3-person teaching team
 - ▶ Therapists
 - ▶ Family



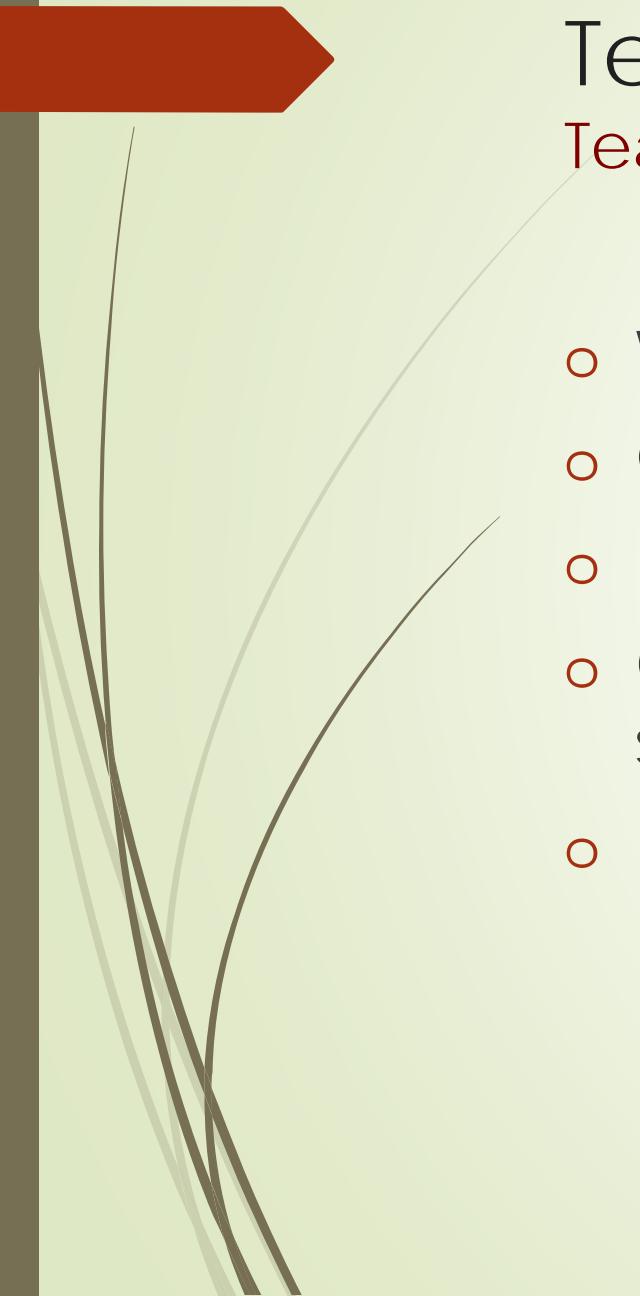
The Teaching Team at WECP

- ▶ Combination of Early Childhood Education, Special Education and Child Development
 - ▶ ECE teachers bring knowledge of EC curriculum and developmentally appropriate practice
 - ▶ Special Ed teachers bring knowledge of behavioral interventions and specific disabilities
 - ▶ Child Development staff bring knowledge of normative development, which we use as a benchmark for all children:
 - ❖ Not a milestone approach
 - ❖ Look at child's accomplishments in relation to the sequence of development in each domain for clues to "next steps"
 - ▶ Including and collaborating with WECP therapists and public school early childhood services



Teaching Strategies

- ▶ Team Meetings
- ▶ Building a platform for social emotional competence in the classroom
- ▶ UDL & Creating Developmental Plans
(<http://www.udlcenter.org/aboutudl/whatisudl/3principles>)
- ▶ Creating a Communication Plan



Teaching Strategies: Team Meetings

- Weekly
- Can include WECP Therapists
- Review of individual goals for children and strategies
- Outline of weekly choices of materials in classrooms, small group activities, dramatic play and other areas
- Discussion of parent involvement plans

Teaching Strategies:

Building Children's Social Emotional Competence



Social Emotional Competence: A Multifaceted Approach

Within the Pyramid Model framework (<http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/>)

We establish a classroom ethos* of kindness, pro-social skills, and recognizing and regulating one's emotions

Kindness Curriculum (based on the work of Richard Davidson, PhD, Waisman Center for Healthy Minds, Laura Pinger and Lisa Flook)

