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# Better Together: Inclusive Education in the Early Years

*Kathy Cologon*

## CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter unpacks the concept of inclusive education and explores the implications of inclusion for the early years.

Learning goals for this chapter include:

- › Considering the process of stigmatisation and the implications for exclusion;
- › Developing an understanding of inclusion, including recognising misunderstandings of inclusion and why they are problematic;
- › Identifying the history of inclusive education;
- › Recognising macro- and micro-exclusion;
- › Developing an understanding of key issues to consider when approaching inclusive early years education.

## KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

agency  
 courtesy stigma  
 early years  
 early years professional  
 enacted stigma  
 felt stigma  
 inclusive education  
 integration  
 macro- and micro-exclusion in education  
 mainstreaming

## Introduction

As Freire (1970) argued, education is never neutral—it is a political act that is informed by individual and collective values. Inclusive education involves embracing human diversity and valuing and supporting the belonging and full participation of all people together (Cologon, 2013a). This includes upholding the rights of all children and providing education free from discriminatory beliefs and attitudes. To do this requires developing and putting into action inclusive values, policies and practices. This follows the call from writers, such as Freire (1970) and Dewey (1916), to engage in education for social justice and democracy, with a focus on reducing or removing oppression within and beyond education experiences and systems.

### Early years professional:

Throughout this book, this term refers to all professionals involved in early years education and care in a range of roles and settings, including teachers and allied health professionals, for example.

### Early years:

Throughout this book, this term is used to encompass early childhood (prior-to-school) and primary school settings.

Every great **early years professional** is inclusive. As Nutbrown and Clough (2009, p.192) argue, ‘respectful educators will include all children’. However, inclusion is frequently misunderstood, and many early years professionals are unsure about what being inclusive involves. Throughout this book, the notion of inclusion will be explored with particular attention to what it means for everyday practice in **early years** settings.

As will be discussed later in the chapter, research provides evidence that inclusive education is better for everyone. Education outcomes are more positive and children learn and grow in ways that do not occur when they are segregated. Early years professionals are more flexible, skilled, confident and competent when they are inclusive. Inclusive early years education has the potential for positive social change—even transformation. However, inclusion is a complex and ongoing process, thus it takes time and commitment to develop a clear understanding of inclusion and to implement this in practice. Ongoing critical reflection, through a process of examining views and practices, is vital in engaging with inclusion—and a key responsibility of every early years professional.

Early years professionals play a powerful role in bringing about genuine inclusion. This book is intended to support early years professionals and researchers as they develop confidence and understanding and undertake the ongoing journey of *becoming inclusive*.

Bringing about inclusive education requires an ongoing commitment to removing barriers to the valued full participation and belonging of all children (Connor & Goldmansour, 2012; Curcic, 2009; Frankel, Gold & Ajodhia-Andrews, 2010; Theodorou & Nind, 2010; Vakil, Welton, O’Connor & Kline, 2009). Inclusion is not the domain of charitable ‘do-gooders’, but rather an essential component of a functioning society. Inclusion is not about granting ‘special favours’, nor about changing someone to fit the elusive ‘norm’ so they can be ‘granted access’ to the community. Rather, it is about acknowledging our shared

humanity and moving beyond false notions of entitlement to recognise that for *any of us* to flourish as members of society, we need to be included. As Prosser and Loxley (2007, p.57) write, inclusion ‘is a philosophy of acceptance and about providing a framework within which all children, regardless of ability, gender, language or cultural origin, can be valued equally with respect and provided with equal opportunities’.

Inclusion is a rights-based approach, and as such creates an opportunity to progress beyond a charity perspective, towards social justice. Cultural and educational transformation is needed to fight against discrimination and prejudice in all its forms (Armstrong & Barton, 2008). Inclusive education is a process that occurs within the everyday moments in any education setting and, as noted above, requires ongoing commitment and reflection on the part of early years professionals.

## Barriers to inclusion

One question that arises in relation to inclusion is inclusion of whom and in what? In addressing this question it is important to reflect on underlying philosophies evident in education policy and practice. Embracing our shared humanity requires going beyond a ‘them’ and ‘us’—beyond the idea that there is one ‘desirable’ group into which all ‘others’ should be included—to instead recognise and acknowledge that people are all equally human: we are all ‘us’. Perhaps surprisingly, social realities suggest that this is harder than it seems.

### STIGMA AND DEHUMANISATION

It is unlikely that anyone would set out intentionally to dehumanise people. However, racism, sexism, genderism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism (see Chapter 2) and ageism all, at their core, involve a process of dehumanisation. Consequently, to work towards inclusion, it is necessary to understand the dehumanising process of exclusion.

