

**“Inclusion of Children with
Additional needs, the way
forward”**

The Philosophy of Early Childhood Educators:

- Each child is a unique individual.
- Each child has a right to be accepted for who they are
- Each child has a right to access their local community children's service.
- We believe in positive outcomes for all children.

The Early Childhood Educator's Philosophies:

Are based on

- Our own values and beliefs
- A shared belief in the purpose of early childhood programs in children's and families lives (this forms the foundations and framework from which we will develop our programs)
- Outside additional influences may come from the local community, the management committee, children and families that we work with

We make decisions about our programs through our shared beliefs and values.

Which may include:

- That children are able to make choices in our programs
- It is important for children to experience success
- Adults are able to be supportive of children in their play and interactions with other children
- Children need to feel a sense of community and belonging
- Each child is unique and we need to value their strengths
- There can be a balance between child initiated and adult initiated experiences
- Relationships form an important foundation in early childhood
- Parents are seen as partners in decision making for their children

“One of the benefits of not having a prescribed curriculum for early childhood programs is that professionals have more freedom to use their talents, strengths and interests in their work.”

Boschetti, C.& Stonehouse, A. (2006). *A Piece of Cake? Inclusive Practices in Early Childhood Settings.*

Ability House. Melbourne.

Historical perspective of Inclusion:

- In Pre-industrial communities, the needs of the community were often placed before the survival of individuals
- Over time folk beliefs and religions incorporated myths and superstitions, which became a part of some cultures.
- In many cultures people with certain disabilities were shunned for fear of attracting harm or “bad” luck.
- In Australia an attitude of “out of sight, out of mind” meant people with additional needs were hidden from the mainstream of life.
- The 1960s saw the beginning of change as people began to recognise the inequality and discrimination against people with additional needs.

“Inclusion of young children into programs with their typically developing peers continues to be an ongoing complex challenge in many ways.” (Guralnick,2001)

The key stakeholders in the task of inclusion in early childhood include:

- Families (parents & children)
- Teachers and their staff

Parents are increasingly seeking inclusive early childhood practices for their children in their local community.

We need to work in partnership with parents because:

- Parents have the most extensive knowledge of their child's development from birth
- Parents have the most powerful influence on a child's development, especially in the first three years
- Parents have the knowledge of the family's circumstances which affect the child

Working in partnership with parents (continued):

- Parents know the wider social environment in which the family lives which will influence the child
- Parents can supply a knowledge of the child's home behaviour.

Educator's need to be aware and/or sensitive to:

- The families journey so far
- Their possible “intimidation” by experts
- The family's lack of knowledge of the system
- The family's aspirations for their child, which may differ to ours
- The family's apprehension about their child's ability to learn, to make friends and be accepted by the community

How can we best include children with additional needs into our programs?

Teacher's attitudes:

- Our attitudes about disability and differences are deeply embedded in our culture, history, language, literature, media and religions
- Staff may feel threatened (through a lack of information)
- Staff may feel concerned about the increased responsibility and lack of support (time)
- Staff may see the word “additional” as implying extra work
- We need to be honest about our feelings and to acknowledge them

We need to meet new challenges with:

- Creativity, energy and resilience
- We need to take risks occasionally, not everything we plan works, we need to have the flexibility to move on and try something else (strategy)
- The secret is to maintain a balance between keeping things similar and changing them subtly

Strategies for our everyday planning:

- There are lots of right ways- but “there simply isn’t one right answer to most everything about working well with all children” (there are no recipes)
- We need to reflect on “what happened” and “where to now” focusing on both successes and challenges, being prepared to make changes in ourselves and our programs

Strategies (continued):

- We need to adjust our expectations of children as we get to know them as individuals
- Sometimes we need to “lower the bar” (survival)
- We need to be confident in ourselves and our beliefs
- We cannot “fix” children or make them like other children.

The Inclusive Early Childhood environment will

- Makes statements about the values and attitudes towards children and parents, and the teacher's priorities
- Influence relationships and interactions between children and adults, and children and children.
- Affect the quality of children's play and engagement in the world around them
- Support a sense of belonging for the children in that community

“WELCOMING TO ALL”

Setting up the Inclusive environment:

- Children should be encouraged to initiate, combine, rearrange, set up and try a variety of settings
- When children explore, create and investigate, “mess” is created.

Do we include the outdoor environment?

- Is it just a way to fill in extra time?
- Where does the real teaching take place?
- Australia's weather.

Program, Experiences & Curriculum:

- Sources of curriculum are the children and their interests (each year there are new children with a different set of interests and experiences)
- Needs to be time for evaluation and reflection and contemplation of new possibilities and being able to make changes.

Focusing on Children.....

- What are the children's strengths, the family's strengths?
- What are the child's likes and dislikes?
- What are the interactions between the child and the family like?
- How does the family encourage the child to play?
- What are the child's anxiety levels?
- What is the child's preferred learning style? (visual learning, parallel play etc.)
- What equipment is required to support the child's play and participation?
- What are our mutually agreed on goals for this child, and the best ways to achieve them?

Activities planned should be seen as not an end in themselves but a medium for relationships, interactions and communication.

An environment created to encourage social skills, creativity, independence, problem solving skills and self confidence.

What are the benefits then for the children?

- A sense of belonging
- Validation, they are making a real contribution
- Development of a sense of responsibility
- Learning to exercise control
- Developing a sense of ownership

“Contact by itself does not necessarily reduce “typical” children’s fears or misconceptions- it may even intensify them- unless adults take active steps to promote children’s learning about each other.”

True inclusion:

- A program needs to offer everyone choices so that everyone can engage according to their interests and abilities
- It is important to offer all children opportunities to explore, experiment and find out about the world themselves and about other people
- Provision of open ended experiences and opportunities.
- At times children with additional needs will need extra support and facilitation
- Equipment may need to be adapted or communication systems put in place eg. Visuals maybe used with all the children in the group.

“ Being fair or just is not about everyone getting the same thing, but about everyone getting what they need.”

(Lavoire)

The adults role:

- Makes final decisions about what happens in the environment
- Decide about space, time, materials and equipment and what choices will be given
- How much power and autonomy the children will have
- Provide assistance to encourage learning, exploration and to support children in meeting challenges
- Give children new ideas, experiences and materials
- To be a partner in play
- An observer
- Uses language effectively to help children's communication skills and add new dimensions to their play and learning.

Inclusion means flexibility in planning:

- It may mean you need to give up on an idea or plan
- Our time schedules (children do need the security of being able to predict what will happen next, but at the same time we need to be flexible enough to allow children to have extra time or change, if it is not working)
- To be able to follow a child's lead
- Goals may be very specific or general, sharing, waiting, listening, following directions, making choices or self help skills.
- It is important for you to be able to adjust to the child and modify as you go along.

In your planning for all children:

- Build a sense of community
- Value and respect each child as a member of the group
- Incorporate family goals
- “Know” the child
- Place an emphasis on the strengths of the child
- Encourage child initiated learning
- Be FLEXIBLE
- Be evaluating continually

**HAVE FUN WITH ALL THE
CHILDREN!**