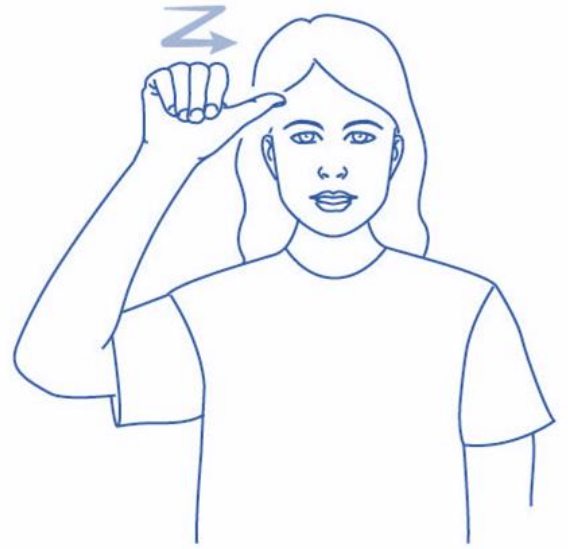




Key Word Sign™  
Australia

## RESEARCH SUMMARY: Increasing inclusion in early childhood: Key word sign as a communication partner intervention



*Cologon, K., & Mevawalla, Z.*

Cologon, K., & Mevawalla, Z. (2018). Increasing inclusion in early childhood: Key word sign as a communication partner intervention. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 22(8), 902-920.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2017.1412515>

### Summary of Key Messages

- Communication is a basic human right
- Inclusion in education is also a human right and is very important in the early years
- Use of Key Word Sign can help promote communication, participation, and inclusion for children in the early years
- Specifically, Key Word Sign can help children to experience 'genuine inclusion'. Genuine inclusion means: belonging, participating, and having opportunities to make valued contributions
- Inclusion is challenging and many children with disabilities who use AAC experience barriers to inclusion
- One important step towards breaking down barriers to inclusion is to focus on education of communication partners, including early childhood teachers
- This study shows that pre-service teachers who are taught Key Word Sign can use this strategy to promote inclusion for ALL children within their classrooms
- Pre-service teachers believe that KWS can support shared communication and development and can enable inclusive practices in early childhood settings

## **More about this research**

The authors of this research wanted to learn about how individuals who were training to become teachers thought they could use Key Word Sign within an early childhood education setting to support shared communication, language development and inclusion of all children.

### **What did the researchers do?**

The researchers in this study taught KWS to 214 pre-service teachers as part of their teacher education degree. When these students went on placement within early childhood settings, they were asked to keep a journal of different ideas about how to use KWS. Each student wrote in their journal for a period of 15 weeks.

When their semester finished, the students were asked if they wanted to be part of a research project in which their journals would be read and common themes about using KWS to support inclusion would be drawn together. The students knew they wouldn't be individually identified and that they could volunteer for this study. Of the 214 students, 196 volunteered their journals. This is a high number of participants for this type of research study that is interested in the experiences and perspectives of individuals.

### **What did the researchers find?**

When the researchers analysed all the journal entries, they found two common themes:

1. The participants believed that KWS helped with shared communication and language development within an early childhood setting;
2. The participants believed that using KWS was a positive way to include all children within an early childhood setting. They noticed that it helped both children and educators to value the different ways in which children communicated and their individual strengths and abilities.

Overall, the pre-service teachers felt that it was important that they use Key Word Sign with everyone in their early childhood settings, to create a supportive and inclusive education and communication environment. Using Key Word Sign in a creative way also helped the teachers to think more broadly about other ways they could promote meaningful inclusion in their classrooms.

### **What does this information mean for practice?**

This research shows that providing training in the use of Key Word Sign can change the beliefs and actions of communication partners. In this case, pre-service teachers who learned about Key Word Sign as part of their education degree, demonstrated positive beliefs and attitudes towards using sign as a strategy to promote access to education for all children. They valued Key Word Sign as a positive communication approach that encouraged a sense of belonging with a learning environment. The researchers concluded that helping others to learn about Key Word Sign can start to break down negative attitudes that can act as barriers to genuine inclusion of children in early education settings. There is potential for this education approach to promote inclusion in other contexts as well.

Dark, L.J. (2019). Research summary: Increasing inclusion in early childhood: Key word sign as a communication partner intervention. [Research summary].

<https://kwsa.org.au/research/>