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Towards Making a Difference: Promoting Social Inclusion and Respect For Diversity¹

Dr Jacqueline Hayden

Program Manager, Social Inclusion and Respect for Diversity
Bernard van Leer Foundation

Introduction

After hearing others at this conference, I have taken speaker's sovereignty and changed the title of my presentation from *Making A Difference* to *Towards Making A Difference*.

As all speakers here have reminded us, we need to be careful about reducing diversity, discrimination, and *oppression* to single indicators - defining these as monolithic issues which call upon simple or unilateral solutions, and which, somehow, can be addressed through early childhood programs. This is simply not realistic

We need to—(as our opening speaker reminded us) be aware of the limitations of our sphere of influence, and of the need to unpack the nuances and to find appropriate partners with whom we can (as another speaker put it) walk *together for justice*.

We need to understand (as others admonished) that we might actually be creating *otherness* by using an ethnic rather than economic or other structural paradigm to frame inequality.

We are not individually or collectively going to change the 400 years of colonial oppression and racism that Glenda McNaughton conjured up for us.

But I do think there is knowledge we can call upon, strategies we can employ and processes for collaboration which will influence change – or change agents – and that is what my presentation is about.

Hypothesis

Interventions in early childhood significantly contribute to social inclusion and respect for diversity – and conversely to the reduction of discrimination in the lives of young children and their families.

This is the hypothesis upon which Bernard van Leer Foundation has developed and continues to build an international portfolio. DECET as a networking organisation, DECET members individually, all of the speakers at this

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conference, and you, the participants are partners in the exploration and promotion of this hypothesis. In fact (as has been made so apparent at this conference) there is a growing cohort who are aware of and promote social inclusion and respect for diversity as a fundamental and critical component of early childhood service delivery and /or of any program for young children and families

Use of terms social inclusion and respect for diversity

Not everyone uses or even identifies with the terms - *social inclusion and respect for diversity* – but the role of early childhood programs in reflecting social justice, in scaffolding emphathtic engagement, in presenting civic fora (meeting places where participation, inclusion and equity are modeled), in forwarding the social agenda – all of these are part of a research and practice discourse which is permeating the international early childhood sector .This is what we mean by the term at Bernard van Leer Foundation –

Social Inclusion and Respect for Diversity': - facilitating the promotion of inclusion and respect as a reality in young children's lives. (from Bernard van Leer Foundation Framework, 2007)

Recently we undertook a survey and discovered that the term social inclusion and respect for diversity does not resonate everywhere - that there were many terms which are referring to the same discourse – but using different language. Some of these include

- multi culturalism
- inter cultural pedagogy
- Social justice – Participation - Equity
- Active Citizenship
- Democracy in the classroom/ sense of belonging
- Meeting places (or, Spaces of public dialogue)
- Social capital, connectivity
- Gender studies
- Health promotion
- in Latin America the issue is *Convivencia : joint living*
- in Africa there is referral to *Ubuntu : the spirit of community*

While the semantics and semiotics are varied, it is obvious that practitioners, researchers and policy makers around the globe are coming to embrace the need to address social inclusion and respect for diversity as a key discourse for the early childhood sector: and it is equally obvious that this is a critical time to consolidate; collate our knowledge, identify collaborators, determine what we know and need to know, articulate our messages and deliver them a with a united voice.

The variety in the use of terms however may be symptomatic of something that Anastasia suggested – that interest groups and key players who should be uniting under similar goals - are not necessarily communicating with each other.I will come back to this point later .

How to make a difference

For now I want to turn to the *continuum for making a difference*. It is the same continuum one would follow for eliciting any kind of social change. The steps are to 1) articulate the problem, 2) define and address what is known and what needs to be further explored, 3) mobilise stakeholders, 4) identify desired solutions, and, finally, 5) present the cogent and cohesive arguments to those who can further policies and resources towards desired ends. This is what will turn our the hypothesis into a reality.

