

Reggio Emilia Australia Information Exchange



Children with Special Rights

Instead of using these provocations for 'reflection', we hope that you will use them to assist in a process of 'diffraction' that generates uncertainty and new ways of thinking.

"Donna Haraway proposes diffraction as an alternative to the well-worn metaphor of reflection. As Haraway suggests, diffraction can serve as a useful counterpoint to reflection: both are optical phenomena, but whereas reflection is about mirroring and sameness, diffraction attends to patterns of difference" (Barad, 2007, p.29).

Prologue

"In the past the term inclusion has typically been used to refer to the participation of children with disability in early childhood services. The term diversity has typically referred to children and families whose language and culture are other than English and Anglo-Celtic Australian. Inclusion is an action. Diversity is what characterises people. Inclusion is about what we do, not just a way of thinking" (Stonehouse, 2012).

Ivana Soncini from Reggio Emilia said, "we wanted to embrace, not ignore, the concept of difference among children. We wanted to encounter these diverse children and try and understand what they could teach us. Loris Malaguzzi strongly believed that having the children with special rights in the schools could stimulate us, as teachers, to think in terms of a much broader pedagogical approach for all children, to broaden our horizons for all the children" (Edwards et al. 2012, p.189).

Image of the child: Rights Holder

"During the last sixty years, we have taken a deterministic perspective with a determinist point of view. In this perspective, the child is considered a sort of sponge, a container and the child absorbs, as does a sponge, everything from their environment. The focus is on the extent that the child's surroundings affect their education. The child is still substantially a sort of teddy bear; it is a waiting child, a child that waits, that hopes to get the necessary stimuli from the environment, provided that he fortunately arrives to a secure port that will allow him, in one way or another, to take control of his life's circumstances" (Hoyuelos, 2013, p78).

Shift from Needs to Rights

Needs

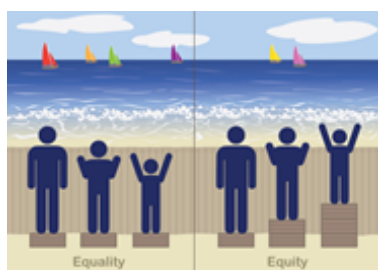
Where children are understood from a health or clinical perspective.

Rights

Where children are understood from a pedagogical perspective.

Understanding Special Rights

Equality vs Equity



Children with Special Rights:

Underpinning Values



Reggio Emilia Australia

Information Exchange



Children with Special Rights

Social Constructivism

“To know children who have special rights is difficult. Therefore, in our work with children, to construct interaction and knowledge, we must reflect continuously and carefully on our own philosophical premises. We must always pay attention constructions of semantic understandings on the part of adults and their way of knowing. The children with special rights have compelled us to direct our attention to our own self-evaluation and to find instruments that would make it possible for us to self-evaluate in relationship to them” (Edwards et al 2012, p.205).

Practicing Inclusion: Setting the scene

- Know the community - use data, talk to key people, listen carefully, observe changes and shifts in the community profile.
- Strengthen the commitment to inclusion in the philosophy.
- Review and refine the policies and procedure to ensure that expectation is clear and transparent and welcome everyone – potential prioritisation of children with special rights.
- Re-examine the way that children with special rights are welcomed in the orientation process.
- Consider the knowledge, skills and understanding of the educator team – what do you need to know?

Practicing Inclusion: Taking Action

- Long and gradual entry
- Environments
- Managing Prejudice
- Partnerships with families
- Learning from and with children
- Using the Hundred Languages
- Documentation
- Building capacity through professional learning

Practicing Inclusion: Long and Gradual Entry

Respectful relationships and responsive engagement apply to relationships with both families and children. All aspects of practice and programs should actively encourage children to develop respectful relationships with others. Early childhood professionals and families who engage respectfully and responsively with children from birth in everyday routines and experiences promote children’s confidence and empowerment (VEYLDF, 2016, p.11).

Practicing Inclusion: Environments

“Learning environments are welcoming spaces when they reflect and enrich the lives and identities of children and families participating in the setting and respond to their interests and needs. Environments that support learning are vibrant and flexible spaces that are responsive to the interests and abilities of each child. They cater for different learning capacities and learning styles and invite children and families to contribute ideas, interests and questions” (EYLF, 2019, p.15).

Reggio Emilia Australia

Information Exchange



Children with Special Rights

Practicing Inclusion: Managing Prejudice

Applying the early years planning cycle can increase early childhood professionals' awareness of bias and inequities and support them to uphold the rights of all children to become successful learners. This process may validate existing practices or challenge and drive improvements to less effective practices (VEYLDF 2016 p.8).