Dehumanisation occurs when we make people ‘other’ to ourselves—that process of creating a ‘them’ and ‘us’ in which ‘us’ is viewed as more desirable or ‘better’. This then forms the justification for discrimination. For example, racial segregation in the past was justified on the basis that it was better for the ‘them’ (the oppressed), while simultaneously maintaining the superiority of the ‘us’ (the oppressors). Similarly, segregation based on impairment or ‘disability’ in Australia (and elsewhere) today often stems from the belief that it is better for ‘them’.

Dehumanisation, which is often subconscious, unintentional and enculturated, occurs through a process of stigmatisation. In his classic book

exploring this notion, Erving Goffman defined stigma as ‘the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance’ (Goffman, 1963, p.9). Goffman outlined the dehumanising process of stigmatisation and the justification that stigma provides for discrimination, explaining that stigma is ‘an undesired differentness from what we had anticipated ... By definition, of course, we believe the person with a stigma is not quite human. On this assumption we exercise varieties of discrimination through which we effectively, if often unthinkingly, reduce his [or her] life chances’ (Goffman, 1963, p.15).

Consider for a moment one of the most stigmatised groups in Australia at present: asylum seekers. By the process of stigmatisation, asylum seekers have become dehumanised—viewed by many as less than human—and thus even extreme discrimination has been justified (see Chapter 15).

Goffman (1963) identified three different aspects or experiences of stigma: enacted, felt and courtesy stigma.

**Enacted stigma:**  
The experience  
of discrimination  
(Goffman, 1963).

**Enacted stigma** is the most blatant form of stigma and involves active discrimination. For example, discrimination in enrolment processes to prevent a stigmatised person from attending or participating in an education setting would be considered enacted stigma (Lilley, 2013).

**Felt stigma:** The fear  
of enacted stigma  
and feelings of shame  
on account of being  
stigmatised (Goffman,  
1963).

**Felt stigma** involves awareness and fear of stigma and feelings of shame due to being stigmatised. The notion of felt stigma relates to ‘stigma consciousness’ or ‘stereotype threat’. Felt stigma can involve the playing out of the effects of stigma on account of these fears. For example, Link and Phelan (2001) in research in North America found that African–American students had lower test scores when told that they were being tested for intelligence compared with when given the same test but told it was for another purpose.

**Courtesy stigma:**  
Stigma felt by  
those around the  
stigmatised person  
(Goffman, 1963).

**Courtesy stigma** involves the feeling of stigma by those around a stigmatised person. For example, a family of a person who experiences disability, or the family of a person who identifies as homosexual in a highly conservative community, may experience courtesy stigma. Courtesy stigma may result in strong advocacy against discrimination or, by contrast, in trying to cover up ‘difference’ or encourage the stigmatised person to ‘pass’ for ‘normal’ in order to avoid stigma. Tongue shortening operations and plastic surgery for children who have Down syndrome (Goeke, 2003) are an example of courtesy stigma.

Experiencing disability (disablement), a socially constructed and imposed social process (as explored in Chapter 2), is, in itself, a process of stigmatisation. As Shapiro (1993, p.30) writes, people who experience disability are constantly described or represented as ‘either an object of pity or a source of inspiration. These images are internalized ... build social stereotypes, create artificial limitations, and contribute to discrimination and minority status’.

Building on Goffman's seminal work, Link and Phelan (2001, p.367) argue that the following process is involved in the playing out of stigma:

- 1 In the first component, people distinguish and label human differences;
- 2 In the second, dominant cultural beliefs link labelled persons to undesirable characteristics—to negative stereotypes;
- 3 In the third, labelled persons are placed in distinct categories so as to accomplish some degree of separation of 'us' from 'them';
- 4 In the fourth, labelled persons experience status loss and discrimination that lead to unequal outcomes;
- 5 Finally, stigmatisation is entirely contingent on access to social, economic and political power that allows the identification of 'differentness', the construction of stereotypes, the separation of labelled persons into distinct categories, and the full execution of disapproval, rejection, exclusion and discrimination.

As Link and Phelan (2001, p.375) note, 'it takes power to stigmatize ... However, the role of power in stigma is frequently overlooked because in many instances power differences are so taken for granted as to seem unproblematic'.

The structures, systems and processes of early years education and care are one such source of power. They hold the potential for the production of stigma, or by contrast—if there is critical engagement with the notion of stigma and a rejection of dehumanisation—for inclusion. Stigma is the basis of segregation and exclusion. Inclusion, on the other hand, is free of stigma. Early years professionals thus need to consider stigma and the process of dehumanisation in their everyday practices.

#### CRITICAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever experienced stigmatisation? If you have, what did this feel like? How did you respond? What might it be like to experience this every day?
2. Consider the power early years professionals might hold. Could this power lead to stigmatisation or dehumanisation of children? How might this be addressed in everyday practice?

## MISUNDERSTANDING INCLUSION

One common barrier to inclusion is the misunderstanding of inclusion as assimilation—the idea that people can only be included if they can be 'the same enough', or learn to 'fit' within existing structures and systems. In effect, this is a belief that people can be included if they can alter or hide their characteristics that are linked to stigma, and 'pass' for 'normal'.

