01-Casey-4002-CH-01:Casey-4002-CH-01 05/01/2010 5:01 PM Page 1

1

Understanding inclusive play

The focus here is not solely on disabled children but on establishing an inclusive ethos to the benefit of everyone in the setting including staff, parents and members of the community of the setting. This chapter introduces some key ideas underpinning inclusive play, including:

- **exploring children's play rights**
- **what we mean by inclusive play**
- **the value of inclusive play**
- **the particular benefits of good early years play experience for disabled children and those children 'on the margins'**
- **inclusive play and our youngest children**
- **making change: getting started**
- **a voice for children**
- **national play policies and strategies in the UK.**

Exploring children's play rights

A first step to forming our strategies for supporting inclusive play is to bring a sharp focus back on to our understanding of play itself. By coupling the words 'inclusive' and 'play', we have created a phrase open to interpretation and some unpicking of what we are aiming for is vital. A definition of play has long been elusive; it's very ambiguity is a subject of study in itself (Sutton-Smith, 2001). Play's resistance to definition remains a challenge with which academics, policy-makers and practitioners grapple.

On top of that, most of us work in teams which bring together people from a number of professional and cultural backgrounds which, with our individual values and beliefs, have a bearing on how we 'read' and respond to children's play.

Since play was recognized in article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989, our thinking on play has taken on new dimensions; this required a shift to acknowledging that every child has a right to play from viewing play as at best a need but commonly as a frivolous way to pass time, a luxury not afforded by every child.

The UNCRC articulates the rights of children and the standards to which all governments must aspire. The Convention is the most universally accepted human

01-Casey-4002-CH-01:Casey-4002-CH-01 05/01/2010 5:01 PM Page 2

rights instrument in history, ratified by the UK government in 1991 and at the time of writing by all but two countries in the world. By ratifying, governments have committed to protecting and promoting children's rights and have agreed to be held accountable for this commitment before the international community.

Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.
2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

Article 31 contains the apparently similar words rest, leisure, play and recreation. In their discussion of implementation, Hodgkin and Newell suggest that play is 'arguably the most interesting in terms of childhood, in that it includes activities of children which are not controlled by adults and which do not necessarily conform to any rules' (2007: 469).

This quickly takes us to the heart of the challenge; if play is not controlled or directed by adults, in which ways can we support play to happen without by our very involvement distorting it? This problem finds many echoes.

A government review in the UK took play to mean 'what children and young people do when they follow their own ideas, in their own way and for their own reasons' (DCMS, 2004: 9). This attempted to capture the concept of self-direction in play but has also been described as representing a 'significant field of tension' (Lester and Russell, 2008: 16). While on paper policy statements may project a central message that control of play should remain with the child, in practice the extent of support for enabling or even permitting the broad spectrum of playtypes and behaviours that might emerge when play is 'self-directed' is open to question.

Practitioners of necessity navigate these tensions while working with children on a day-to-day basis reconciling, if they can, the premise of play being controlled by children with requirements for planned or purposeful play and early learning goals. (Two examples with a slightly different emphasis, the first from England and the second from Northern Ireland, are given below.) Can we unravel planning for play and planning play, in a way with which we are content? There is no easy answer to this.

All the areas (of Learning and Development) must be delivered through planned, purposeful play, with a balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities. (DCSF, 2008a: 11)

Children should have opportunities to experience much of their learning through well-planned and challenging play. Self-initiated play helps children to understand and learn about themselves and their surroundings. (Interboard, 2006: 6)

01-Casey-4002-CH-01:Casey-4002-CH-01 05/01/2010 5:01 PM Page 3

As a starting point, it would be fair to say that the guidance within this book is aimed firmly at supporting play that is 'freely chosen, personally directed, intrinsically motivated behavior that actively engages the child' (NPFA, 2000: 6), a description of play widely accepted by play practitioners if open to criticism that there are, inevitably, exceptions to the rule.

By extension, the book is concerned with supporting children to reach the point where this is the way they are able to play if that is what they choose. For many children – including some disabled children – at least some of the time free play of this sort is unlikely to happen in a way that is satisfying to them without some additional support (direct or indirect) from peers or informed adults.

