



Early Years Practice: For Educators and Teachers

Inclusive Early Years Practice

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Chapter overview

This chapter examines cross-curricular pedagogy of equality and diversity for inclusive practice in working with children, parents and families. The notion of diversity, similarity and difference is explored through examining cultural, language, social and family influences. Adults' values and beliefs as potential barriers for children's learning are considered. Inclusive education, by enabling equal access to the curriculum for children with special educational needs, is discussed. The concept of making every child matter forms a discussion about policy and practice within an agenda of social justice. There is opportunity to reflect on inclusive practice and consider your own inclusive pedagogy and practice.



Diversity

'A unique child' as a principle of practice in the EYFS curriculum (DfE, 2014a) highlights the individual strengths and attributes of a young child and the diversity of children, parents and families with differing cultural heritages, family structure, gender, ability, social and economic status. A range of diverse cultural, linguistic, social and familial factors influences the needs of children in education and care, as shown vertically in [Table 10.1](#) (adapted from Hendry, 2012: 94).

Table 10.1 Diverse influences

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Cultural	Language	Social	Family
Country of origin	Children learning English as an additional language	Parental education and literacy	Looked-after children
Experience of education/school elsewhere	Multilingual or monolingual families	Economic status	Adopted children
Religion	Literate or non-literate family members	Unemployed parents or on a low income	Prisoners' children
Dietary requirements	Newly arrived families or established in the UK	Working parents using childcare	Same-sex parents
		Refugees' experience of trauma and living in temporary accommodation	Single parents
			Divorced parents

Ensuring that all children are included and learn to value one another is a challenging aspect of the role for those who work with children and families. It is important for children to make links between their own and others' experiences, to be aware of similarities and differences and to feel a sense of connecting and belonging to their learning community. For children to learn in early years environments, they must feel comfortable, valued and listened to within a framework of boundaries and expectations (Hendry, 2012), and

a culture of respectful education (Nutbrown et al., 2013) and social justice that includes children, parents, families and the local community.

In considering diversity and how practitioners, educators and teachers support children's learning, those who work with children should reflect on their own understandings of cultural, language, social and family influences on children's learning and awareness of assumptions and prejudices about race, gender, ability, disability, parenting and social class, which may act as barriers to learning. They should be familiar with children's concepts of themselves, identity and belonging and children's awareness of others' needs, beliefs, similarities and differences (Hendry, 2012). Diversity and difference in the early years setting or school need to be viewed as 'a rich resource to be utilized for the benefit of all, rather than as a problem to be overcome' (Booth et al., 2006: 10). Including diversity in early years practice demands that those who work with children be responsive to the diversity of children and families in their communities (Roberts-Holmes, 2009), by valuing identity and respecting differences in children's learning about themselves and each other. In embracing diversity in inclusive practice, the following questions help to reflect on and shape practice (adapted from Hendry, 2012: 98 and Nutbrown et al., 2013: 16):

- How does each child, parent and family in the setting or school know they are welcomed and respected?
- How do children learn about languages, cultures and ethnic groups that are not represented within the setting or school?
- Is every child in this setting/school seen as equal? Do we treat children equally according to their needs, irrespective of their race, gender, religion, nationality or ability?
- Is every child respected here? Do I say their name correctly? Do I make efforts to know and understand their background and nationality?
- Does every child have their needs met to promote their healthy mental, emotional, cognitive, physical and spiritual development?
- Are children's diverse learning and developmental needs provided for?
- How do we know that our practice is genuinely inclusive and not reinforcing stereotypes?

Inclusive practice as a cross-curricular approach to teaching and learning is the cement between the building blocks of knowledge, as in areas of learning or programmes of study, forming a curriculum wall of learning. Teachers should ensure that all curriculum resources and opportunities for learning throughout the year reflect the diverse and wide range of family backgrounds, multiple languages and faiths (Hendry, 2012). The bi-cultural curriculum, Te Whariki in New Zealand, promotes equality of opportunity in contexts of diversity, through recognizing the link between culture, language and learning (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1995). The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia: Belonging, Being and Becoming (Australian Government, 2009) recommends that educators recognize and respond to barriers to children achieving educational success, by challenging assumptions and practices that contribute to inequities and making curriculum decisions that promote the inclusion and participation of all children. By developing professional knowledge and skills, working in partnership with children, families, communities, other services and agencies, they endeavour to find equitable and effective ways to ensure that all children have the opportunity to achieve learning outcomes.

