

- COE News
- COE News Archive
- Accolades
- In the News
- Profiles
- COE Awards
- Research Wednesdays
- Milestone Magazine

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION » COE NEWS » COE STUDENTS SEE BENEFITS OF INCLUSION FIRSTHAND THROUGH INTERNSHIP

COE students see benefits of inclusion firsthand through internship

by Claire Miller

Preschooler Marin Smith spends her days at the First Presbyterian Preschool in Atlanta, learning the basics of reading and writing and playing with her peers.

She had help from College of Education student Sabrina Henry, who came to the preschool once a week and helped her maneuver around the classroom and on the playground. The stroke Marin suffered as an infant affects the way she moves, and Henry was there to hold her waist and guide her around the classroom.

Henry, who will graduate from the College of Education's Birth Through Five Program this spring, worked one-on-one with Marin last semester as she learned alongside her peers. By keeping her in a general education classroom and working with her individually on her daily tasks – an educational approach known as inclusion – Henry showed Marin how other preschool students respond and participate.

Henry and several other students in the college's Department of Early Childhood Education see this inclusion approach firsthand through their internships with the Adaptive Learning Center.

"We are an inclusion preschool for kids with special needs," said Charles Schoen, executive director of the Adaptive Learning Center. "We embed facilitators in a typical preschool with our students to help them adapt and participate in a regular preschool classroom."

The Adaptive Learning Center places student interns at one of four preschools in Atlanta, where they spend one day a week for five weeks working with a child on their daily activities. These COE interns also learn how to interact with children with special needs and their parents, to help set goals for each child and to communicate the children's progress with the lead teachers.

College of Education students have been benefiting from these ALC internships since fall 2009, when Kelle Laushey, special education liaison for the COE's Birth Through Five Program, was looking for internship opportunities where her students could work with infants and toddlers. She sat down with Kathy Ward, ALC program manager, to discuss the possibilities of working with the Adaptive Learning Center.

"A lot of the schools the ALC partners with have the same approach and I thought it would be good for our students to see inclusion in practice," Laushey said. "It's a different approach than what they would see elsewhere."

Seeing inclusion at work at the First Presbyterian Preschool opened Henry's eyes when she worked with Marin each week.

"It's a great experience – there's so much that you can learn and unlearn," Henry said. "You can see where you need to adapt your personal and classroom decisions."

Not only do these internships allow COE students to see the benefits of inclusion, but the parents of children with special needs notice improvement in their kids' behavior and learning.

Four-year-old Edward Gorgoll was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) when he was a year and a half old. Children with ADHD can exhibit a number of symptoms, including the inability to focus and hyperactivity, while those with ODD exhibit a need to be in control at all times.

Edward couldn't focus or follow instructions at the first preschool he attended, so at the urging of their pediatrician, the Gorgolls took their son to the Adaptive Learning Center.

"From day one, Edward had someone by his side every step of the way to guide him through the day," said Jennifer Gorgoll, Edward's mother. "The first month was a little rough because he had no idea how to act in the situation. But the facilitators learn along the way how he responds and what works for him."

Edward's facilitator would take pictures of all the tasks he needed to complete on a regular basis – putting his backpack up, taking out his snack and other activities – to help him learn the routines children learn when they go to school. Edward also works with an occupational therapist once a week on letters, numbers, reading and writing.

This combination of inclusion in a regular classroom and individualized attention has made a dramatic impact on Edward, his mother happily attests.

"He can now write his name and he's almost on par with his peers in the classroom with writing and letters," Jennifer Gorgoll said. "It's just tremendous the impact this program has, not only for the children who need the program but for those outside of it who learn about children with special needs."

For more information about the Birth Through Five Program, visit <http://education.gsu.edu/ece/BirthThroughFive.htm>.

For more information about the Adaptive Learning Center, visit www.adaptivelearningcenter.org.



Kelle Laushey, special education liaison for the COE's Birth Through Five Program, works with the Adaptive Learning Center to place her students in inclusion classrooms in the metro-Atlanta area.