There is a strong link between article 31, the right to play, and article 23 of the UNCRC, the right of disabled children to 'enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community' (UNICEF, 1989). The General Comment on the rights of disabled children issued by the UN makes this link explicit.

> The attainment of full inclusion of children with disabilities in the society is realized when children are given the opportunity, places, and time to play with each other (children with disabilities and no disabilities). (UNCRC, 2006: 19)

Play is so much a part of children's day-to-day lived experience that it represents at a very fundamental level the extent to which they participate in their communities. Restricted opportunities for play can be seen as a form of discrimination (UNCRC, 2006: 5). Concern was expressed in the 2008 report to the UK government (UNCRC, 2008: 12) that disabled children continue to face barriers to enjoyment of their rights, highlighting access to leisure and play as a current and ongoing issue.

In the UK, the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 amended the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to make unjustified discrimination by education providers against disabled pupils, students and adult learners unlawful. The Disability Discrimination Act 2005 took things further, giving most public authorities a positive duty to promote disability equality. And going back to the UNCRC again, article 29 lays out the agreement undertaken by governments that education should be directed to 'the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential'.

At a practice level, putting rights into practice demands that we ask ourselves questions. What do we really mean when we say our settings are 'inclusive', that we are responding to 'the right to play' or the right to be included? What does it suggest about the direction of our practice and goals or the philosophy of the setting? Does it reflect the experience of the children who use the service or setting? Do they *feel* included?

The following short exercises can be used to explore what play and inclusion mean in our settings. They should involve as many different people as possible from the community of the setting and can be adapted to use with children as a way of exploring their experience of inclusion and play (suggestions are given below).

01-Casey-4002-CH-01:Casey-4002-CH-01 05/01/2010 5:01 PM Page 4

Activity

What we mean by inclusive play

'Inclusive play' is now a commonly used term but the meaning may be neither clear nor shared. This group activity aims to spark discussion and reflection. It is important that the facilitator of the activity sets a non-judgmental tone emphasizing that they are not looking for right or wrong answers, but rather some discussion of different points of view. The facilitator should be familiar with the thinking behind medical and social models of disability and about integration and inclusion. Information is given below which could also be used in handouts to support this activity. The discussion can be set up in one group – up to perhaps a dozen if people feel comfortable with that – or smaller groups of three or four.

- Copy the 'Discussion starters' below, or create your own (suggestions below) and cut into separate slips of paper. You may prefer to remove the sources so that these don't influence the direction of discussion.
- Lay these slips face down. A member of the group should pick one at random and read it out. One member of the group can be designated as the reader if that is more appropriate to the group.
- This person begins the discussion by sharing any thoughts or questions it brings to mind and other members of the group are encouraged to join in the discussion.
- Use as many or as few of the discussion starters as seems appropriate.
- One person could be designated as a recorder to note common themes or key phrases and questions on large sheets of paper as they arise.

Discussion starters

- Memories of having a really good time together are a resource on which to draw – a history of being happy together.
- For inclusion to work, children should get one-to-one support to prepare and support them into mainstream. They do need lots of help and preparation first.
- I just want to be with who I want to be with, hanging out really.
- Inclusive play means enabling each child to play and express themselves in their own way and supporting them to play together when they wish to.
- I know that inclusion will probably never happen as everything gravitates towards what's normal and what's acceptable and what we can all relate to. People like to pigeon-hole other people and if they are different, they think 'oh, they don't fit in'.
- Disabled children are not just the responsibility of specialist disability services. All services need to ensure that disabled children can take part in everything they do. (The Inclusion Charter – source online: www.edcm.org.uk/inclusioncharter)
- Inclusion means a deep commitment and awareness that there is a very wide range of human behaviour and understanding of the world; that there is a respect for different perceptions of life.
- In a school setting, inclusion can mean that the total environment has meaning and is accessible to everybody: that it is safe; that it is clear what everything is for; that it is functional.

01-Casey-4002-CH-01:Casey-4002-CH-01 05/01/2010 5:01 PM Page 5

- If the children are all just absorbed in their own thing, I don't think that is inclusion.
- True equality of opportunity is about making sure that everyone has the power to help shape the society they live in. (Source online: www.equalityhumanrights.com)

Note: all discussion starters without accompanying sources originate from the Play Inclusive (P.inc) Action Research Project.