<http://www.mindful.org/preschoolers-learn-kindness-curriculum/>

And resilience

Devereux Early Childhood Assessment Program (Attachment, Self-Regulation, Initiative)

<http://www.centerforresilientchildren.org/preschool/assessments-resources/the-devereux-early-childhood-assessment-preschool-program-second-edition/>

* the guiding beliefs of a person, group, or organization

Social Problem Solving: The Green Book



Social Problem Solving: The Green Book

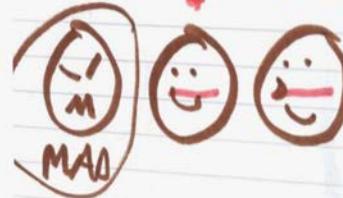


I don't like my lunch.
I did not ~~not~~ like my sandwich or
my strawberries or
my applesauce.



I feel sad. Because
I miss my mommy.
I want my daddy to
get my shoes on.

Tues. Jan 5 Shahd



I am mad because
I want to color
a book for
the ~~guinea~~ ~~long~~
pigs.



I am making more pictures
but it is clean up time

Social Problem Solving: The Conversation Table

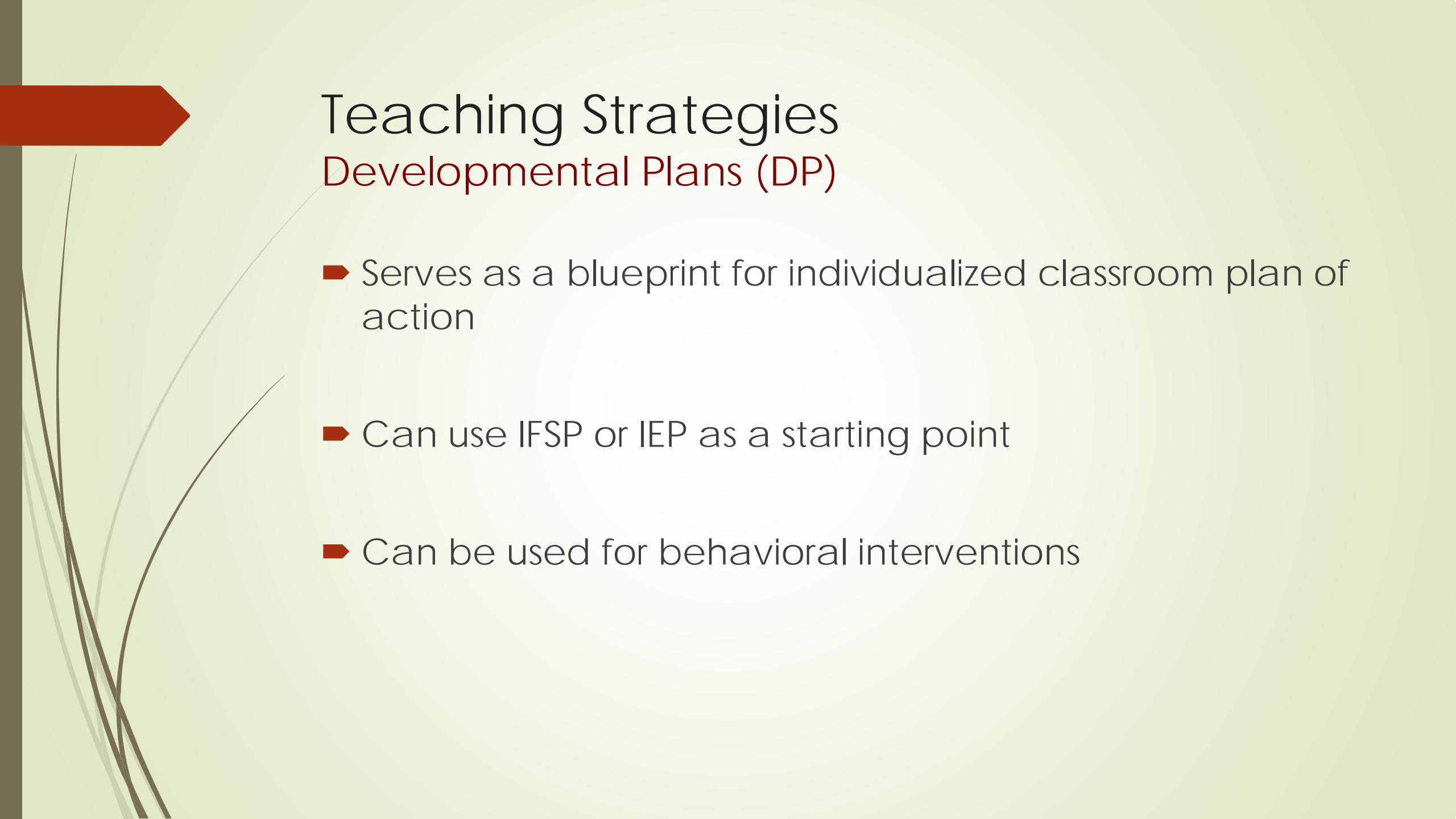


Self Regulation

► Practicing mindfulness

► A place for one





Teaching Strategies Developmental Plans (DP)

- ▶ Serves as a blueprint for individualized classroom plan of action
- ▶ Can use IFSP or IEP as a starting point
- ▶ Can be used for behavioral interventions

Creating Developmental Plans

Directions for writing goals for DP:

- Select a learning objective (can be based on IEP, family's wishes, classroom needs)
- Decide which developmental domain this objective belongs to (it may be more than one, so just pick one).
- Determine where in the developmental sequence the child's level falls. What comes next?
- Write the DP objective in words that describe what the child will actively do that you can observe.
- Include in the description of activities the criteria by which you will give credit for the child to reach his/her goal (e.g. 3 reciprocal turns in a row; every other time the child does the activity).
- Describe the strategies you will use to facilitate the child's behavior; these are the activities you/teachers will use (e.g. verbal prompt, hand over hand, peer helper)
- Identify the times during the day or the routines during which the child will work on achieving this objective (e.g. at snack time, during circle time, every half hour, etc.).
- ✓ Monitor progress
- ❖ Use this information when writing summary report for family meeting.

DP: Monitoring Progress



Teaching Strategies: Making a Communication Plan with the Team