In regards to early years settings, this idea leads to an emphasis on changing the child (who is being ‘included’) to ‘fit’ within a setting, rather than on changing the setting to include the child (Armstrong, Armstrong & Spandagou, 2011; Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Curcic, 2009; Lalvani, 2013; Rietveld, 2010). When inclusion is understood as assimilation, a stigmatised child carries a perpetual ‘question mark’ over his/her right to be ‘included’ (Bridle, 2005; Cologon, 2013b). Rietveld (2010) describes this dehumanising approach as a demeaning understanding of inclusion, in contrast to a facilitative understanding of inclusion in which all children are valued and recognised as rights-holders and equal human beings.

Another misunderstanding of inclusive education occurs when it is viewed as a ‘special effort’ or ‘added (optional) extra’ born out of ‘charity’, or ‘kindness’. This stigmatisation is perhaps more subtle, but the patronising creation of a ‘them’ and ‘us’ is clear.

Common to these misunderstandings is the underlying idea that inclusive education gives children permission to be present, rather than valuing the participation of all children and ensuring all children belong. In addition to the negative impact this has on the child and family, this attitude also disempowers early years professionals to a point where they may feel they have little to offer the child. By contrast, as explored throughout this book, early years professionals have a critical role to play in adapting the environment and making changes to teaching approaches and materials in order to include every child, rather than seeking to change them (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Biklen, 2000; Cologon, 2010, 2013a). An important question to consider is how these misunderstandings of inclusion developed and how barriers to inclusion can be broken down.

## The journey towards inclusion

‘Inclusive education’ is one of the most contested terms in education (Graham & Slee, 2008) and is a contentious issue (Barton, 1997). Understandings of inclusive education have changed over time, with the gradual move from extreme levels of segregation towards greater inclusion.

### EXCLUSION AND SEGREGATION

**Macro-exclusion** involves the dehumanising process of stigmatisation as a ‘lesser’ or ‘inferior’ person, which is then played out in the form of exclusion from education. At its most extreme, this means a child is not provided

**Macro-exclusion in education:** When children are denied education or excluded from general education settings and segregated into ‘special’ schools, classes or units for all or some of the time (Cologon, 2013a).

with access to any formal education opportunities. Segregation is a form of macro-exclusion that involves the provision of formal education, but within separate settings or activities. This exclusion occurs when a child is barred from a setting, for example on the basis of impairment, or when a child is excluded from particular activities or experiences within a setting. For example, in the past, the exclusion of ‘black children’ from ‘white schools’ in the United States, or in Australia until 1972, the exclusion of Aboriginal children from schools if parents of non-Aboriginal children objected to their attendance (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2001). In addition to segregated settings, segregation may occur within general education settings, for example, a ‘special’ class. As Connor and Goldmansour write, ‘with segregation comes devaluation, a loss in cultural capital for individuals. This form of disempowerment actively disadvantages students’ (Connor & Goldmansour, 2012, p.31).

When asked about the sensory overstimulation present in everyday classrooms as an argument for segregated education, Jamie Burke—a man labelled with autism—shared that in his experience of education, ‘segregation equals a distinction of lesser ability’ (Biklen & Burke, 2006, p.172). He goes on to ask: ‘Am I lesser because I get nervous about an exam? Am I deemed less intelligent because my feelings only make passing a higher stakes? I again ask you to think of who is it that has placed this way of evaluating worthiness? Have they placed their feet in my shoes? I would enjoin them to try’ (Biklen & Burke, 2006, p.172).

## MAINSTREAMING

In the 1960s, strong criticisms of segregated education began to emerge. Questions were raised regarding whether ‘special’ schools had positive or negative outcomes. Consequently, **mainstreaming**, where all children are educated within the same setting, became more common. This led to research, including meta-analyses, identifying no benefits of segregated education compared with education of all children together (Calberg & Kavale, 1980; Dunn, 1968; Wang & Baker, 1985).

While it is a rejection of extreme segregation and exclusion, mainstreaming is based on the understanding that all children can and should assimilate to ‘fit’ the existing setting, rather than that education approaches and environments should be developed to include children. Mainstreaming involves attendance, but not inclusion. It is now widely recognised that ‘being there is not enough; it is no guarantee of respect for difference or access to the material, social, cultural and educational capital that people expect’ (Komesaroff & McLean, 2006, p.97).

### Mainstreaming:

The placement of children together within the same setting, but without making adjustments or adaptations to facilitate inclusion.

**Note**

It is important to distinguish between the terms ‘mainstreaming’ and ‘mainstream’. Settings intended for the ‘general population’, be that a childcare centre, school, library, swimming pool or any other setting or activity, are often referred to as ‘mainstream settings’. For example, a ‘mainstream school’ would be one that is not targeted at a specific minority group, but rather all children of school age in that locality. As a result, people sometimes talk of inclusion within a ‘mainstream’ school or centre (as opposed to mainstreaming).