"In order to educate ourselves, we must try to understand differences rather than wanting to cancel them. This means approaching each individual in terms of his or her background and personal story, and with great sensitivity. It means 'listening' to the differences (what we refer to as the pedagogy of listening) but also listening to and accepting the changes that take place within us, which are generated by our relationships, or better, by our interactions with others. It means letting go of any truths that we consider to be absolute, being open to doubt and giving value to negotiation as a strategy of the possible. All of this means – or more precisely, can mean – greater possibilities for us to change, but without making us feel displaced or that we have lost something" (Rinaldi, 2006, p.140).

Practicing Inclusion: Partnerships with families

Every partnership will be unique, just as each family is unique with different values and priorities. Early childhood professionals work in partnership with all families within communities to build links between home and other settings a child attends.

This provides greater consistency and complementarity for the child.
(VEYLDF 2016 p9).

"Work with a child who has special rights is considered to be a shared educational task involving the parents, the child's classroom teachers, the pedagogista of the infant-toddler centre or preschool and myself" (Soncini cited in Edwards, et al, 2012, p. 193).

Practicing Inclusion: Learning from and with children

High expectations and encouragement are closely linked with children's agency and sense of capability. Children are capable of making choices and decisions from birth. High expectations by professionals and families means being open to possibilities about children's capabilities and avoiding being locked into ideas about what children are capable of at a certain age or stage. (VEYLDF 2016 p10).

Practicing Inclusion: Using the Hundred Languages

Child-directed play and learning is an exploratory process that occurs when children lead their learning through exploring, imagining, experimenting, investigating and being creative in ways that they control. The adult's role may be to observe what the child knows and understands based on what they make, write, draw, say and do (VEYLDF 2016 p.15).

Languages are the myriad sources and forms of knowledge in children and mankind. "We maintain that all the languages of a child's life are born together with the child. They are interacting acts and have exploratory and perceptive equipment capable of organising information and sensations, and of seeking out exchange and reciprocity" (Loris Malaguzzi, cited by Giudici, 2010, personal notes).

Reggio Emilia Australia

Information Exchange



Children with Special Rights

Practicing Inclusion: Documentation

"Documentation, as we have developed in Reggio, does not mean to collect documents after the conclusion of experiences with children but during the course of these experiences. Traditionally the recording and reading of memories takes place at the end of an experience and may become part of a collection of archives.

For us documentation is part of the daily life in the schools. It is one of the ways in which we create and maintain relationships and the experiences among our colleagues and children. We think of documentation as an act of caring, act of love and interaction" (Rinaldi, 2006 p.1).

Practicing Inclusion: Building capacity through professional learning

Early childhood professionals working with young children have diverse disciplinary backgrounds, levels of training and experience.

A culture of inquiry and challenge builds robust collaboration and continuous improvement.

Effective partnerships with other professionals require leadership, common goals and communication across disciplines and roles to build a sense of shared endeavour.

(VEYLDF 2016 p.16).

In conclusion:

REAIE recognises their ethical responsibility to advocate for reconciliation, social justice, democracy and equity, utilising respectful relationships, listening, reciprocity and participation.

Hope for a shared humanity can be realised through these rights in educational contexts with and for children.
#blacklivesmatter

Questions to critically reflect on:

- Why did you choose to engage in this package?
- What histories, experiences and contexts inspired you to relook at inclusion in your service?
- What ideas have taken flight for you so far?
- Do you recognise your image of the child? Do you want to reposition this?
- Do you understand the difference between equality and equity? Can you reconcile this understanding with your practices?
- What connections can you make to your existing knowledge of the VEYLDF and the educational project of Reggio Emilia?

References:

Cagliari, et al. (2016) Loris Malaguzzi and the Schools of Reggio Emilia: a selection of his writings and speeches 1945 -1993, U.S.A., Routledge.

Edwards, C., Gandini, L. & Forman. G. (Eds.) 2012 The Hundred Languages of Children: The Reggio Emilia experience in transformation, Praeger, Santa Barbara, California.

Hoyuelos. A. (2013) The ethics in Loris Malaguzzi's philosophy. Reykjavik. Isalda.

Stonehouse, A. (2012). A Piece of Cake?: Linking Inclusive Practice to the EYLF and the VEYLDF. Yoralla.

Rinaldi, C. (2006) In Dialogue with Reggio Emilia: Listening, researching, and learning. U.K: Routledge.

Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF).

Accessed on 28 December, 2021 at:

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/childhood/providers/edcare/veylldframework.pdf>