Further discussion starters specific to your setting can easily be created:

- look for definitions of inclusion and inclusive play in your own or other organizations' policy and guideline documents, in statements from disability, play or children's rights organizations, or on the Internet
- ask children, parents and colleagues for their definitions. Try using a dictaphone to quickly capture some views. This is a nice way to adapt the activity for children
- gather visual discussion starters such as photographs, pictures from newspapers or video clips.

Further discussion points

- Does the discussion suggest a common understanding or definition of 'inclusive play' within the group?
- How does this compare with the practice in your setting?

Medical and social models of disability

The medical and social models of disability reflect two ways in which disability is understood. They influence how people react to, think about and act towards disabled children and adults.

The medical model views disabled children as having an illness or problem that needs to be cured. This illness or problem is a hurdle which they need to get over in order to take part in 'normal' society. They require help from experts who are in the best position to determine what will be the most suitable treatment for them. If they cannot be cured, then they should be cared for. This attitude is very pervasive in many societies and lots of us have unconsciously absorbed aspects of it.

The social model of disability was developed by disabled people as a challenge to the medical model. The social model recognizes that some people are disabled by barriers in society that exclude and discriminate against them, for example through attitudes that favour non-disabled children and adults, through physical barriers and in the way we organize things. Let's have a look at a few examples of each of these from children's settings.

- the assumption that all disabled children will require one-to-one assistance, thereby allowing children to be excluded on the basis of not being able to afford enough staff

01-Casey-4002-CH-01:Casey-4002-CH-01 05/01/2010 5:01 PM Page 6

- having equipment stored in cupboards with written labels only, with the consequence that some children are prevented from making independent choices because they do not know what equipment is stored where
- entrance criteria which insist that only children from the local school can attend the provision, thereby excluding children who attend special schools or units.

Removing these attitudinal, environmental and organizational barriers is a priority within the social model. It is also the approach taken in this book.

Integration or inclusion?

The terms ‘integration’ and ‘inclusion’ are sometimes used interchangeably and often very loosely. Integration tends to suggest that disabled children can be part of a children’s setting if they are able to adapt to it. This places the emphasis on ensuring the child is equipped with particular skills or has achieved particular standards so that he or she is able to fit in.

Inclusion has a broader meaning, placing the onus on our settings to ensure that we are open and prepared to welcome children with a range of abilities, backgrounds and personalities as a matter of course; that we respect the right of the child to be there and expect to provide a high quality experience for all.

The move from a concept of ‘integration’ towards ‘inclusion’ reflects a progression in the thinking about the rights of disabled children in society and about the roles of settings and institutions such as schools.

Quick actions for change

- Obtain a copy of the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and look for the rights relevant to play and inclusion. Look out for child-friendly versions to stick up on the walls.
- Graffiti children’s rights as slogans around your setting.
- Dedicate some shelf space to inclusive play resources in your staffroom, office or parents’ meeting room.

Activity

The value of inclusive play

> Playing allows children to develop a sense of well-being, develops their emotional responses, and improves their interpersonal skills. It involves exploration and creativity, helping children think in a flexible manner, developing the creative process, language skills, and learning and problem solving skills. Playing in natural spaces is particularly beneficial as these are open to more opportunities for play. (DCSF and DCMS, 2008: 10)

01-Casey-4002-CH-01:Casey-4002-CH-01 05/01/2010 5:01 PM Page 7

Play of course has crucial and wide-ranging benefits to children and the people around them, both benefits in the here and now and those that they will carry with them into the future. Taking as a starting point that children do need to play and benefit from it, this activity looks in particular at the benefits of 'inclusive play' and what is gained through shared experiences of play, perhaps with some support.

Using Figure 1.1 as an example, on a very large sheet of paper, draw out rippling concentric ovals with the headings: Children, The Setting, The Community of the Setting and Wider Society. Don't add in the rest of the text.

- The facilitator asks colleagues to write down all the benefits of inclusive play they can think of on sticky 'post-it' notes.
- Each idea goes on a separate note.
- Each person sticks up their notes onto the appropriate space within the concentric ovals.
- Similar and related benefits are then grouped together and headings are created for these.
- This provides a rich picture. The group looks for any gaps, contradictions or discussion points.
- The facilitator helps to review and sum up the activity.