**INTEGRATION**

In an effort to address the many issues with mainstreaming, in the 1970s, the increasing focus within policy and practice in Australia (and elsewhere) became **integration** (Doneau, 1984). Integration involves making adaptations or accommodations to enable participation within a mainstream experience or setting.

Many education settings incorporate segregated ‘special’ classes or units in which children labelled ‘disabled’ or ‘disordered’ are educated. Many of these units have a segregated, fenced off, playground. Children who attend these segregated settings are often integrated into some whole-setting activities. In school settings, for example, the whole school may come together for school assemblies, music or some sport activities. Individual children may also attend part of the day in a mainstream class with age-matched peers. Some children will also join together during outside playtime. Children who attend ‘special’ settings (for example, ‘special’ schools) may be integrated for a day or more per week at a mainstream setting.

While the focus on accommodations is critical, integration has been criticised for being tokenistic. Many children who are integrated actually spend little time participating in the centre or school community and most of their time in segregated activities, classes or settings. A major criticism of integration is the implication that someone who is ‘different’ needs to be ‘fitted in’, rather than working to include, value and meet the needs of all children within the setting. In this sense, integration is often little more than moving ‘special’ education from a segregated setting into a mainstream one—the perpetuation of exclusionary practices in the guise of integration. Armstrong and Barton (2008, p.10) argue that ‘integration makes no requirement for the school to effect radical change in its culture and organisation because the expectation is that the child is accommodated to existing structures and practices or—at best, if organisational and pedagogical adjustments *are* implemented, they take place *around* the individual child or group of children identified as in need’.

**Integration:** Involves attendance at a ‘mainstream’ setting, part-time or full-time, with needs-based practical accommodations to facilitate participation, but without change to the setting.



**Note**

This notion of integration is different to the notion of ‘an integrated unit of work’, which involves integrating different subject areas within one experience, activity or lesson; for example, an experience that is focused simultaneously on teaching literacy, science and mathematics.

**Micro-exclusion**

Due to the lack of understanding of inclusive education, exclusion and segregation often occur in the name of inclusion. Segregation can occur socially within so-called ‘inclusive’ settings when children are not given the opportunity to participate, learn and grow together. Like for integration, this can involve moving ‘special’ education from a segregated setting into a mainstream setting, but without any genuine efforts to bring about inclusion. Children therefore remain segregated and excluded within a so-called inclusive setting. This is what D’Alessio (2011) has termed ‘**micro-exclusion**’. For example this is evident when a child attends a general education setting, but is excluded from the activities of the rest of the children, as illustrated by McLeskey and Waldron:

The general education teacher had just completed taking roll and handling the daily chores that are necessary to start the day. As reading was beginning, the special education teacher entered the classroom. She went to a table in the back of the room, and four students with disabilities joined her. The general education teacher gathered the remaining 20 students in the front of the room. The special education teacher began working on a phonics lesson with ‘her’ students, while the general education teacher was discussing a book she had been reading to the rest of the class for the past week (2007, p.162).

Micro-exclusion occurs when adaptations or accommodations to the environment, curriculum or pedagogy that are required to include a child are not made (for example, refusing to install a handrail in the toilets) (Purdue, Ballard & MacArthur, 2001). Or, it might occur where a child is only permitted to attend a setting under certain conditions (for example, only when a parent or assistant is present, or only for part of the day) (Purdue et al., 2001). Inclusive education, on the other hand, is ‘a way of looking at the world that enacts the fundamental meaning of education for all children: full participation, full membership, valued citizenship’ (Kliewer, 1998, p.320).

**INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

In response to criticisms of integration, alongside greater recognition of the human rights of all children in legislation and policy (see Chapter 4), there has been a growing move towards **inclusive education**. Beyond mainstreaming and integration, inclusive education involves ensuring the valued full participation

**Micro-exclusion in education:** When physical presence or placement alone is misunderstood as inclusion.

**Inclusive education:** Involves embracing human diversity and valuing and supporting the belonging and full participation of all people together (Cologon, 2013a).

and belonging of all children within any given education setting. Inclusive education involves both social and academic inclusion, free from discrimination in any form.

The term ‘inclusion’ often brings to mind minority groups and people who experience disability in particular, but in reality, inclusion is about everyone (Armstrong & Barton, 2008). However, people from minority groups are often excluded and thus particular emphasis is placed on inclusion to address this issue.

Petriwskyj (2010a) argues that understandings of inclusion reflect beliefs about diversity in any given context. Graham and Spandagou (2011, p.225) found that ‘[t]he contextual characteristics of a school and its community inform discussions of diversity and define what inclusive education means in specific schools’. Consequently, greater diversity in a school results in a broader understanding of inclusive education (Graham & Spandagou, 2011).

