

## **WORKING WITH INCLUSIVE IDEAS TO ENRICH EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT**

**Salisu Ahmad Sidi Ali**

*Department of Early Childhood Education*

*Sa'adatu Rimi College of Education, Kumbotso, P.M.B. 3218 Kano, Kano State, Nigeria*

### **Abstract**

*This paper seeks to map out inclusive approaches to early childhood education as a strategy to achieve the goal of education for all. To do this, it provides, the following outlines – why inclusion within the early years education, provide a definition of inclusive early childhood education, goals of inclusion-what are they, strategies of integrating inclusion ideas into early childhood education. The paper, then, closes with a recommendation that inclusion ideas will create a high expectation for every child to reach his/her full potentials.*

### **Introduction**

As gains continue to be counted on Millennium Development Goals and Education for All Goals; a lot is still according to Dickens & Denziloe (2004) needs to be done on early childhood development within inclusive perspectives. Inclusive education according to Nind (200) is a process that involves the transformation of schools and learning centres according to Kugelmass (2004) to cater for all children. It aims to eliminate all schooling barriers promoted through exclusion that is a consequence of negative attitude (Isioma & Samuel, 2012). It is in this context that this paper seeks to map out inclusive approaches in early childhood education as a strategy to achieve the goal of education for all. The paper started with the need for inclusion in early childhood education. It is then after outlining some elaborative features; it, then, closes with a recommendation that inclusion ideas will create a high expectation for every child to reach his/her full potentials.

### **Why Inclusion within the Early Years Education**

At the apex of inclusive education is the question of right to education, pronounced in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1949. Of equal importance is the right of children not to be discriminated against, as stated in Article 2 of the Convention on the Right of the Child (UN, 1989). A logical consequence of this right is that all children have the right to receive the kind of education that does not discriminate on grounds of disability, ethnicity, religion, language, gender, capabilities, and so on. Inclusive early childhood education is a means according to Ainscow (1999) of bringing about personal development and building relationships among individuals, groups and nations. The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (1994) asserts that:

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*“Regular schools with inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discrimination, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all”.* (Salamanca Statement, 1994)

### **Definition of Inclusion within Early Childhood**

Making a clear elaboration of what the field is will provide insights to professional within early childhood education and special needs education to bring about new concepts and elaborate further on what is on the ground. It is with this in mind that a definition of early childhood inclusion provided by (DECNAEYC, 2009) was used; it says:

*“Early childhood inclusion embodies the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every infant and young child and his or her family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society..... The defining features of inclusion that can be used to identify high quality early childhood programs and services are access, participation, and supports”.*

(DEC/NAEYC. 2009).

The above definition provides a clear context on which to put inclusion within early childhood development as adopted Nigerian Policy on early childhood. That education for *all* is the concern of *all* through *all* meaningful approaches.

### **Goals of Inclusive Early Childhood Development**

The goal for inclusive education according to Lewis and Norwich (2005) is to widen access to education and to promote full participation and opportunities for all learners irrespective of his/her conditions and it is an “all-in-all” support and engagement for all (ACEI, 2008)). Summarizing the goals Dickens and Deziloe (2004) state, that, the goals concern with:

1. Widening participation to increase educational opportunity for all learners;
2. Education and training in inclusive education for all teachers;
3. Organizational culture and ethos that promotes inclusion;
4. Support structures organised so as to promote inclusion;
5. Flexible resourcing systems that promote inclusion;
6. Policies that promote inclusion; and
7. Legislation that promotes inclusion.

### **Supportive Inclusive Ideas to Early Childhood**

1. **Diversity:** Diversity is about all the ways in which people differ and in how they live their lives Lindon (1998).

2. **Equity:** Equity is related to securing all children’s rights to, within and through education so they can realise their potential and aspirations (Peters 2003).
3. **Access:** Providing access to a wide range of learning opportunities, activities, settings, and environments according to Miles (2002) is a defining feature of high quality early childhood inclusion.
4. **Participation:** Social-emotional development and behaviors that facilitate participation are critical goals of high quality early childhood inclusion.
5. **Supports:** In addition to provisions addressing access and participation, an infrastructure of systems-level supports must be in place to undergird the efforts of individuals and organizations providing inclusive services to children and families (Persona Doll Training 1998).

### **Inclusive Strategies for Early Childhood Development**

Strategy is a term that refers to a complex web of thoughts, ideas, insights, experiences, goals, expertise, memories, perceptions, and expectations that provides general guidance for specific actions in pursuit of particular ends. Examples are:

- **Needs Identification:** A needs assessment is a systematic approach to studying the state of knowledge, ability, and interest, attitude of a defined audience or group involving a particular subject to understand what has and what remain to be done.
- **Understand the Stakeholders:** Effective stakeholder engagement enables better planned and more informed policies, projects, programs and services (Balaban, 1992).
- **Engaging with Stakeholders:** Effective stakeholder engagement aligns with several of the commitments under the three pillars including:
  - effective collaboration and partnerships
  - knowledge sharing and collective learning
  - aligned and effective processes
  - transparency
  - a capable and empowered workforce.
- **Develop policy**  
 Policies — including laws, mandates, regulations, standards, resolutions, and guidelines - provide the foundation for effective school programs, practices, and procedures. School policies establish parameters in areas such as:
  - The goals and expected outcomes of health and physical education programs;
  - Students’ and staff members’ rights and responsibilities;
  - Infection control guidelines; and
  - Accommodations available to students and staff.

Sound policies also contribute to a positive school environment and provide reassurance to students, staff, and the community.

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- **Disseminate the policy**

The term “dissemination” Lewis & Norwich (2005) has become a familiar part of our vocabulary within higher education and it is easy, therefore, to talk about doing it without having a real grasp of what it means, “to disseminate” or what it is you are trying to achieve by doing it. It is helpful to think about dissemination in three different ways:

- Dissemination for Awareness: It can be assumed that, at the very least, you wish people to be aware of the work of your project. This may be useful for those target audiences that do not require a detailed knowledge of your work but it is helpful for them to be aware of your activities and outcomes
- Dissemination for Understanding: There will be a number of people that you will need to target directly with your dissemination – early childhood administrators, professionals, other significant figures in ECD.
- Dissemination for Action: “Action” refers to a change of practice, ideas, plans or strategies resulting from the adoption of new approaches due to policy review.

- **Work with the policy**

Communicating the policy to stakeholders in inclusive early childhood development circle is another route through which inclusive practices will be institutionalized into it. This is achievable as you make it available for more inputs and amendments.

- **Monitor and evaluate**

Monitoring and evaluation is an essential procedure for the continuous professional enrichment of any program.

## **Conclusion**

Successful inclusive early childhood programs depend considerably on early identification, assessment and stimulation of the very young child with special educational needs. Early childhood care and education programs for children aged up to 6 years are meant to promote physical, intellectual and social development and school readiness. Programs at this level should recognize the principle of inclusion and be developed in a comprehensive way by combining pre - school activities and early childhood health care. There is also a need to create high expectations for every child to reach his or her full potential, develop a program philosophy on inclusion, establish a system of services and supports, revise program and professional standards, achieve an integrated professional development system and promoting accountability systems.

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