

**ANNIE COX:** In general, early education or early inclusion, early education inclusion, for us it's really about having children with and without disabilities learning together, and then providing the supports so that we can reach all their needs, all children's needs. We've been collaborating with the Child and Family Studies Center Lab School for the last 22 years. We're a separate organization, but work very well together in terms of providing an inclusive programs where children with and without disabilities learn together.

There's been quite a bit of research, now over 25 years of research, really supporting early childhood inclusion and the benefits for children both with and without disabilities. So for children with disabilities, they do at least as well in an inclusive environment-- so learning from other children, being supported in the environment-- and do better in terms of their social interactions.

So if you think about all the great opportunities for interactions, for modeling, we're so lucky to have that here. That makes a big difference. And for children without disabilities, it's also showing they do at least as well in an inclusive environment versus a separate, non-inclusive program, and do better in terms of social interactions, in terms of their understanding of differences. And that's something that has, I think, become very important in the society that we live in. So what we're seeing is that parents are making sometimes a very conscious decision, choosing a program because it has the great diversity that we can provide here.

What we see working very well is children learn a lot from each other starting in their toddlerhood. Their interest in other children starts, so their social development really starts-- it starts much earlier, but at that point we see a lot more interest in peers. And at the preschool level, it becomes very motivating. So to have a peer who can instigate a play, a game, a toy to make things more interesting, then you get into motivation for young children.

And we're surrounded by children who can model language, who can model motor

skills, who can model all developmental skills. And that's what makes it very successful. The other way around is for children who maybe are not speaking yet, for example, or using a type of communication device or using signs or gestures or word approximations to communicate, what we see is this tremendous openness from young children. They don't have any preconceived ideas about what's good or bad. They are just very curious.

We usually talk about the very young three-year-olds not even being aware of differences. About 3 and 1/2 and 4 they are very aware of differences and ask those questions, those very important question. How come so-and-so is not talking? And we can address it by saying, you're right. Not using words yet, but is doing this. Whatever it is. OK, that's great, and they go on. So that's what makes a difference in terms of creating a community, that sense of belonging for all children, that we have each other's back. That idea.

So there are also great benefits for families. There are issues that happen that are common to all children, for example, separation. In some children, depending on their earlier experiences at preschool, may be more or less ready to separate from their parents. That's a common issue. It's not a disability issue.

**TEACHER:** Look at this. Goodbye, Mama. Ah, good job. Good job, Oliver.

**ANNIE COX:** And so for families to be able to see that, to see-- and that's just one of many examples in terms of there are common parenting issues that happen. And it's important to understand that it's for all parents. It's not only because a child has a certain disability.