This presentation will review where we seem to be along that continuum. Thus I will address -

1. The common problem: What we know . Why social inclusion and respect for diversity in early childhood is an idea whose time whose time is now .
2. Some of the gaps in our knowledge base: Deconstructing the problem. What needs to be known. What I call ecological and etiological analyses.
3. One initiative that Bernard van Leer Foundation is supporting as a step towards collating and enhancing the knowledge base and mobilising stakeholders: This is The *Joint Learning Initiative on Children and Ethnic Diversity*

What we know: Why we are promoting social inclusion and respect for diversity in early years at this time

There are four overarching reasons why social inclusion and respect for diversity are increasingly central to early childhood

1. In the past decade rapid social change on a global scale, wars and conflict mean that the vast majority of children are growing up in environments of diversity which becomes synonymous with exclusion and discrimination. As Glenda put *It Is In The Air*. - AND it is a human right to participate and live free from discrimination.
2. There are long term - harmful - individual and social outcomes associated with social isolation.
3. The development of self-identity and prejudice take hold in the early years of life.
4. There is an explosion of programs which address social inclusion and respect for diversity as an early childhood issue and mounting evidence of efficacy of these interventions.

1. The vast majority of children are growing up in environments of diversity and discrimination

War/conflict is affecting millions of young children (22 are currently at war.). Millions more children live in Environments marked by deep division and fear. Border areas/displacements: cross border raids/unpredictable dislocations are the norm in many parts of the world. Millions of children are living in areas where there is no overt conflict but where diversity is a source of bias and discrimination. Children may be subject to stigma because of their ethnic, religious or other cultural inheritance or they may become perpetrators of prejudice and hate.

The UN Report of the Secretary General, 2006 names Europe, the USA, Canada, Australasia and the UK as areas of growing diversity and discrimination. It s the right of children and famlies to live free from discrimination

2. Long term outcomes

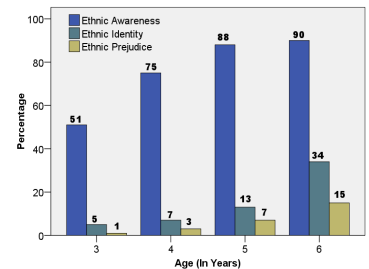
The next reason why dealing with diversity is critical at this time is because we know that there are long-term, harmful individual and social outcomes of social isolation. We know that growing up on either side of exclusion and discrimination - as a perpetrator or a victim - perpetuates a *worldview* and a *world* of dominance and oppression/ privilege and power/ bias and hate. We know that low self esteem, negative self identity, disconnection which leads to ill health, depression, crime and violence have roots in the early years of life. We know that environments marked by prejudice and discrimination erode relationships and stifle interpersonal intelligence. They inhibit learning and creativity and affect the skills and attitudes for healthy social living. As Gerhardt put it

Social exclusion, inhibits learning and creativity and creates a poor 'seedbed' for sensitive growth. It casts a long misshapen shadow across the developmental profile of children, affecting later school and other vital social learning, eventually blighting adulthood and creating destructive circumstances for others within the social orbit; (Gerhardt, 2004 p 218, cited in Gammage, in press)

3. Prejudice develops in early years

The 3rd reason for promoting social inclusion and respect for diversity is that there is mounting evidence on development of prejudice in the early years. We have heard this from other speakers. Knowing this makes non-intervention a form of neglect - an infection that will spread.

In a recent study of Northern Ireland Connolly showed that ethnic awareness and ethnic identity preclude ethnic prejudice, and that these concepts appear to take hold in children between the ages of 3 and years of age .This graph shows the % of children responding to questions which reflect ethnic awareness, ethnic identity and ethnic prejudice according to age²



A number of authors are now stating with confidence statements like the one below:.

By the time children enter primary school their reflections of difference reflect and perpetuate the dominant radicalised, gendered sexualised, class and body stereotypes and prejudices that prevail in the broader society (Robinson and Jones Diaz 2007 pg 4).

Glenda provided cogent evidence yesterday that to NOT intervene, to NOT present alternative worldviews to children- is to perpetuate 'active harm'.

