



The Fundamentals of Inclusive Practice: Understanding the inclusive mindset – by Meggie Fisher

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Inclusive practice is key to ensuring all children have the opportunity to access and engage with early learning environments and provisions. Inclusion is not merely a tick-box exercise but a fundamental mindset. It's about creating environments where every child feels they belong, especially those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). High-quality, inclusive provision allows children to interact with their peers, promoting better life outcomes and celebrating their strengths and aspirations.

An inclusive mindset is a fundamental approach to creating environments where every individual feels valued, respected, and able to participate fully. Here are some key aspects to understanding and fostering an inclusive mindset:



1. Recognising Individual Needs

An inclusive mindset starts with acknowledging that every person has unique needs, strengths, and challenges. This involves moving away from a one-size-fits-all approach and instead tailoring support and opportunities to everyone's specific requirements. For children with SEND, this means understanding their unique communication methods, sensory preferences, and learning styles. A great tool for gathering this information is a "One-Page Profile".

2. Building Strong Relationships

Inclusion is not just about the physical environment; it's also about the relationships within it. An inclusive mindset fosters strong, respectful relationships between educators, children, and families. This involves listening to and valuing the insights of parents and carers,

involving them in decision-making processes, and working collaboratively to support each child's development.

3. Encouraging Participation and Engagement

Inclusive practices encourage active participation and engagement from everyone. This means providing opportunities for individuals to interact with their peers, explore their interests, and develop their strengths. Activities and experiences should be designed to be accessible and engaging for all, allowing everyone to contribute and benefit.

4. Continuous Reflection and Adaptation

An inclusive mindset involves ongoing reflection and adaptation. Practitioners should regularly assess their environments, policies, and practices to ensure they are meeting the needs of all individuals. This might involve seeking feedback, observing interactions, and making adjustments based on what works best for each person.



5. Celebrating Diversity

An inclusive mindset celebrates diversity. It recognises that differences enrich our communities and that everyone has something valuable to contribute. By embracing diversity, we create environments where everyone feels respected and valued, leading to more positive outcomes for all.

The Role of Policies and Procedures

Inclusion is most effective when integrated into all aspects of practice, including policies, procedures, strategies, and support services. It's crucial to use all available tools to engage children and families from diverse backgrounds. Understanding local authority expectations for provision and clearly defining early years' roles is essential. Strong child development knowledge and confident engagement with parents help gather valuable insights for early identification of needs and implementing a graduated approach. Documentation should reflect a child's right to education, reasonable adjustments, and use inclusive language to ensure all children feel valued and supported.

Preparing and Planning your Environment for the Four Broad Areas of Need

Understanding and planning for the broad areas of need is a keyway to ensuring you create environments which are inclusive. Everyone will be at different stages of learning and development in relation to communication and interaction, cognition and learning, social, emotional and mental health and physical and/or sensory needs. If your approach, teaching methods and environment are planned and developed with consideration for these variety of needs then no matter the diagnosis of a child within your care their needs will be supported through the provision you already have in place.

Children communicate in various ways, and it's crucial to provide multiple methods for them to express themselves such as through the use of symbols, visual aids, and physical objects of reference. For instance, having clearly labelled resources and communication boards can significantly enhance a child's ability to understand and interact with their environment. Additionally, tools like sound buttons and visual timelines help children grasp routines and make choices independently.

It's crucial to be ambitious about children's learning experiences, ensuring they can participate and learn alongside their peers. Planning should focus on children's interests while introducing new experiences and stimuli. For example, providing various types of scissors for different abilities and presenting stories with diverse sensory stimuli. The goal is to adapt experiences so all children can engage and develop, fostering their aspirations and ensuring they feel included and capable.



Creating calm and supportive environments is essential for children's social, emotional, and mental health. Creating calm spaces within the main environment, rather than separate rooms, will support educators in teaching children how to use these spaces to support their self-regulation. Providing a range of sensory resources or calm boxes tailored to individual needs can provide readily available strategies of support to enable children to understand and regulate their emotions and behaviours.

When considering the physical environment, you should ensure that furniture and resources are accessible and adaptable. It is also important to recognise the significance of understanding all eight senses and how they impact a child's interaction with their surroundings. Taking time to understand a child's unique sensory profile can enable simple adjustments such as increasing soft furnishings to absorb sound or providing wobble boards or peanut balls for when children are displaying physical sensory seeking behaviours can make a big difference.

Engaging with Families

Parents and carers play a crucial role in a child's development, and their input is invaluable. Building strong relationships with families involves being non-judgmental, providing clear information, and involving them in decision-making processes. This collaborative approach ensures that children receive consistent support both at home and in educational settings.

By adopting an inclusive mindset, implementing effective policies, supporting diverse communication methods, and engaging with families, we can create environments where every child thrives. Inclusion is not just about meeting legal requirements; it's about fostering a sense of belonging and ensuring that all children have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

References:

<https://dingley.org.uk/resources-for-educators/>

<https://help-for-early-years-providers.education.gov.uk/support-for-practitioners/send-assessment>

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/early-years/evidence-store/personal-social-and-emotional-development?> (Evidence shows working closely with parents and involving them can include outcomes)