

Early years FOR everyone

Professor Cathy Nutbrown of the University of Sheffield discusses issues of inclusion in nursery settings...



Early education – at its best – is ‘inclusive education’ because of the emphasis, in practice, of identifying and meeting the individual learning needs of all young children

CATHY NUTBROWN

E Everyone has their own idea about what ‘inclusion’ means, and as a consequence it can take a different form in different settings. At its broadest, inclusion in the early years is about practices which ensure that everyone ‘belongs’: from children and their parents, to staff and any others connected with the setting in some way.

Inclusion is sometimes taken to apply specifically and only to those children identified as having special educational needs, learning in mainstream settings. However, it has a much broader meaning and applies to the practices, attitudes and, above all, values which create early childhood communities where everyone feels comfortable and all feel that they ‘belong’ and can contribute.

Emphasis can vary from culture to culture, society to society, setting to setting and even practitioner to practitioner. For example, in Australia the inclusion of indigenous children in education is a key issue (Fleer and Williams-Kennedy, 2001); whereas in the UK the focus can be the inclusion of refugee and asylum-seeking families, or Travelling families, some of whom find that they are excluded from educational services or that attempts to include them threaten to violate their cultural heritage and ways of living (Lloyd et al 2003).

The importance of inclusive practices and equality of opportunity and access to educational provision is a matter of constant discussion, and policy documents on early childhood provision draw attention to the importance of including everyone.

How to be inclusive

Probably the best supportive process available for developing inclusion is the Index for Inclusion: a detailed set of materials to help settings increase the participation of children and young people in play and learning. The Index involves a self-review of all aspects of a setting, drawing on additional help as needed. It encourages the involvement in inclusive development of all practitioners, volunteers, management committee/governors, children, young people and their parents/carers (as described by its authors, Booth, Ainscow and Kingston).

The Index seeks to support practitioners in developing their own positive responses to the diversity of children in those learning communities. The planning framework in the Index supports a structured approach to review and development, and suggests ways of working on creating inclusive cultures, producing inclusive policies and evolving inclusive practices.

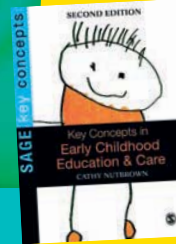
In current policy terms the Early Years Foundation Stage is clear about what is expected of practitioners in providing for young children identified as having SEN or who are disabled:

'Inclusive practice' is one of the commitments to the EYFS principle of 'A unique child'. The explanation of the commitment includes information about children's entitlements – their right to be treated fairly regardless of race, religion or abilities. There is information about involving parents in early support and knowing when and how to call for specialist help.

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find out more



Cathy Nutbrown is Director of Studies in Early Childhood Education at the School of Education, University of Sheffield. Further discussion of the issues of 'inclusion' can be found in Cathy's book, *Key Concepts in Early Childhood Education and Care (2nd edn)*, published by Sage 2011. Visit www.uk.sagepub.com/books/Book234324

individual learning needs of all young children. It is often the experience of those who work in early years settings that young children are included as a first option. Many such settings would argue that supporting children with learning difficulties is as much about attitude as it is about practicalities.

Individual needs



A childminder took 13-month-old Demetrius to watch the trains. She held his hands and patiently supported him as he walked up the steps of the footbridge and bent beside him – her arms around his tummy – as he looked through the railings on the top of the footbridge. In the distance a train was approaching – Demetrius loves the trains and this little outing to watch them go under the bridge was one of his favourite events of any day. As the train came nearer two strangers walked over the footbridge – Demetrius took his eyes off the

train and his gaze fixed on the strangers as they approached him, smiled at him and continued past. Demetrius's childminder gently turned his head – reverting his eyes to the train which was about to pass under the bridge. Demetrius struggled slightly in an attempt to continue watching the new people he was so fascinated by, but his childminder had brought him to see the trains and, from her point of view, he was missing the event he usually so enjoyed. What is important here, we suggest, is that listening to babies and toddlers requires constant vigilance and perpetual checking of the adult agenda so that – when children's interest change as subtly as they did for Demetrius – that adult can identify such shifts and further support new interests.

As the case study above demonstrates, to include means finding ways to listen to young children and to become sensitised to their needs and wants, developing a deep and intimate knowledge of each and their unique ways of communication. (Nutbrown and Clough, 2006)

Further reading

The issues surround 'inclusion' are explored in detail in the following books...

- Booth, T, Ainscow, M and Kingston, D *Index for Inclusion: developing learning, participation and play in early years and childcare (2nd Edition)* (Bristol: Centre for Studies in Inclusive Education, 2006). The Index is available from CSIE 1 Redland Close, Elm Lane, Redland, Bristol BS6 6UE
- Clough, P and Nutbrown, C *The 'Index for Inclusion': perspectives of early years practitioners* in Nind, M, Sheehy, K and Simmons, K (Eds) *Inclusive Education: Learners and Learning Contexts* (David Fulton, 2003)
- Fler, M and Williams-Kennedy, D *Building bridges: literacy development in young indigenous children* (Canberra: Department of Education, Science and Training, 2001)
- Lloyd, G, Stead, J, Jordan, E and Norris, C *Teachers and Gypsy Travellers* in Nind, M, Sheehy, K and Simmons, K (Eds) *Inclusive Education: Learners and Learning Contexts* (David Fulton, 2003)
- Nutbrown, C and Clough, P *Inclusion in the Early Years: Critical analyses and enabling narratives* (Sage, 2006)