² Connolly, P. (2006). Addressing Diversity and Inclusion in the Early Years in Conflict-Affected Societies: A Case Study of the Media Initiative for Children--Northern Ireland. *International Journal of Early Years Education* Vol.14 n3 p263-278.

4. *There is an explosion of programs which address social inclusion and respect for diversity as an early childhood issue and mounting evidence of efficacy of these interventions.*

The 4th reason for identifying the need to promote social inclusion and respect for diversity – here and now - is that we know how to do it:

The conference workshops, the programs that BvLF has supported, some of the excellent publications being distributed here and beyond - are documented evidence that early childhood programs are addressing social inclusion and respect for diversity through a number of strategies.

Some of the goals and outcomes of early childhood programs which BvLF directly support include

- Implement specific social inclusion and respect for diversity curriculum
- Target positive social identity as an outcome for programming
- Facilitate empathy through imaginative engagement with others' realities
- Address the development of critical thinking, negotiation, empathy development
- Train adults re social inclusion and respect for diversity issues
- Network at several levels- work with and within communities
- Model meaningful participation/equity within 'meeting places'
- Advocate for appropriate policy development.

We also have empirical findings. Using random control methodology, Connolly et al showed that attitudes of young children were influenced by a 6-week multi – pronged intervention (which included teacher and parent workshops and classroom activities following a nationwide media campaign) (Connolly, 2006). The implication is that for very young children one can increase the ability to recognise when someone is being excluded, increase sensitivity about how exclusion feels for that person, and increase willingness to be inclusive – play with the *other*. Although not conclusive without further longitudinal findings, these studies to imply that interventions at key periods can *make a difference!*

What we don't know

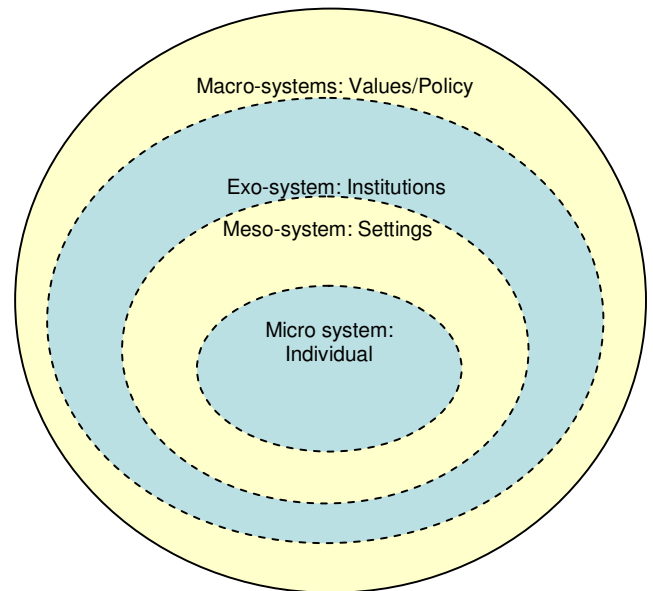
The 2nd part of my presentation is about identifying what we don't know: What still what needs to be investigated. I refer here to the need for an ecological and etiological analyses of social inclusion and respect for diversity.

If we gathered all that is published and known (perhaps entering other fields and using those terms which I listed earlier) and if we place that knowledge into an ecological framework, I am sure that we will see a great amount of activity and research at some levels and some gaps at other levels. This can help to target research needs.

We will also find that the interface, that is the collaboration, communication, and connections between the knowledge bases, and between the agents and actors, is not strong. As Anastasia told us (key players are not communicating with each other especially at higher (policy) levels)!

The ecology of social inclusion and respect for diversity

Here is my attempt to classify our knowledge base in this area.



At the micro system level we have studies and programs about facilitating empathy and pro social behaviors in children.

At the meso system level we know about the role of adults in the child's near environment; and about providing strategies, processes, tools, guidelines, curricula and resources which support social inclusion and respect for diversity as an integral part of service delivery (DECET is prevalent at this level).

Regarding the exo system, we know some things about (but perhaps have not engaged in deep analyses) community, structural and systemic barriers to social inclusion and respect for diversity. Nor have we unpacked the issue of access and opportunities.