People who experience disability are the largest minority group in the world today (World Health Organization [WHO], 2011) and are among the most marginalised and excluded people in Australia and throughout the world (Hobson, 2010; United Nations Children’s Fund [UNICEF], 2013). Therefore, while this book focuses on inclusion of *all*, particular emphasis is placed on inclusion of children labelled ‘disabled’. However, as one teacher in some of my research argues, ‘Inclusion is really (when you think about it) what teaching is: Meet each child where they are at, build on their strengths and interests to move them along, and adapt your teaching style, resources and pace to each of them. Thus it puzzles me when words such as “disability”/“special needs” throw people off’ (Cologon, 2010, p.47).

FIGURE 1.1 DIVERSITY



Artwork by Kaitlyn

### Confusion between inclusion and integration/mainstreaming

Confusion sometimes occurs between the terms ‘integration’/‘mainstreaming’ and ‘inclusion’. Foreman (2011, p.16) argues that integration and mainstreaming involve asking ‘*Can we provide for the needs of this student?*’, while inclusion involves asking ‘*How will we provide for the needs of this student?*’ The difference between these concepts is important to reflect upon and is illustrated in Figures 1.4 and 1.5.

**FIGURE 1.2** INTEGRATION



*(From 'One of the Kids', published by the Disability Council of NSW, written by Wendy Stroeve and illustrated by Kerry Millard, reproduced with permission.)*

**FIGURE 1.3** INCLUSION



*(From 'One of the Kids', published by the Disability Council of NSW, written by Wendy Stroeve and illustrated by Kerry Millard, reproduced with permission.)*

## Why is inclusion important?

Though Foreman’s question ‘How we will provide for the needs of this student?’ seems a simple one, inclusive education is not always easy to implement (Barton, 2008). So, why would early years professionals commit to bringing about inclusion in reality?

Montaigne, an influential sixteenth-century French philosopher, wrote extensively on the question of ‘how should we live?’. Writing of his many and

varied experiences of life and observations of what it is to be human, Montaigne explored questions about how one can make honourable choices, live ethically and flourish as a human being.

After meeting conjoined twins, Montaigne (1580) reflected on the human tendency to wonder at what seems uncommon due to lack of understanding and yet not to wonder at what seems common *even when we do not understand that either*. Montaigne argued that this apparent ‘novelty’ of something that seems less common leads to a perception of strangeness, but that it is in fact this sense of novelty or ‘astonishment’ (which leads to stigmatisation) that needs correcting. Within this, it could be argued, is recognition of a fundamental aspect of inclusion—the need to embrace human diversity so that it is no longer ‘astonishing’. This is a challenge for every early years professional.

While Montaigne did not explore what the experience of *being* ‘astonishing’ might be like for the children he met, research demonstrates that experiences of exclusion are likely to lead children ‘to internalise the messages that they are inferior, incompetent and undesirable peer group members, which in turn is likely to negatively impact on their motivation to seek inclusion’ (Rietveld, 2010, p.27). Exclusion results in marginalisation, stigmatisation and often bullying and abuse (Biklen & Burke, 2006; Curcic, 2009; Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2012). On the other hand, inclusion results in greater self-esteem (Diamond & Huang, 2005; Fitch, 2003).

Building on Montaigne’s essential question ‘how should we live?’, there is a subtle yet fundamental shift in thinking when we ask ‘how should we live *together*?’. This question opens the frame to thinking about all humans living together, rather than bringing into existing settings those of us who are currently left outside. In this sense, ‘inclusion goes to the heart of how we as communities of human beings wish to live with one another’ (Cologon, 2010, p.47).

## INCLUSION AS A HUMAN RIGHT

Addressing the ways in which humans live together, there is a long history of people from across the world working together to articulate and support the recognition of human rights. As discussed in Chapter 4, inclusion and education are rights of all people. This is outlined in conventions and declarations including the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (United Nations, 2006), the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989), the *Salamanca Declaration* (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 1994) and the *United Nations Guidelines on Intercultural Education* (UNESCO, 2006), as well as in the global commitment to *Education for All* (UNESCO, 1990).

## POLICY AND LEGISLATION

Partly on account of these international covenants and declarations, policy and legislation across much of the world outlines a commitment to inclusive education. For example, in Australia the *Australian Early Years Learning Framework* (DEEWR, 2009), *Framework for School Age Care* (DEEWR, 2009) and the *Australian Curriculum* (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2011) describe a clear commitment to inclusive education. (See Chapter 4 for details of policy and legislation.)