Questions for reflection: diversity in inclusive practice



Consider how you include diversity within your practice or observe the inclusion of diversity in practice in your work placement.

Use the questions listed above (Hendry, 2012; Nutbrown et al., 2013) to help you reflect on diversity in inclusive practice:

- How is diversity addressed in practice?
- Can the inclusion of diversity be further developed in practice?

Inclusive education

The concept of inclusion has been defined and used in relation to special educational needs (SEN), however inclusion relates to more than children with SEN and disabilities and also to a philosophical stance of ethical values and beliefs of equality and social justice (Devarakonda, 2013). Inclusive education is about equal opportunities for all, irrespective of age, gender, ethnicity, disability, attainment and background. It gives particular attention to the provision made for the achievement of different groups (Ofsted, 2000). The agenda of inclusive education concerns the overcoming of barriers to participation that may be experienced by children (Ainscow, 1999). Corbett and Slee's (2000) metaphor of integration as the square peg struggling to fit into a round hole illuminates their view of inclusion as a circle containing many shapes of differing sizes within a holistic approach to education. While integration accommodates children, inclusion concerns difference that is celebrated and where every child fits in.

Every early years setting or school presents a culture created by leaders with governors, children, educators, teachers, parents and others. Inclusive processes and practices embedded within this culture, curriculum and services are designed to help all children reach their potential (Nutbrown et al., 2013). The leader of a setting or school with a philosophy of equality and social justice develops with staff an inclusive ethos and culture underpinning inclusive practice, providing appropriate developmental practice to meet the needs of individual children, as illustrated in [Figure 10.1](#).

The government's current school-led agenda of raising attainment through target setting and a discourse of categorizing individual children in terms of attainment create tension between a culture of academic achievement and the development of inclusive practices so that all children may reach their potential (Nutbrown et al., 2013). The effects of problematizing difference by identifying children and families 'at risk' offer the potential for difference and exclusion as well as inclusion. [Figure 10.2](#) shows arenas of inclusion/exclusion (adapted from Nutbrown et al., 2013: 9).

Figure 10.1 Inclusive practice



Some government strategies promote difference for later educational inclusion. Early intervention, a strategy for working with vulnerable families, aims to support children and families at risk (Allen, 2011). The term

'special educational need' (SEN) is commonly used in the UK to describe a child who has additional need(s) in accessing educational provision. SEN help may be provided in the form of an adult, such as a teaching assistant or learning support assistant working alongside the child in the classroom, or as a physical resource to support a child in writing – for example, a chair to support a child with one arm shorter than the other.

The all-encompassing term 'special educational need' was introduced in the Warnock report (DES, 1978) and subsequent Education Act (1981) to ensure that provision focused on a child's educational needs rather than on non-educational ones (Trussler and Robinson, 2015). This policy promoted an inclusive system of education following the social model of disability, which focuses on the child and the social and life skills needed for independent living. The medical model of disability used prior to the Warnock report focused on the child's condition or illness and the medical support required for the health of the child (Trussler and Robinson, 2015). The following story of practice demonstrates inclusive education and how through adapting practice to meet an individual child's needs, the child becomes the centre of inclusive educational practice.