Following the discussion, you can use the material by sticking it all down firmly or making it into a poster and displaying it in a public area to prompt more discussion.

The particular benefits of good early years play experience for disabled children and those children 'on the margins'

When considering inclusive play, we often start by thinking about children who are identified as needing help because of an impairment or additional support need. However, when looking at and then developing our provision for play, it's often noticeable that there are children who flit around on the margins and are rarely engaged in play or play with others. These children often gain enormously from changes within the environment or sensitive support. The message from inclusive play is that it makes it better for everyone.

Play is crucial to children's experience of a setting (settings in which play is the primary objective or one way of working). Whether or not the staff are pleasant, the buildings adequate, the programme varied, if the time spent at play with peers is unsatisfactory then that can set the tone for the child's whole view of the setting. The work of hospital play specialists illustrates this well; good medical treatment isn't enough for children to feel positive about their spells in hospital and children's opportunities for play will aid their adjustment, coping and recovery.

Child-mediated play (particularly outdoor play, school playtime, free play with low levels of adult intervention) is especially important to how included children feel. These are the opportunities for children to have a place among peers and take part in the particular culture of play in that place. Children's play culture can have its own language, fads and phases, values, even its own history and geography as seen in the play landscapes children create and recreate for themselves.

01-Casey-4002-CH-01:Casey-4002-CH-01 05/01/2010 5:01 PM Page 8

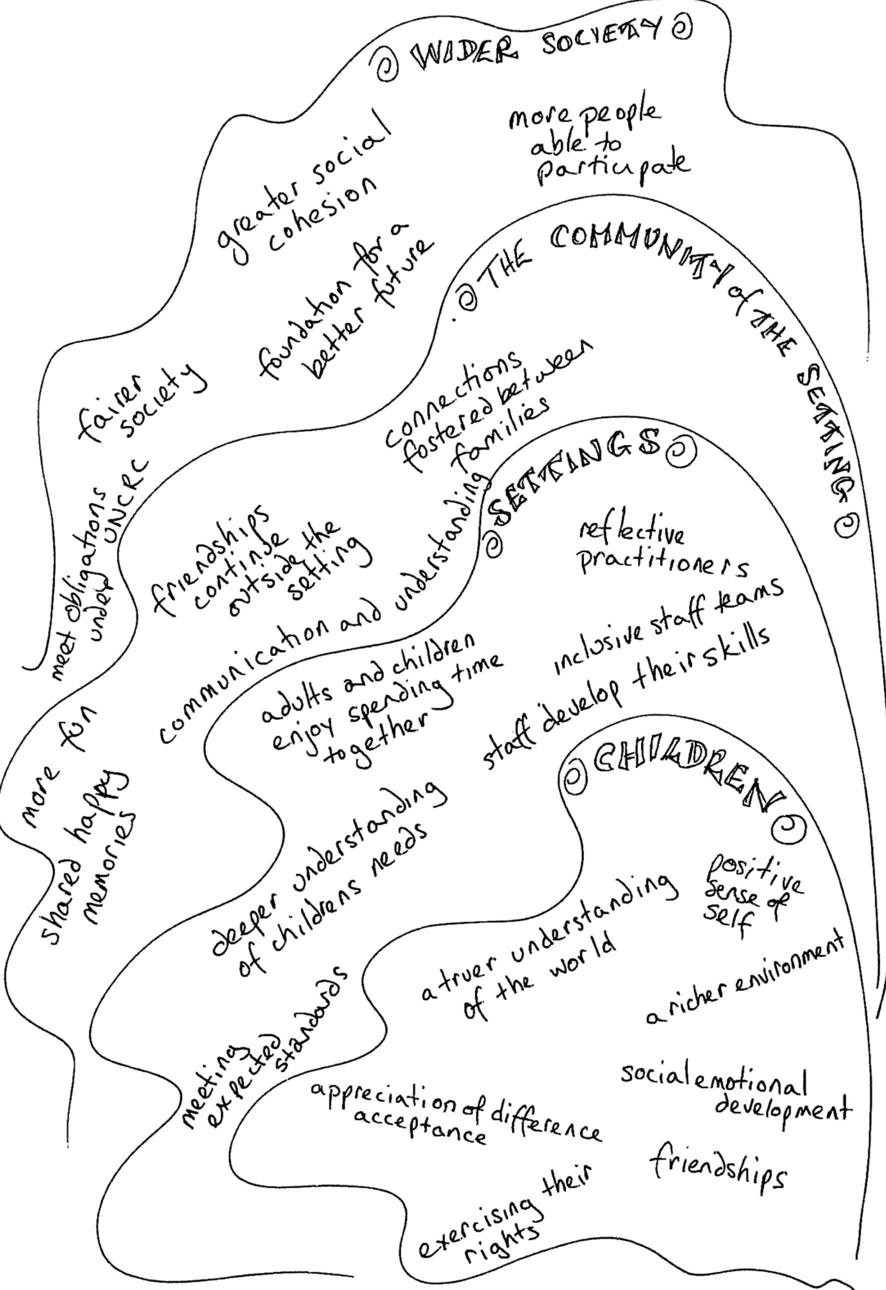

Figure 1.1 The benefits of inclusive play

Acceptance by peers is significant in the development of a child's sense of self and personal identity. We can all remember from our own childhoods how quickly children see through well-intentioned social engineering by adults so child-mediated play is particularly important. In play, children may have to 'take on the world' and learn about relationships, how they work and are negotiated including through teasing, falling out, making up, loyalty, quarrels, shifts in groups, jealousy and so on. These are real experiences that all children have to tackle and learn about.

01-Casey-4002-CH-01:Casey-4002-CH-01 05/01/2010 5:01 PM Page 9

When discussing inclusion with children, friendship is usually at the centre. Friendships developed through specific attempts to provide for inclusive play can be carried over into other parts of their lives. A friendship developed at playtime or in a playscheme has the possibility of developing into play in the children's local community or homes. These are the types of experiences that are stifled before they even have a chance to develop, when children are not able to access local play provision.

