



Inclusion Fact Sheet

Understanding inclusion

“We should acknowledge differences, we should greet differences, until differences make no difference.”

(Dr Adela A Allen)

Belonging, Being and Becoming is fundamental to the vision for children’s learning in the *Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)* and *My Time, Our Place - Framework for School Age Care in Australia*. This philosophy makes it clear that, “all children regardless of their abilities, the family constellation to which they belong, or the community in which that family resides, have a right to simply belong, be and become” (Richardson, 2011, p.6).



**National
Alliance**

Ensuring that all children have the right to belong, be and become is a key principle underpinning the provision of inclusive practice. This fact sheet aims to assist educators to increase their knowledge, understandings and practices of inclusion and inclusive practice. Reflective questions and activities are included to promote reflection and discussion.

Inclusion is defined in the *EYLF* and *My Time, Our Place* as

'[...] taking into account all children's social, cultural and linguistic diversity (including learning styles, abilities, disabilities, gender, family circumstances and geographic location) in curriculum decision-making processes. The intent is to ensure that all children's experiences are recognised and valued. The intent is also to ensure that all children have equitable access to resources and participation, and opportunities to demonstrate their learning and to value difference

(2009, p.24; 2011, p.22)

Inclusion is about belonging to and participating in a diverse society. An inclusive environment is holistic and recognises the unique contributions each child and their family make to the richness of a diverse community. Inclusive practice lays the foundation for each child's participation within a diverse community.

Inclusion and Exclusion

It was only three decades ago that exclusion, that is, segregating or isolating children with disabilities, was seen as an appropriate methodology. More recently, a number of factors including advocacy efforts, contemporary research and new legislation has led to a broadening of the definition of 'inclusion', and greater acceptance and full participation of inclusion for children with disabilities in all aspects of life.

Providing an inclusive early or middle childhood setting is a philosophy which now extends well beyond children with a disability, and encompasses the idea that all settings should strive to provide optimal learning environments for all their children, regardless of their social, cultural or ethnic background, or their ability.

This will ultimately lead to increased access and equity for all children and their families, and a celebration of the diverse backgrounds, languages, abilities, family structures and life experiences they bring to our early or middle childhood community.

FOR REFLECTION

Think of a time when you felt included and a time when you felt excluded and reflect on the following questions:

- How did it make you feel? What did you do?
- How can this reflection assist you to promote a sense of belonging for all children?

SOME IDEAS ON INCLUSION:

Take a moment to reflect on what inclusion means to you

Inclusion is about welcoming and celebrating diversity

All children are capable and competent

Educators work in partnership with children, their families, and support professionals

Helps build a caring, fair and inclusive learning community

Services, not children, have to be ready for inclusion



INCLUSION

Belonging is central to being (who children are) and becoming (who they can become)

Educators collaborate with families to make children's learning meaningful

Inclusion is about belonging and participating fully in a diverse society

Educators value children's different abilities and respect differences in family background

Creating an environment in which ALL children can participate and succeed

Collaboration is the cornerstone of effective inclusive programs

Respect for diversity

Inclusion is about diversity and creating an environment in which all children can participate and succeed. Acceptance of, and knowledge about, diversity is fundamental to effective inclusive practice. This may sometimes require a change of attitude or 'mindset'. To do this, educators must reflect on their own response to diversity, examine their personal biases and prejudices, and reflect on what they may need to do to undertake a more positive approach.

Effective educators celebrate the benefits of diversity and have the ability to understand and honour differences.

'Respecting diversity means within the curriculum valuing and reflecting the practices, values and beliefs of families. Educators honour the histories, cultures, languages, traditions, child rearing practices and life style choices of families. [...] For Australia it also includes promoting greater understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing and being' (DEEWR, 2009, p. 13).

Partnerships

Collaboration amongst parents, educators and support professionals, based on mutual trust and respect, is a cornerstone of high quality early and middle childhood programs. Children grow, learn and thrive when families and educators work together in partnership. This requires educators to acknowledge and utilise parents' expert knowledge about their child, and promote open communication, collaboration and shared decision-making.

Collaboration and teamwork is essential when working with professionals who are supporting children enrolled in children's services settings. Support professionals, including therapists and special educators, are expanding their role from providing predominately direct services to the child, to also providing indirect services in the form of collaborative partnerships with parents and educators. This new way of working is more effective when the adults involved (educators and parents) share expertise and work together to promote children's ongoing learning and development.