Figure 10.2 Arenas of inclusion/exclusion

Achievement
Age
Challenging behaviour
Disability
Disaffection
Emotional and behavioural difficulty
Employment
Gender
Hearing
Housing
Language
Learning styles
Mental health
Obesity
Physical impairment
Poverty
Race/ethnicity
Religion
Sexual orientation
Sight
Social class
Special educational need

Story of practice: inclusive education

Kaila is a Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) in a primary academy working in the Foundation Stage Unit. She describes how she led and supported staff to work with Adam, a 4-year-old boy with speech and language delay:

As SENCO and the child's key person, I had undertaken observations and assessments of Adam in the setting; from these I was able to identify that the child was continually frustrated with the environment, the staff and children due to his language delay, resulting in him being aggressive and displaying low levels of concentration and difficulty in responding to adults' talk and instruction. I was also working with his parents and the speech and language therapist to gather as much information about Adam as possible, to identify strategies they were undertaking so that these could be used in the setting to maintain consistency.

I held a meeting with the Foundation Stage Team to discuss Adam's needs, to confidently share the information I had obtained from other professionals and to enable staff to highlight any issues or difficulties

they were experiencing when working with the child. The staff raised issues about what strategies to use, expressing their frustration and lack of confidence in dealing with the situation. From the meeting, I identified that it would be beneficial for the staff to undertake training to meet both their own professional needs and Adam's language needs. I contacted the academy's professional development adviser who signposted me to a short course on communication difficulties, and I asked the facilitator to deliver the course at the academy.

All staff attended the training; they evaluated it as being beneficial to their practice as it was child-focused and practical. The course gave the staff an understanding of how Adam must feel in a situation with limited communication skills, and gave them ways to sensitively approach children with communication difficulty and effective strategies that could be used. As a team, we suggested strategies to use in the setting – these included using a visual timetable, shortening staff language by using clear repeated responses, active listening and modelling language.

Shortly after the strategies were put into place, the staff identified that they were experiencing difficulty in shortening their language responses, so I suggested they observe me whilst I engaged with Adam in a building bricks activity. In turn, each member of staff observed my use of language, then I supported them while they engaged with Adam in another activity. During a feedback session with staff about use of the strategy, they confirmed their confidence was increasing and that they felt more comfortable interacting with Adam due to the strategies provided. This, in turn, increased Adam's concentration levels, his listening skills and language usage; and his aggressive behaviour and frustration were noted to be significantly decreasing. In adapting their communication and interaction with Adam to meet his needs, the adults were putting him at the centre of their practice.

Questions for reflection: inclusive education



Consider an example of inclusive practice that shows how a strategy for learning has been adapted to meet the learning needs of a child:

- Describe the adaptation.
- How did the adaptation benefit the child's learning?
- Can more adaptations be made to encourage the child's further engagement in learning?

Making children matter

As an approach to practice, Every child matters: change for children (ECM) (DfES, 2004a) put children and young people from birth to 19 years of age at the centre of provision and practice. An agenda for social justice (Knowles, 2009) for children and young people to achieve well-being in childhood and in later life was the driver for the five outcomes, which were central to ECM policy (DfES, 2004a):

- Be healthy.
- Be safe.
- Enjoy and achieve.
- Make a positive contribution.
- Achieve economic well-being.

Research in a local authority on the implementation of ECM with staff who were practitioners, teachers, leaders and managers from early years settings, primary schools, the youth service, and children and young people's services (Hallet, 2005), found the integrated approach to holistic service delivery provided a common language across service provision. A range of activities emerged from the five ECM outcomes. ECM underscored activities related to health in early years settings and primary schools around healthy eating and cooking; extended school provision through sporting activities; and was embedded in youth service provision – 'it is the basis of our work'/'ECM is the youth service'. Some teachers from primary schools were unclear

about the ECM agenda and its aims, 'although planning sheets have ECM tick boxes' to record provision in the classroom. ECM provision was reported in school improvement plans and in the school's self-evaluation for Ofsted. This was reflected in ECM training for leaders and managers who were responsible for reporting ECM provision, although there was a lack of training for practitioners, educators and teachers working with children and families.

