

Inclusion and Diversity in the Early Years

A practical resource to support inclusive practice in early years settings

by Anne Rodgers and Dr. Elaine Wilmot

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Acknowledgement

Thanks to all the settings used as examples of good practice in this book, including Pembury House and Woodlands House.

Published by Practical Pre-School Books, A Division of MA Education Ltd,
St Jude's Church, Dulwich Road, Herne Hill, London, SE24 0PB.

Tel: 020 7738 5454.

www.practicalpreschoolbooks.com

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ISBN 978-1-907241-21-5



An introduction to inclusion and diversity

This book has been written for early years practitioners looking to focus on issues surrounding inclusion and diversity within their practice. It is important to focus on what inclusion and diversity really means when working with young children, and its importance in truly understanding the nature of children's differences, similarities, and their development when being cared for in the early years setting. It is vital to meet the individual and diverse needs of all children and to help them reach their full potential.

The Early Learning Goals (QCA, 2000) in England state that children should:

- Understand that people have different needs, views, cultures and beliefs which need to be treated with respect
- Understand that they can expect others to treat their needs, views, cultures and beliefs with respect
- Begin to know about their own cultures and beliefs and those of other people
- Have a developing respect for their own cultures and beliefs and those of other people

Furthermore the *Learning for All: Standards for Racial Equality in Schools* document (CRE 2000) states that effective provision will enable children:

- To achieve their full potential and that expectations are high
- To have access to and make full use of the facilities and resources
- To be prepared for life in a diverse and multi ethnic society
- Be in an environment that has a positive ethos on diversity

Inclusion and diversity is an integral part of effective provision and this book sets out to promote best practice through planning and

resourcing early years provision, as well as show how others have achieved this. This book is divided into five chapters as follows.

Chapter one looks at what inclusion and diversity means and why it matters. It asks the reader to consider how inclusive their setting is and also looks at the history of inclusion and considers children with English as a second language. It also considers children with special educational needs, the stereotypes and assumptions made and cultural diversity.

Chapter two will look at the inclusion of children with special educational needs with regards to the requirements of legislation and then will give some information about a range of special needs, with reference to where further information can be sourced.

Chapter three will look at the Early Years Foundation Stage (2008) and what this means when considering inclusion and diversity within the four themes of the curriculum. It also considers Ofsted requirements and legislation in the UK, as well as the rights of children.

Chapter four looks at why working with parents is so important and focuses on establishing relationships with them. It gives ideas for ways to engage parents within the setting and how to continue relationships with them and looks at what may go wrong. This chapter also looks at family learning and inclusive practice.

In chapter five we look at the role of the adult in promoting inclusion and diversity, as well as that of the learning environment. The chapter covers how to promote positive self-esteem and plan effectively to ensure that children's diverse individual needs are met. Examples are given from other practitioners, and next steps and further possibilities explored.

Chapter six looks at leadership and reflective practice and how practitioners can lead by example. This chapter contains a section on selecting staff, monitoring and evaluation.

What does inclusion and diversity mean and why does it matter?

Inclusion is the process by which we value all individuals, recognising their unique attributes, qualities and ways of being. Central to good inclusive practice are children's rights. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, (1989) outlines the basic human rights to which children up to the age of eighteen everywhere are entitled: the right to survival; the right to the development of their full physical and mental potential; the right to protection from influences that are harmful to their development; and the right to participation in family, cultural and social life. The Convention protects these rights by setting minimum standards that governments must meet in providing health care, education and legal and social services to children in their countries.

In order to ensure inclusive practice, settings need to develop their ethos, policies and practices to include all learners with the aim of meeting their individual needs.

The Early Years Foundation Stage (DCSF, 2008), which must be complied with in all registered and maintained early years settings in England, states that:

Providers have a responsibility to ensure positive attitudes to diversity and difference – not only so that every child is included and not disadvantaged, but also so that they learn from the earliest age to value diversity in others and grow up making a positive contribution to society. (DCSF, 2008, p. 9)

It also outlines that:

All children, irrespective of ethnicity, culture or religion, home language, family background, learning difficulties or disabilities, gender or ability should have the opportunity



Every child has their own specific needs

to experience a challenging and enjoyable programme of learning and development. (DCSF, 2008, p. 10)

There are many definitions of inclusion. The Early Childhood Forum define inclusion as:

A process of identifying, understanding and breaking down barriers to participation and belonging. (Early Childhood Forum, 2003)

Early years settings must promote an inclusive society in which every person is fully accepted, respected and valued.