## OUTCOMES OF INCLUSION

In addition to the human rights and social justice arguments for inclusive education, changes in policy and legislation have been informed by research, particularly in relation to children who experience disability. There are a number of challenges when considering research into inclusive education. Discriminatory attitudes are present not only in practice, but also in research. Many studies, while intending or claiming to examine inclusive education, are actually based on practices of micro- (and sometimes macro-) exclusion. However, despite these challenges, research provides evidence of benefits of inclusive education for children who do and do not experience disability in terms of social, academic, cognitive and physical development (Cologon, 2013a). This includes research involving children with a diverse range of labels, such as children labelled with ‘mild’ to ‘severe’ intellectual, sensory and physical impairments and multiple impairments (Cologon, 2013a).

Overall, research provides evidence that inclusive education results in improved quality of education for all, and education which is more sensitive to children’s needs (Jordan, Schwartz & McGhie-Richmond, 2009; Jordan, Glenn & McGhie-Richmond, 2010; Purdue et al., 2001). This contrasts with the absence of evidence to suggest any benefit of segregated (‘special’) education over inclusive education (Jackson, Chalmers & Wills, 2004; Jackson, 2008).

### *Academic outcomes*

Despite the higher adult to child ratios in ‘special’ education, inclusive education facilitates greater academic outcomes compared with segregated education, including in the areas of reading, writing and mathematics (de Graaf, van Hove & Haveman, 2013; Finke, McNaughton & Drager, 2009; Giangreco, 2009; Kliewer, 1998, 2008; Myklebust, 2006; Peetsma, Vergeer, Karsten & Roeleveld, 2001; Stahmer & Ingersoll, 2004; Tanti Burlo, 2010; Vakil, et al., 2009; Vianello & Lanfranchi, 2009). Inclusive education creates more opportunities for engaging academically and, consequently, results in outcomes that otherwise may not

be possible (Finke et al., 2009; Fox, Farrell & Davis, 2004; Jordan et al., 2009; Jordan et al., 2010).

Early years professionals and parents often report concerns that the inclusion of children who experience disability will impact negatively on the academic outcomes of children who do not experience disability. However, research demonstrates that this concern is unfounded, and children who do not experience disability benefit from inclusive education and demonstrate equal or better academic outcomes than children educated in non-inclusive settings (Dessefontet & Bless, 2013; Farrell, Dyson, Polat, Hutcheson & Gallannaugh, 2007; Kalambouka, Farrell, Dyson & Kaplan, 2007; Kliewer, 1998, 2008; McGregor & Vogelsberg, 1998; Odom & Diamond, 1998; Odom, Buysse & Soukakou, 2011; Purdue et al., 2001).

### *Inclusion and behaviour*

Children's behaviour is reported to be one of the greatest concerns for early years professionals (Cologon, 2012). Research provides evidence that inclusive education facilitates positive behaviour development, including development of greater independence, patience, trust, acceptance of diversity, and responsiveness to the needs of others (Baker-Ericzén, Mueggenborg & Shea, 2009; Diamond & Huang, 2005; Finke et al., 2009; Hanline & Correa-Torres, 2012; Hollingsworth, Boone & Crais, 2009; Kliewer, 2008; Mogharreban & Bruns, 2009; Nikolarazi et al., 2005; Palmer, Fuller, Arora & Nelson, 2001; Stahmer, Carter, Baker & Miwa, 2003; Stahmer, Akshoomoff & Cunningham, 2011).

### *Communication, language and physical development*

Communication and language development is enriched through inclusive education (Baker-Ericzén et al., 2009; Finke et al., 2009; Fisher & Shogren, 2012; Hart & Whalon, 2011; Johnston, McDonnell, Nelson & Magnavito, 2003; Kliewer, 1998, 2008; Peetsma et al., 2001; Stahmer et al., 2003; Stahmer et al., 2011). Inclusive education has also been found to stimulate physical development (Fox et al., 2004; Qi & Ha, 2012; Stahmer, et al., 2003; Theodorou & Nind, 2010).

### *Inclusion and bullying*

A common assumption regarding segregated education is that in 'special' settings children will not experience bullying or teasing. However, research indicates that all forms of bullying occur in 'special' settings (Davis & Watson, 2000; Rose, Monda-Amaya & Espelage, 2011; Torrance, 2000). While there is variation in studies (Hebron & Humphrey, 2013; Woods & Wolke, 2004), a growing body of research provides evidence that children who attend segregated settings are more likely to experience bullying, with inclusive education being a key strategy for reducing bullying (Rose et al., 2011). In fact, inclusive education has

been found to promote positive social development; facilitate friendships that may not otherwise occur; and support the development of a sense of belonging (Baker-Ericzén et al., 2009; Finke et al., 2009; Hanline & Correa-Torres, 2012; Jordan et al., 2009; Kliewer, 1998; Odom et al., 2011; Petriwskyj, 2010b; Stahmer & Ingersoll, 2004; Stahmer et al., 2003; Stahmer et al., 2011).