The Children's Plan (DCSF, 2007), a 10-year vision built on the ECM agenda, aimed to raise attainment and aspirations for this and future generations of children and young people, and to close gaps in educational achievement, ensuring standards of educational excellence for everyone. ECM developed an integrated service approach to delivery, to health, education and social care professionals working together for better outcomes for children, young people and families. In the view of the DfES (2004a), children cannot learn if they don't feel safe or if health problems are allowed to create barriers, and an education is the most effective route for young children out of poverty and disaffection (DCSF, 2007). Recent reform in the Code of Practice for special educational need provision in England for children and young people from birth to 25 years of age (DfE and DoH, 2015) promotes joint planning and commissioning of services to ensure close co-operation between education, health and social care provision. An Education, Health and Care Plan (EHC) replaces a statement of special educational need for a child, and reflects the integrated service delivery of education, health and social care provision established in the ECM agenda for inclusive practice in settings, schools and further education colleges. EHC plans focus on the holistic development of children and young people.

As stated in the UNCRC (UN, 1989), Article 28, children have a right to an education. They have an entitlement to follow a nationally prescribed curriculum, such as the EYFS or NC. Over the years, educational policy in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland has developed into a knowledge-based, prescribed, target-led, assessment-focused and adult-led curriculum, but how education is accessed by children is important. The best of early education includes developmentally appropriate practice (DAP), observation-based pedagogy and assessment; close parental involvement; equality of access to a differentiated curriculum; and a multi-professional, cross-agency approach to provision (Nutbrown et al., 2013). Where DAP is used to adapt to children's individual strengths, needs and interests, the notion of special educational needs or additional needs is not required.

Promoting inclusive practice and eliminating discrimination require shared language and understanding by sharing information (Nutbrown et al., 2013). Inclusive practice concerns practitioners', educators' and teachers' role in promoting equality of opportunity and access to the curriculum for all children. The following questions help you to reflect on your values, beliefs and practices in working with children and families in an inclusive way.

Questions for reflection: inclusive practice



Personal reflection

- Complete the sentence: I believe inclusive practice is ...
- How do I provide access for the children or child I work with?

Professional reflection

- What human and physical resources are provided in my setting or school to make the curriculum accessible to all children?
- How could they be improved?
- Does your setting or school have a policy for special educational needs, equal opportunities or inclusion? Consider why the setting or school has such a policy. What values and beliefs are the drivers for this policy?

Best practice – a child study

- Give an example of effective inclusive practice for a child in your setting, school or work placement.
- What are the key factors in this provision?
- What impact do (or did) they have on the child's learning and development?

Implications for practice

Inclusion in its broadest sense concerns all children, parents, practitioners, educators and teachers in each and every early years community and seeks to demonstrate how inclusive practices can be embedded within early years curriculum, pedagogy and services, which are designed to help all children reach their potential and achieve all that is possible for them.

Nutbrown et al.'s (2013: 16) view defines inclusion as an overarching pedagogy for practice in the care and education of children. This has implications for practice within the changing political agenda of education. Within the ever-increasing climate of assessment, academic achievement, reporting and accountability, it is important to continually remind ourselves of the ethical agenda of inclusion for social justice and equality of opportunity and access when working with children, parents and families.

Further reading



Level 4

Lambert, S. (2012) 'Inclusion and "educating" the whole child', in P. Beckley (ed.) Learning in the early years. London: Sage.

The chapter in this book provides an awareness of inclusion within a holistic approach to children's learning and development.

Level 5

Devarakonda, C. (2013) Diversity and inclusion in early childhood: an introduction. London: Sage.

This book provides a clear introduction to what inclusive practice means for those working with children in their earliest years.

Level 6

Trussler, S. and Robinson, D. (2015) Inclusive practice in the primary school: a guide for teachers. London: Sage.

This book discusses the challenges teachers face in developing and refining an inclusive classroom.

NCTL Teachers' Standards (Early Years)

Standard 8.1

- Promote equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice.

Nutbrown, C., Clough, P. and Atherton, F. (2013) *Inclusion in the early years* (2nd edn). London: Sage.

This book provides a broad view of inclusion, demonstrating the impact of inclusive practices on children and parents.

- children
- inclusive education
- special educational needs
- inclusion
- equality of opportunity
- staff
- family and parenting

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