- ❖ Before enrollment begins, family meeting to determine the frequency and forms of communication that work best for team (e.g. communication notebook back and forth, group e-mail, regular meetings, classroom newsletters)
- ❖ Informal conversations at drop-off and pick-up
- ❖ Teachers and WECP Therapists participate in IFSP and IEP meetings (including transition in and out of WECP)
- ❖ Family Conferences fall and spring



Strategies to Facilitate Inclusion:

Administrator's Role: Cheerleading and Involvement

1. Establishing the “tone” for the program:

written materials (handbooks, web site, family newsletters)

writing job descriptions and hiring multidisciplinary staff

program-wide yearly training “theme”

2. Providing support to teachers:

guiding DP process

resource for UDL in team meetings and brainstorming ideas for specific children

planning and implementing staff development activities

creating school calendar that allows for staff participation in local group trainings

establishing teacher resource library



Administrator's role (cont'd)

3. Budget planning

- ✓ Allow for expenses for materials that will accommodate children's needs (e.g., rocking chairs, sitting cushions, fidgets, visual timers, Velcro)
- ✓ Allow for hiring additional temporary staff as needed, e.g., hiring University students to allow staff to have regularly scheduled team and family meetings
- ✓ Work to identify diverse funding sources
- ✓ Small grants for specific needs/projects (e.g. gardening grants)

4. Engage staff in Outreach Activities

Summary

Inclusive EC programs employ a multifaceted approach:

- Engaging families
- Supporting individual children
- Employing teaching teams who
 - Build social emotional competence
 - Teach social problem solving strategies
 - Teach self regulation strategies
- And who use specific teaching strategies:
 - IDL and developmental plans
 - Establish workable communication plan with families and other support staff
- Administrative support: Fiscal management, cheerleading and involvement



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Q & A

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THANK YOU!

Visit the Websites

- AUCD Website: <http://www.aucd.org>
- EIEC SIG Website: <http://www.aucd.org/eiec>

Questions about the SIG?

- SIG Co-Chairs
 - Mary Beth Bruder: bruder@uchc.edu
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Questions about the Webinar?

- Anna Costalas: acostalas@aucd.org

Please take a few minutes to complete our survey!