Including children with special educational needs (SEN)

Defining special educational needs

The definition of Special Educational Needs according to the Education Act 1996, Section 312 is:

A child has special educational needs if he or she has a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her.

A child has a learning difficulty if he or she:

- a) Has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of the same age; or
- b) Has a disability which prevents or hinders them from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided for children of the same age in schools within the area of the local education authority.
- c) Is under five and falls within the definition at a) or b) above, or would do if special educational provision were not made for the child.

A child must not be regarded as having a learning difficulty solely because the language or medium of communication of the home is different from the language in which he or she is, or will be taught (The Education Act 1996, Section 312).

Where a professional or a parent has a concern about a child, then the setting can instigate Early Years Action. The revised SEN Code of Practice (DfEE, 2000, p.20) suggests that the

triggers for intervention through Early Years Action could be a practitioner's concern about a child who, despite receiving appropriate early education experiences:

- Makes little or no progress even when teaching approaches are particularly targeted to improve the child's identified area of weakness;
- Continues working at levels significantly below those expected for children of a similar age in certain areas;
- Presents persistent emotional and/or behavioural difficulties, which are not ameliorated by the behaviour management techniques usually employed in the setting;
- Has sensory or physical problems, and continues to make little or no progress despite the provision of personal aids and equipment;
- Has communication and/or interaction difficulties, and requires specific individual interventions in order to access learning.

Special educational needs provision

Special educational provision means:

- a) For a child over two, educational provision which is additional to, or otherwise different from, the educational provision made generally for children of the child's age in maintained schools, other than special schools, in the area

Legislation and policy

This chapter will look at the Early Years Foundation Stage (2008) and what this means when considering inclusion and diversity within the four themes of the framework. The chapter will then look at the Ofsted requirements and legislation in England and approach the subject of children's rights. All of the acts, policies and frameworks included in this chapter give the statutory position of frameworks for England in place in July 2011 which affect early years provision. They all include guidance which shapes early years provision based on the principles of inclusive practice and the respect of a diverse society.

Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

There are four themes of the Early Years Foundation Stage framework. These are:

- A Unique Child
- Positive Relationships
- Enabling Environments
- Learning and Development

Each of these themes are enabled by an inclusive provision, and it is important to consider them when providing opportunities for all children, especially those with additional needs.

A key concept in these themes is the idea of 'a unique child', which recognises every child as a competent learner from birth who can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured. It also goes further to say that every family that attends the setting is unique, and should therefore be included regardless of colour, race, religion, ability or social class. The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) recommend that

settings where possible hold festivals and celebrations to represent the diverse background of the families within the setting and should be valued as a learning opportunity.

Another key strand of the EYFS is that of respect, which runs through the theme of positive relationships. This theme stresses the importance of respecting each other and working in partnership with parents and carers.

Office for standards in education (Ofsted) recommendations

The EYFS clearly states that "Providers must promote equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice and must ensure that every child is included and not disadvantaged because of ethnicity, culture or religion, home language, family background, learning difficulties or disabilities, gender or ability". (DCSF, 2008, p. 37)

Settings must take all reasonable steps to ensure children with disabilities can have access to the premises. In meeting this statement, all activities should be available to all children and adapted where necessary taking into consideration their age and stage of development, gender, religion and culture. Children with medical and dietary needs need to be considered and allowances made for their care. Families choosing not to participate in activities have the right to do so; this may be due to cultural or religious reasons. Also, parents may choose to follow a particular routine for their child and this should be respected as much as possible.

It is a requirement for each setting to submit a Self-Evaluation Form (SEF) prior to an Ofsted inspection. Table 2 provides examples of evidence that you can include in your SEF (according to the Ofsted 2009 Self-Evaluation Form for Early Years Settings) to demonstrate your inclusive practice.

Working with parents and carers

We have included a chapter on working with parents and carers because they are central to their children's lives; they are the child's key educator, know their children better than anyone else does; and they care very deeply about their children. Parents need to feel included and it is part of the role of the early years professionals to ensure that parents' diverse needs are met in order that they can continue to support their children's learning and development.