High expectations and equity

The *EYLF* and *My Time, Our Place* recognise that

'... educators who are committed to equity believe in all children's capacities to succeed, regardless of diverse circumstances and abilities. ... Children progress well when they, their parents and educators hold high expectations for their achievement in learning'

(DEEWR, 2009 & 2011).

This means that educators promote inclusion and the participation of all children across the entire program. It involves working with each child's unique qualities and abilities, strengths and interests, so that each child can reach his or her potential. 'Equity' for all children will be achieved by acknowledging that some children and their families will require different levels of support at different times, rather than having an 'equity' approach where everyone is treated the same. One size doesn't fit all!

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- What does collaboration with parents and support professionals currently look like in your service?
- Ideally, what would you like it to look like?
- What might you need to do to address any gaps between your current and ideal practice?
- What is the first small step you can take to get you started?

Supporting inclusion: Implications for educators

Simply placing children, with or without disabilities or from diverse backgrounds and circumstances, in an early or middle childhood setting does not ensure successful inclusion. Effective inclusion requires thoughtful planning and implementation by educators.

Fleer and Richardson (2004), in Richardson (2011, p.11) clearly identify the role of the educator to meet the needs of all children in an inclusive learning environment. They state,

'For far too long [...] educators have been seen as passive bystanders responsible for setting up the environments and then making observations of children's 'development' as it has 'naturally' occurred'.

As identified by Fleer and Richardson (2004), educators need to do more than be a mere observer. Educators need to make use of intentional teaching, which is deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful. Intentional teaching uses strategies such as 'modelling and demonstrating, open questioning, speculating, explaining, and engaging in shared thinking and problem solving to extend children's thinking and learning' (DEEWR, 2009, p.15). Educators also make use of spontaneous 'teachable moments' to support and extend children's learning (DEEWR, 2009, p.15). The educator builds on existing strengths and interests of children and then provides them with support to extend them even further.

Responsibilities of the educator include:

- Providing a highly engaging learning environment, which meets the interests and needs of all children.
- Recognising the value of play as a major avenue of learning for all children, while also recognising that some children may need additional support and assistance in developing and utilising play skills.
- Arranging a balance of small and larger group experiences, both vigorous and quiet, so that all children, at their own levels, can be active and interactive participants.
- Structuring a learning environment in which all children are supported to participate together in a variety of activities, across a range of learning and development areas.

- Creating a learning environment that includes a range of materials and activities where all children can be challenged according to their current capacities, strengths and interests.
- Collaborating with colleagues regarding children’s ongoing learning and development.

(Adapted from Allen & Cowdery, 2009, p.18)

Inclusion enables access, engagement and success for all learners...

(Ashman & Elkins, 2009)

Barriers to Inclusion		
Personal	Attitudinal	Organisational
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Threatened by change to practice • Out of comfort zone • Perceived lack of skills • Dislikes working with others • Demands on time and skills • Expectations of families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion detrimental to children without a disability • Generalising and labeling children and families • Disability, racial and indigenous stereotypes • Prejudice or ignorance about cultures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of funding • Lack of professional development • Lack of resources • Difficulties in recruiting and retaining competent staff • Lack of commitment by leader and/or staff to inclusive practice • Difficulties accessing

ACTIVITY

In light of the barriers to inclusion listed previously, reflect on the following questions:

- What barriers are evident in your early or middle childhood setting?
- What successes have you had in overcoming these barriers in the past?
- How might you continue to build on this success in the future?
- Strategies for educators to support inclusive practices
- Welcome all children and families into your early or middle childhood community.
- Revise your philosophy, policies and curriculum documents to reflect your commitment to equity, inclusion and social justice.
- Support educators to use the EYLF or My Time Our Place to articulate their teaching philosophy and

curriculum decisions to families in relation to inclusive practices.

- Involve all educators in a whole team approach in working with children - all educators need to take responsibility for the care and education of all children.
- Additional educators, including those engaged through government funding, support a whole team approach to meet the needs of all children.
- Plan collaboratively with families and professionals to support children through transition times, such as the transition from early childhood settings to middle childhood and school settings.
- Seek out and participate in relevant professional development opportunities and engage in reflective practice.

REFLECTION

- Write down three strengths that relate to your capacity to promote inclusive practice as an educator.
- Write down one or two changes you could make to improve this practice.
- What resources and supports might you need to help you successfully make these changes?
- What is one small thing you can do to get started?

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

To locate an Inclusion Support Agency in your region, contact the Professional Support Coordinator (PSC) in your state or territory.

Contact details for all PSCs are available on the National PSC Alliance website at www.pscalliance.org.au.

References

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