Play provokes wide-ranging language and communication and through inclusive play, children will hear flexible use of language by peers including slang, word play and hilarious rude words. There is enormous motivation to use language in play and flexible use of non-verbal communication can often be more readily exchanged in the context of play. Play also offers opportunities for behaviour and traits to be appreciated in a way they might not be elsewhere – taking daring risks, making rude noises, mimicry, silliness, jokes or telling unbelievable tales.

Many children with disabilities have few areas in their lives in which they feel able to exercise real choice and control. It may be because of change or disruption in their lives, because they spend a great deal of time having treatments or therapy, or simply because they have to rely on adults to get them around. Play can be a process through which they can regain a sense of control or work through difficult or challenging experiences. Play environments which have elements that can be manipulated, and that can cope with processes of creation and destruction, are of great importance to children. (See Chapter 2 for more on play environments.)

Risk and challenge are integral parts of the play experience and it has been said that children with disabilities have an equal if not greater need for opportunities to take risks, since they may be denied the freedom of choice enjoyed by their non-disabled peers (Play Safety Forum, 2002). Children need opportunities in their play to learn to judge their own capacities and extend them, explore limits and to experience excitement, nervousness, courage, daring, thrills and real spills. (Chapter 5 looks at this in more detail.)

Ultimately, it is in the nature of play that there is no right or wrong. It is therefore an arena in which children with additional support needs can be themselves, making their own meaning, gaining their own satisfaction from play in their own way and at their own pace.

This presents a particular challenge to adults who find it very difficult to gauge the level and type of support to provide without intruding and therefore disrupting the very dynamic they hope to support. It is this particular challenge that is a central issue in providing for inclusive play and we look at it in more detail in Chapter 3.

Inclusive play and our youngest children

> Inclusion starts early. From the very earliest age, disabled children should have the right to play and learn with other children, enjoying all aspects of life and friendship that other children do. (The Inclusion Charter – source online: www.edcm.org.uk/inclusioncharter)

01-Casey-4002-CH-01:Casey-4002-CH-01 05/01/2010 5:01 PM Page 10

Finally, in this section, a mention of rights and our youngest children. The early years are a period of amazing growth and change with mobility, communication and understanding developing rapidly. Children are building relationships and emotional attachments and interests and abilities are emerging. Early childhood is also a critical period for realizing children's rights. In 2005, the UN children's committee issued a General Comment on implementing child rights in early childhood with objectives including to encourage recognition of young children as social actors from the beginning of life, with particular interests, capacities and vulnerabilities, and of requirements for protection, guidance and support in the exercise of their rights (UNCRC, 2005: 2).