## INCLUSION AND BELONGING

Belonging is critical to inclusion. In fact it is argued in the *Early Years Learning Framework* that belonging is ‘integral to human existence’ (DEEWR, 2009, p.7). A sense of belonging leads to a sense of identity and positive self-esteem (DEEWR, 2009; Jones, 2002), which are two of the most essential goals to be addressed through early years education (Nutbrown & Clough, 2009). However, belonging does not occur without participation (Dockett & Perry, 2005). To bring about a genuine sense of belonging, ‘there needs to be a strong commitment to inclusive education that expects student **agency**, where the participation of the student in the heart of the classroom is a given, not an experiment, and not conditional, and where participation amounts to more than mere physical presence’ (Biklen & Burke, 2006, p.172).

**Agency:** ‘being able to make choices and decisions, to influence events and to have an impact on one’s world’ (DEEWR, 2009, p.45).

In sum, inclusive education is important when we consider ‘how we should live *together*’. ‘Inclusion is what we make it, and what we make it is what we wish our culture to be’ (Kliewer, 1998, p.320).

## Inclusive early years professionals

Dempsey (2011, p.64) writes, ‘The argument over whether inclusion works has ended. Inclusion does work when key components of the classroom and the school environment are in place, and legislation and policy now demand that teachers and schools ensure that these components are enacted.’ Early years professionals can expect that they will be required to include a diverse range of children—this is the right of every child. However, many early years professionals are concerned about how and whether they can do this.

Two concerns are commonly voiced among professionals who express resistance to inclusion. The first is that the needs of children will not be met amid the complex dynamics of a general education setting. The second is that the needs of children with disabilities will require an excessive amount of directed resources that take away from the educational experiences of children without disabilities ... neither concern is valid in a thoughtfully structured, well-resourced early childhood classroom (Kliewer, 2008, p.135).

Research provides evidence that early years professionals develop positive attitudes towards inclusion and build confidence in their ability to be inclusive,

through experience and support (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Cologon, 2012; Jordan & Stanovich, 2001; Jordan et al., 2010; McGregor & Vogelsberg, 1998; Purdue et al., 2001). Early years professionals report increased personal satisfaction and professional growth through the experience of inclusive education (Finke et al., 2009) and become more confident and ‘better’ teachers of all children (Cologon, 2012; Jordan & Stanovich, 2001; Jordan et al., 2010). With this knowledge in mind, the question then becomes *how* to bring about inclusive education. This question is addressed throughout this book.

Research with parents and early years professionals in New Zealand has identified that inclusion is experienced when (Purdue et al., 2001):

- ▶ Children and families are welcomed as valued members of the community and belong;
- ▶ Inclusion is viewed as ‘ordinary’, ‘part of life’;
- ▶ Peer acceptance is fostered;
- ▶ Parent collaboration is welcomed;
- ▶ Conditions are not placed on attendance and the child is welcome all of the time;
- ▶ Adaptations are made;
- ▶ Early years professionals work to advocate with parents;
- ▶ Resources are created or funding is sought where required;
- ▶ All staff within the setting are involved with all children (for example paraprofessional support is used across the setting and visiting therapists work with teachers to support inclusion).

The attitudes of early years professionals are fundamental to the realisation of inclusion (Carlson, Hemmings, Wurf & Reupert, 2012). Ainscow writes that

The development of more inclusive approaches does not arise from a mechanical process in which any one specific organisational restructuring, or the introduction of a particular set of techniques, generates increased levels of participation. Rather, the development of inclusive practices requires processes of social learning ... becoming more inclusive is a matter of thinking and talking, reviewing and refining practice, and making attempts to develop a more inclusive culture (2007, p.5).

Bringing about inclusive education ‘requires the abandonment of special educational stances which focus on compensatory approaches to individual “needs”, to embrace a pedagogy of inclusion and a commitment to the rights of all to belong’ (D’Alessio, 2011, p.141). This involves abandoning the idea of ‘special children’, ‘special teachers’ and of ‘making children normal’ (Baglieri, Bejoian, Broderick, Connor & Valle, 2011; Barton, 1997; Connor & Goldmansour, 2012; Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2011) and instead embracing our shared



humanity. To do this, it is essential to examine the underlying beliefs and attitudes that we bring to the early years and to our interactions with children and families.

## DEVELOPING INCLUSIVE ATTITUDES

‘Children are not born with prejudices ... but acquire them from adults, the media, and the general way in which society is organized’ (Rieser & Mason, 1990 cited in Beckett, 2009, p.320). As young as three years of age, children internalise dominant cultural preferences or prejudices, for example identifying people as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ on the basis of cultural (stigma) markers (Connolly, Smith & Kelly, 2002). By the age of six, children will make spontaneous biased or prejudiced statements consistent with the dominant cultural preferences of the context (Connolly et al., 2002). Early years professionals play a role in the process of enculturating children and thus have a responsibility to avoid perpetuating stigmatising and discriminatory beliefs and attitudes. The beliefs and attitudes of early years professionals impact on the developing beliefs of the children with whom they work, and are critical to the development of an inclusive culture (Berlach & Chambers, 2011; Carlson et al., 2012).