At the macro system level, we need to know more about how diverse constructions of childhood affect social inclusion and respect for diversity. We need to analyse how nations value and implement a commitment to equity, pluralism, and inter culturalism and how these values and processes effect the everyday experiences of young children and their families. We need how fiscal, employment, migration and related policies effect the goals of social inclusion and respect for diversity in any one context. (John Bennett has published some of this information)

An ecological framework is one way to identify what we know and what we have yet to know. This will allow us to target activities in the making a difference continuum – including where raised awareness is appropriate, what kind of stakeholders need to be mobilised and what messages are going to resonate at what time and place. (It would be very

helpful for someone to apply a much more intensive analyses to the ecol of social inclusion and respect for diversity .
If you do please send that to us at Bernard van Leer Foundation – for our next volume of ECM!)

The etiology of discrimination

Having some background in health promotion I want to offer another framework for categorising our understanding of this issue area . It is the etiology -- or the way in which exclusion and discrimination take hold and spreads.

I borrowed this concept from the health sector because it is synonmous with the way one might trace the risks, preventative strategies, symptoms, outcomes and treatment of any infectious disease.

In our scoping of the literature on social inclusion and respect for diversity we found little, if anything, that contributes to our knowledge of the etiology of social exclusion and discrimination in terms of young children and their families. There is a dire need to investigate and to interrogate *discrimination* as a prelude to making a difference in its reduction.

These are the categories by which epidemiologists investigate the bacteria that cause communicable diseases. They seek to identify the

- Type
- Domain
- Agency
- Intensity
- Form of the bacteria – so they can address the
- Target for action against the infection

The fit is not exact and there is some overlap, but generally, it may be helpful to consider these categories as a guide to knowledge generaton about the underlying issues of social exclusion and discrimination. Here are some questions which might be helpful in identifying what we know and need to know

Type: How do we classify discrimination and exclusion - is it gender, religious, ethnic economic, geographical or combinations? Are there culmulative effects on those who come from more than one stigmatised, discriminated against group?

Domain: How are barriers to social inclusion manifest in any given context? Is exclusion manifest in service access, or in community environments (including media, services, police)? How direct and overt are the barriers? Are they entrenched or purposefully not addressed in policy? Is the problem with implementation of policy?

Agency: Who is perpetuating the exclusion or discrimination? Is it at the state, legal, instituion, setting or individual level?

Form : How is the social exclusion or discrimination expressed – through open hostility or by making invisible?

Intensity: How do we measure intensity and frequency of social exclusion and discrimination?

Target for action: How, where and with what tools can the 'infection' be stopped?

These potential knowledge gaps take me to the third and final section of this presentation

A way forward? The *Joint Learning Initiative on Children and Ethnic Diversity (JLICED)*

The JLICED is a way of enhancing knowledge base and mobilising stakeholders regarding one aspect of social inclusion and respect for diversity. It is a way to fill in the gaps and facilitate the communication between the levels/systems of the social inclusion and respect for diversity ecology.

A Joint Learning Initiative is an established process which involves a pool of international researchers working independently but collaboratively on diverse aspects of one problem. This is done through a network of learning groups (LGs), also known as *communities of learning and practice*. (See www.jlica.org for more information about another JLI, similarly funded by Bernard van Leer Foundation.)

The JLICED addresses programs and policies which interrogate the experience of children and ethnic diversity.

For the JLICED, we are using the terms 'ethnic' and ethnicity in their broadest sense:

Ethnic' and 'Ethnicity' are used in a generic sense to refer to people's group identities, based upon one or more of the following: race, nationality, religion, language and/or shared history.