> Babies and infants are entirely dependent on others, but they are not passive recipients of care, direction and guidance. They are active social agents, who seek protection, nurturance and understanding from parents or other caregivers, which they require for their survival, growth and well-being. (UNCRC, 2005: 8)

In our work with children, beginning with a perspective of young children as 'active social agents' helps to inform practice and the experiences we make available, with a view to responding to children as they are now. Their need to do what their one-, two- or three-year-old self needs to do rather than preparing them for what they might need to do later, is paramount.

Making change: getting started

All teams need to invigorate and refresh their ideas from time to time: the dynamics of play change with different groups of children, adults, seasons, and spaces and places to play. Practitioners with distinct professional roles may want to consider the benefits to be gained within their area of concern and therefore how they see their role, with others, in providing for or supporting inclusive play.

The following quick exercises are always useful:

- Swap roles: a teacher could take the place of a playground supervisor for the day; a playworker from the after school club could come into the nursery class; an occupational therapist could make playground observations. It is easy to fall into set expectations of children and ourselves. Swapping roles can give insight into children's needs, abilities and personalities in a different environment, allowing them to surprise us.

- Make a change in the environment and watch what happens. Are new possibilities opened up? Does it influence patterns of play or groupings of children? There are numerous ways to do this quickly:

  - Throw a tarpaulin over the branch of a tree.
  - Introduce music: hide a CD player in some bushes and play intriguing music from it; ask some music students to set up in a corner of the play space and play classical music during the play session; set out some sturdy percussion instruments.
  - Hang billows of ribbon from a doorframe.

01-Casey-4002-CH-01:Casey-4002-CH-01 05/01/2010 5:01 PM Page 11

  - Make a trail around the play space with chalk, stones or shiny paper.
  - Make a cave with tables and dark cloths.
  - Leave out a pile of big cardboard boxes.

- Observe: spend a bit of time quietly in the play space observing the children at play as unobtrusively as possible. You could look out for different types of play, groupings of children, interactions, preferred places, preferred play materials, use of the whole space.

- Check out your observations with the children at an appropriate moment that doesn't disrupt their play. Make it positive: 'I noticed you all doing something really interesting when you were in that corner … can you tell me about it?' Children are often really keen to talk about their play provided you are genuinely interested and listening, and not seeking to intervene, direct or judge.

- Encourage other members of the team to observe play at the same or different times. Compare your observations. It is interesting how differently adults can interpret the same play situation having seen it from different angles or with different levels of involvement.

- Recognize that you cannot be invisible in a play space and that you may find children are curious to find out what you are up to. One useful strategy is to involve them in what you are doing. Ask them to go off and survey their friends for you on what they are doing. A little notepad and pencil in their pocket will give them a role.

Case study

We are very aware of the importance of the outdoors in a child's development and therefore our outdoor space is an integral part of our nursery. We have a small, enclosed nursery garden which we developed with the help of parents, creating an area we felt was rich in learning and experiences.

We were upset when we were unable to access our play area due to building work in the school. For a two-week period, we took our children up to the primary school field to play instead. The children loved the big open space where they could run freely, play with balls and hide and seek. It was a great opportunity for us to observe children's play in a way we cannot do in the confines of our nursery garden. For example, we picked up on one child's difficulty in running which enabled us to focus further on his development and how we can best support him; we could see that some children had little experience of being in a wider space from their initial lack of confidence and ideas about how to play out there; some children were very competent at using whatever they found – twigs and grasses etc to play with; the school's play apparatus posed a bigger physical challenge in comparison with the nursery garden and it was great to see the children's perseverance.

As a result of our observations, we now aim to take the children to the big field more frequently in future.

01-Casey-4002-CH-01:Casey-4002-CH-01 05/01/2010 5:01 PM Page 12

A voice for children

Listening to and engaging with children, acting on their recommendations, following up on the views that children have expressed through behaviour, actions and words are important in all children's settings. These processes, anchored in the children's day-to-day experiences, form the basis of an ongoing dialogue.