The environment and culture of a setting influences not only children, but also adults (Kasa-Hendrickson & Kluth, 2005). ‘Challenging widely accepted beliefs and practices in education is a difficult and unpopular task’ (Slee, 2011, p.14), thus leadership is essential to bring about inclusion (Ainscow, 2007). One important aspect of accepting this challenge is to acknowledge that the beliefs and attitudes we hold are not necessarily the ones we desire to hold or have set out to develop; and, until we examine our beliefs and attitudes, we may often be unaware that we hold them. We all exist within our context and time and are enculturated into the dominant beliefs and attitudes of our society. Nonetheless, early years professionals have an ethical responsibility to uncover our beliefs and attitudes, and to examine and challenge them with a view to unpacking the impact they may have on the children and families we work with. In doing so, early years professionals can contribute to ongoing social change and transformation towards greater inclusion.

### CRITICAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS

In Chapter 2 we will explore further, deeply held social views that lead to discrimination and exclusion. Before we do this, it is important to consider these questions:

1. What are your own beliefs about who has a right to inclusive education?
2. Who do you think can be educated?

When a person is stigmatised, the beliefs of that person and those around them about their capacity to learn are negatively influenced. When a person is not stigmatised, they are generally presumed to be competent (Biklen, 2000; Biklen & Burke, 2006). Presuming competence ‘casts the teachers, parents, and others in the role of finding ways to support the person to demonstrate his or her agency... The notion of presuming competence implies that educators must assume students can and will change and, that through engagement with the world, will demonstrate complexities of thought and action that could not necessarily be anticipated’ (Biklen & Burke, 2006, pp.167–168).

In the words of Jamie Burke, ‘why do all those who have said they are educated in ways of teaching not know that hope and desire must be moved into place as the pillars of strength first before the floors can be built?’ (Biklen & Burke, 2006, p.171).

## Becoming inclusive

In a speech entitled ‘In Our Hands’ delivered on the tenth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1958, Eleanor Roosevelt argued,

Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home—so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighbourhood he [or she] lives in; the school or college he [or she] attends; the factory, farm or office where he [or she] works. Such are the places where every man, woman and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerned citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world.

Inclusive education is a human right for all children. Inclusive education is a ‘big idea’, however, as Eleanor Roosevelt argued, human rights are realised every day, when we live our lives in interaction with others. Inclusive education ‘is about providing the best possible education for all’ (Armstrong & Barton, 2008, p.11). We *all* need to be included in order to flourish in our lives—and for this to occur we all need to include each other. Early years professionals have identified that respectful engagement with all children and families, taking a rights-based approach and listening to children, embracing diversity and providing equitable access to education are all critical for quality education—and for inclusion (Cologon, 2010).

As noted earlier in this chapter, early years professionals play a powerful role in bringing about (or preventing) inclusion and need to be supported to challenge unquestioned ways of being and doing, thus ‘enlarging their capacity to imagine what might be achieved’ (Ainscow, 2007, p.6). A key part of this is

FIGURE 1.4 AUSLAN SIGN FOR *BIG*

Photos: Dinah Cocksedge

challenging false assumptions and low expectations regarding the capabilities and behaviours of certain children or groups of children (Ainscow, 2007).

## Conclusion

In writing about education and inequality Beckett reminds us of the place of education in our society:

The relationship between “education” and “inequality” has been, and continues to be much debated ... Within this wider debate there is a long history of theorising that supports the idea that the education system has the *potential* to rise above the inequalities of society, and even play a part in reducing those inequalities (Beckett, 2009, p.317, emphasis original).

Inclusive early years professionals can play an important role in bringing this *potential* to a *reality*. If inclusion is embracing our shared humanity, then bringing about inclusive education in reality involves an active and lived *expression* of our shared humanity. This requires putting inclusive values into action.

## FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

1. What do you understand education to mean?
2. What do you understand inclusive education to mean?
3. What do you understand difference and disability to mean?
4. Reflect on the notion of 'curing' or 'fixing' children as a precursor or condition for inclusion. Do children need to be 'the same enough' to be included?
5. Why is inclusion important for bringing about genuine education for all?
6. Consider an early years setting that you are familiar with. Who is included in this setting? Who is excluded? Why and how are inclusion and exclusion determined?
7. What do you consider to be the role(s) of early years professionals in facilitating inclusion? What do you see as a starting point for becoming more inclusive?

## WEBSITES

[www.eenet.org.uk/what\\_is\\_ie.php](http://www.eenet.org.uk/what_is_ie.php)

The Enabling Education Network: Provides information regarding inclusive education from a global perspective.

[www.csie.org.uk](http://www.csie.org.uk)

Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education: Provides information regarding inclusive education.

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