CROSS-CULTURAL ISSUES IN EARLY INTERVENTION

Australia is one of the most culturally diverse nations on earth. According to the 2001 Census, 43 percent of the Australian population was born overseas, or has at least one parent born overseas (2001 Census Australia). As a result, about 16 percent of over 23 million Australians do not speak English at home. This extensive cultural and linguistic diversity within the Australian population is now reflected in schools.

Another characteristic of diversity reflected in Australian early childhood environments is the greater access and participation of young children with special education needs. In 2007–08 migrants came into Australia from more than 200 countries (Australia's migration trends 2012-2013). Because of rapid changes in the global economy, immigration policies, and technology, early childhood educators (ECEs) are finding themselves having increased contact with children and families who are culturally different and in need of inclusive education services. Consequently, in many large and small communities, ECE providers need to acquire additional knowledge regarding different cultural practices to manage their classrooms appropriately and mindfully. This is particularly the case, when ECEs find that they need to interact with families from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds who are raising a child who requires inclusive education services.

As teachers enter the 21st century, there is a growing need to become knowledgeable about families from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, in addition to learning the most appropriate educational strategies to serve their children. Teachers need to ensure that public policy and public funding guarantees that all students with special education needs (SEN) have access to appropriate education services, so that children who are culturally different and who also have SENs are not put at double jeopardy. The aim of this presentation is to report briefly on the outcomes of a research project that was conducted in Hong Kong SAR by the author, which investigated the impact on Hong Kong Chinese families raising a child with a disability. It is hoped that this information will assist ECE's, preparing educational programs for Australian Chinese children with SEN's, in aspects of cultural sensitivity.

BIography

Dr Kathleen Tait’s expertise in the field of developmental disabilities stems from 25 years in early intervention and tertiary environments in the UK, Brunei, and recently 5 years in Hong Kong when she also worked as a consultant to the Stars and Rain Institute for Young Children with Autism in Beijing, Mainland China. This international experience has provided her with an appreciation of the complexities of working with diverse cultures (e.g., Malaysian, Indian and Chinese) and diverse religions (e.g., the Islamic, Hindu and Buddhist faiths). Dr. Tait specializes in the field of functional behaviour analysis and evidence based intervention practices for individuals with complex disabilities (such as cerebral palsy, ASD, and moderate to severe intellectual impairments).

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