A culture of participation is important to the development of inclusive play. Inclusion is an ongoing process, and in inclusive play we need to be sure we are continually acting on our observations and responding to individual needs within groupings of children.

Each child's experience is unique. For children with disabilities or additional support needs, their perception of the world and experience of it may not be like our own and we cannot act on assumptions or on assumed models of ages and stages.

> The Convention (on the Rights of the Child) envisages a change in relationship between adults and children. Parents, teachers, caregivers and others interacting with children are seen no longer as mere providers, protectors or advocates, but also as negotiators and facilitators. Adults are therefore expected to create spaces and promote processes designed to enable and empower children to express views, to be consulted and to influence decisions. (UNICEF, 1989)

Figure 1.2 illustrates some of the Why? Who? When? Where? How? and What? of encouraging participation.

Use Figure 1.2 as the basis for a 'mind map'; take the whole figure or redraw it as separate circles on separate sheets of large paper. Ask colleagues to elaborate on the points in each circle, adding for example discussion and action points, barriers or opportunities.

There are many ways to find out more about children's own experience of play and play environments. Quiet observation of children's play (informed by knowledge of the children themselves, of play and of children's needs) is one of the most fundamental. Other suggestions include:

- Chatting to the children and asking about their likes, dislikes and preferences. Informal chatting is often very fruitful and shouldn't be overlooked as a method of consultation.

- Actively building up the children's experience of expressing themselves through creative opportunities in the setting. Always have art materials freely available for the children to use. Visit galleries, exhibitions, theatres, watch street theatre, hold workshops, stage mini-performances – all of these will help the children to build up their language of expression.

- Encouraging the children to interview each other about their views. Using a dictaphone lends an air of authenticity to being a 'reporter' and means the child doesn't have to be able to write replies down. A schedule of questions can be drawn up with visual prompts as well as text.

- Spending time with children in their special place or doing something they really enjoy allows you to explore their preferences more deeply and shows them you really are interested in the things they like to do. For example, you