Six learning groups (LGs) will be established, each is co-coordinated by a senior academic and a key player in a programming, funding, policy or similar role. The LGs establish their own research and publishing agenda - but are coordinated and supported from a centralised secretariat (in this case Centre for Educational Research, Queens University Belfast) Thus while the LGs work independently on their own 'piece' of the research puzzle, they liaise and communicate through the secretariat to create a research agenda which is greater than the sum of its parts. The LG coordinators meet every six to eight months in a symposium to present and collate findings, support and consult with each other and to prepare manuscripts. The secretariat organises and funds these symposia and assists with and/or develops vehicles for publication of papers and manuscripts. An international conference is held at the end of the three-year JLI cycle, coinciding with the launch of the final report (most likely in book form). The next 3-year cycle involves empirical research to test and refine findings from Phase One. (See diagram of the processes of the JLI below)

Some of the outputs of the JLICED will include

- Multiple publications and reports from each learning group
- JLICD Final Report:
 - a JLICED Website and communications platform
 - National and regional practitioner workshops
 - International conference – in late 2009
 - Policy briefs
 - Training materials
 - Tools for program design, implementation and evaluation
 - A global advocacy and communications campaign.

The hope is that the JLICED will move us forward towards understanding and the *disease of discrimination and stigma* for young children, families and beyond and that it will serve an advocacy role for support in terms of policies, programs and resources towards the alleviation of that (social) condition.

Conclusion

In the past decade rapid social change on a global scale along with wars and conflict mean that nearly all children in the world are growing up in situations of diversity, many experiencing discrimination, stigma, exclusion and alienation. Coincidentally, there has been growing concern about young children's acquisition and internalisation of prejudices and stereotypical attitudes towards differences. Some excellent research and analyses have provided important critiques of existing programmes and have identified a range of innovative and promising approaches to promoting mutual respect and understanding among young children³.

But many factors remain unknown: We still need to know the etiology of exclusion and discrimination in different contexts, who and what contributes to solutions and what obscures progress, what roles are played by parents, professionals, institutions, media and beyond. To address our hypothesis we need to uncover the pathways between interventions and environment in the early years and long-term social cohesion.

The JLICED and conferences like this one are taking important steps towards making a difference. Two quotes seem to capture the mission

Disrupting and challenging inequality is fraught with contradiction and complexity ... quick solutions may appear to many as a way of masking or obscuring difficult issues - but ultimately they will not provide a sufficient means for effectively dealing with issues of diversity and difference (Robinson K. and Jones Diaz. 2007 p174)

³ See, for example, Siraj-Blatchford, 1994; Creaser & Dau, 1996; Brown, 1998; Millam, 1998; MacNaughton 2000; Grieshaber & Cannella, 2001; Connolly, 1998, 2004).

In an upcoming paper to be published by Bernard van Leer Foundation, Philip Gammage writes

We learn our value and our agency from others... We construct our attributions of causality..from experience and the degrees of consistency we note in others...We learn what is of value in the company of others... In short, humankind is the supremely 'social' animal; dependent and interdependent, the gatherer, the communicator, the copier, the initiator, the creator of cultural change, the reflective thinker (Gammage, P. in press, Bernard van Leer Foundation)

The nurturing of the empathetic, sensitive and reflective individual and making space for affirming social interactions is what social inclusion and respect for diversity in early childhood programs are about!

Our challenge is to acknowledge and embrace the complexities and to unpack the needs so that we can target support, join forces raise awareness, and promote social inclusion and respect for diversity as fundamental component of the political agenda for early childhood.

Originally I had ended this presentation by stating and with that thought - of promoting the political agenda - I eagerly turn over the podium to our next speaker, but our political speaker is not here. So instead I will repeat my opening statement:

As all speakers here have reminded us - we need to be careful about reducing diversity, discrimination, oppression to single indicators –to define these as monolithic issues which call upon simple or unilateral solutions – which somehow can be addressed through early childhood programs – that is simply not realistic. And we need to be aware of the limitations of our sphere of influence – and the need to unpack the nuances and find appropriate partners with whom to – walk together for justice. We need to understand – as Michel admonished – that we might actually be creating otherness by using ethnic rather than economic or other structural forces to frame inequality. We are not individually or collectively going to change the 400 years of colonial oppression and racism. **BUT there is** knowledge we can call upon, strategies we can employ and processes for collaboration which will influence change – and can move us towards *making a difference*.

The challenge rests not with the politicians who could not make it today – and who might always be sidetracked by issues of perceived greater importance: The challenge rests with us.

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