Parents play a crucial role in the education of their children. There is a wealth of research (Evangelou and Sylva, 2003; DCSF, 2008) that shows that children do better when:

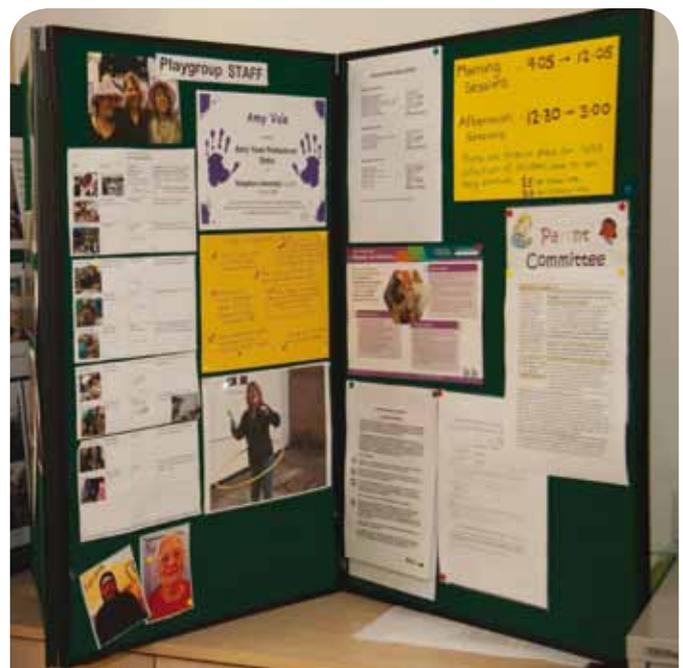
- There is a close working partnership between home, early years settings and school
- Information about children's learning is shared between everyone involved in the child's successful development

- Parents show a keen interest in their children's education and make learning a part of everyday life
- Children are actively involved in making decisions about their own learning

The DCSF report *The Impact of Parental Involvement on Children's Education* (2008, p.2) found that 'parental involvement in children's education from an early age has a significant effect on educational achievement, and continues to do so into adolescence and adulthood.' The report goes on to say that it is the quality of time spent with children that contributes most to outcomes and the attitudes and aspirations of parents predict later educational achievement. It recognises that the level of parental involvement varies among parents, with mothers, parents of young children, black or black British parents, and parents of children with a statement of special educational need being more



Establish regular communication with parents



First impressions are important

Planning and resourcing

In this chapter we look at planning and resourcing effectively to ensure we are meeting the needs of the children in inclusive ways, using examples from early years settings to show how activities and events can meet children's diverse needs. There are four main areas to consider when deciding what activities to promote with young children. These are:

- The role of the adult
- Learning environments
- Promoting positive self esteem
- Record keeping, planning and assessment

The role of the adult

To find out about the children in our care we usually have a settling in period where we get to know the family and the child and can assess how best to implement the transition from home to the setting so that the family feel comfortable, safe and can trust the key person to care for their child as they would wish. The settling in period is invaluable and each setting should have a settling in policy. This will explain to the parents how their child will be cared for within the nursery. The setting will have a key worker system and each child will have their own special grown up to relate to while their parent or carer is not there. This will help the child to separate from their parent or carer much more easily as they will develop a bond with their key worker. Ideally the room should be laid out in a welcoming fashion that is accessible to all who use it, and staff should be approachable. The routine and way the room is set up should be kept the same during the 'settling in period' as children need a sense of order and a routine can be established, enabling them to explore their surroundings. On settling in, children will become aware of the rules of the nursery and the areas of play and exploration as well as interacting with others, which can be difficult at such a young age.

POINT FOR REFLECTION

John Bowlby (1907-1990), one of the main theorists focussing on the importance of attachment, considered carer and baby relationships and early attachment vital for the development of the child. He stated that babies need one central carer, and his work in this area led to the introduction of key workers in settings. He was also interested in the separation of children in hospitals and noticed that they went through stages of grief and loss when separated. Bowlby believed that by having good attachment experiences children gain self-confidence, self-esteem, the capacity to care for others, and to be cared for. Emotional care was seen as equally as important as physical comfort, and consistent care was crucial for the overall wellbeing and development of the child. He believed that children under four who experienced prolonged maternal deprivation would suffer permanent damage. The process of bonding and attachment between mother and child begins during pregnancy and early infancy. The baby at around eight months will display separation and stranger anxiety. Bowlby's influences are seen in settings in the following ways:

- Key workers
- Consistency of care
- Attachment and bonding

LINKS WITH YOUR PRACTICE

- What do you feel is the main role of the adults in your setting and how do the adults make all of the families who attend your setting feel welcomed?