01-Casey-4002-CH-01:Casey-4002-CH-01 05/01/2010 5:01 PM Page 13

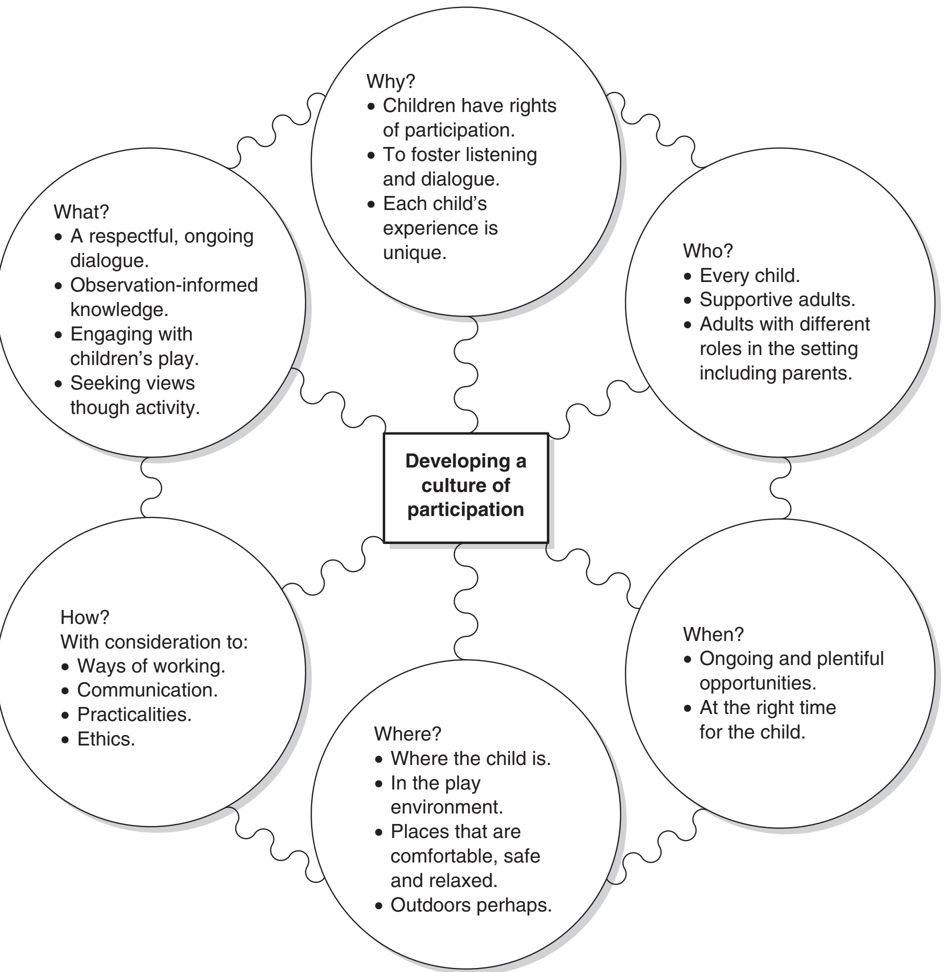

Figure 1.2 A culture of participation supports inclusive play

could sit quietly with a child (if they allow) in a spot they enjoy and share in the sensory experiences that the child gains (the sound of the wind, the flickering of light through moving leaves, the sensation of being in a little enclosed space, for example). The children might share with you otherwise overlooked details that make the space special to them, such as a hollow in a branch or a gap in a hedge to peek through.

- Creating the story of playtime: what playtime is like for me. Ask children for their play and play experiences as though they were telling a story: 'I went out to play and …'

National play policies and strategies in the UK

In 2002, the Welsh Assembly Government published its play policy. The *Play Policy* and *Play Policy Implementation Plan* (2006) are available from the Welsh Assembly Government (see http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/publications).

01-Casey-4002-CH-01:Casey-4002-CH-01 05/01/2010 5:01 PM Page 14

> The Welsh Assembly Government believes that: play is the elemental learning process by which humankind has developed. Children exhibit a behavioural imperative and instinctive desire to play. It has contributed significantly to the evolutionary and developmental survival of our species. Children use play in the natural environment to learn of the world they inhabit with others. It is the very process of learning and growth, and as such all that is learnt through it is of benefit to the child. (WAG, 2006: 2)

The English *Play Strategy* was published in 2008 as a 'commitment from the Children's Plan' (and is available from www.teachernet.gov.uk/publications):

> Our vision for 2020
>
> 1.1 The Play Strategy is key to achieving our ambition to make this the best place in the world for children and young people to grow up. Play is a vital ingredient of a happy and healthy childhood. (DCSF, 2008b: 11)

The Play and Leisure Policy Statement for Northern Ireland was published in 2009 by the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) (and is available from www.allchildrenni.gov.uk/index/play-and-leisure-policy.htm):

> The vision for play is: to recognise, respect and resource play is to recognise, respect and value childhood. (p. 3)
>
> The aim of the policy is to establish play within a policy framework that will place high value on play and leisure as an essential element in the development of children's lives, families, communities and society.

(At the time of writing, Scotland does not have a national play policy or strategy – see Play Scotland for the latest information at www.playscotland.org)

Summary

Once inclusive play starts to happen and people experience it working (even in small steps), it gathers momentum.

Being left out of play is one of the first signs of a child having difficulty. Children can become increasingly isolated over time despite other attempts to include them. When play is seen as a central way in which we ensure all children feel a valued part of the setting (since it is so important to them), then it supports the feeling of connectedness.

The ethos (the disposition or character) of a setting gains much from inclusive play. Most importantly, shared experiences which are authentic, memorable and happy contribute to a shared identity which each member of the community of the setting takes with them.

- It is important to spend time as teams exploring what we mean by inclusive play and how that relates to the practice in our settings.
- The model of inclusive play is informed by a number of things: the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the application of laws and our personal and professional values and principles.

01-Casey-4002-CH-01:Casey-4002-CH-01 05/01/2010 5:01 PM Page 15

- An approach informed by these allows us to start to reflect on whether the children in our settings are getting as much out of their play as they might – enjoyment as well as development – and whether all the children are really included.
- Children's experience both of inclusion and of play are unique and each child holds considerable knowledge and a range of experience.
- Participation and inclusion cannot be separated – inclusion is absolutely integral to any attempt to foster participative cultures based on children's rights.
- The benefits of inclusive play are wide-ranging and long-lasting, both in different and in common ways among members of the community of the setting.

Further reading

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