Early Intervention in the 21st Century

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A SOCIAL RELATIONAL APPROACH TO THE INCLUSION OF CHILDREN WHO EXPERIENCE DISABILITY IN EARLY EDUCATION

Education of young children who experience disability often focuses on changing the child, and neglects to acknowledge the role that environments can play in disabling children. This approach is based on a medical model understanding of disability. However, when approached from a social model view, disability is not something that exists within a person, but rather something is experienced when a person encounters unaccommodating environments, behaviours or attitudes.

When a social model understanding of disability is applied in the case of early childhood inclusion, the focus becomes on modifying early childhood environments in ways which reduces children’s experiences of disability, rather than focussing on changing the child. However, there is limited consideration of social and medical model approaches to inclusive early childhood education.

In this research, the attitudes and behaviours of staff at a Melbourne based early childhood centre were investigated in light of the social and medical models of disability. This centre is known for its inclusive practices and was including a child labelled with Autism at the time of this research.

Research methods within this study included document analysis, staff and parent interviews, and centre observations. Analysis revealed ways in which the adoption of a social model perspective to disability facilitated the inclusion of all children in this centre, as well as having implications for the inclusion of families and staff. In this presentation, the implications for facilitating inclusive early childhood education are discussed, with consideration of the impact of a social model approach in which the focus becomes on changing the environment and engaging in an ongoing process of critical reflection and action towards greater inclusion.

BIOGRAPHY

Ms Meike Mackenzie BA, GradDipEd(EarlChildEd), MEChild, is a DIR/Floortime provider and the director of EduPay Children’s Services. Meike loves working with children and their families to provide fun play based DIR/Floortime sessions to help children engage and relate through play. Meike’s Masters research focussed on the social model of disability in inclusive early childhood education. As a result of this research Meike and EduPay have become advocates for a social model approach to early childhood inclusion and intervention. Meike’s goal is to spread the social model message throughout Australian early childhood services to promote a society where diversity is embraced and celebrated.

Dr Kathy Cologon lectures in Inclusive Early Childhood Education at the Institute of Early Childhood, Macquarie University. Kathy has a particular interest in research and practice relating to the development and support of inclusive education, with a view towards greater recognition of the rights of all children.

Dr Marianne Fenech is passionate about quality early childhood education for young children and is committed to working for this through excellence in teaching and research. Her teaching and research focus on effective early childhood settings through strong management and leadership, and the development of a quality and equitable system of early childhood education in Australia through policy and industrial reform.

FIND OUT MORE

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