

# *Playing, creating, learning together: Arts-based pathways towards inclusion*



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# Overview

- Inclusion in early childhood – creating, learning and growing together
- Disability and inclusion
- Q and A

## **Break**

- What can the arts bring to an inclusive early childhood classroom?
  - The value of creativity
  - Why creativity is inherently inclusive
- Coming together with music
- Music and inclusion - why? How?
- Puppetry and inclusion
- Visual arts and inclusion
- Bringing it all together - Arts and early childhood curriculum
- Conclusion
- Q and A

# Inclusion:

- Is more than just being there (NOT assimilation)
- Is about EVERYONE – acknowledging, welcoming and catering for all forms of diversity (including disability)
- Allows everyone to feel a sense of belonging
- Is better for everyone
- Is a right of all children



# Inclusion

- Inclusion is about citizenship – everyone feeling that they belong and have rights in the same learning community
- If children are not together, then for those who are excluded the implied message is – you're not welcome here, you're not good enough to be here
- The ultimate impact of not feeling included is that children will not develop a positive sense of identity, as a person or as a learner



# The need to belong

- We all need to feel a sense of belonging
- Connectedness and the need to feel included and valued is essential to being human
- Children who experience disability often encounter barriers to belonging. These may relate to social attitudes and provisions as much as, or more than, their impairments
- Barriers to belonging have an impact on identity, self-esteem and sense of belonging for people who experience disability

(Connors & Stalker2003)

# The ongoing journey of inclusion:

- Involves values, policies and practices
- Early childhood can lead the way
- People who experience disability are the biggest minority group in the world, and the one most often excluded from key aspects of life



# Disability/ impairment

According to the World Health Organisation, disability involves one or more of:

- Impairments
- Activity limitations
- Participation restrictions

It is possible to have an impairment and not experience activity limitations or participation restrictions

**This all depends on environments, people and attitudes**

# The medical model:

- Disability = impairment
- Disability exists within a person
- Disability is a tragedy
- Disability needs to be 'fixed'

This model can lead to people with disabilities being seen as a problem



# The social model:

- Recognises that the medical model has led to isolation and discrimination (human rights are not respected)
- Recognises that social attitudes and environments are disabling, rather than impairments in themselves
- Argues that people are disabled by barriers imposed by society that stop them from being actively involved in many aspects of life

# A social-relational model:

- Is based on the belief that disability does not reside within a person
- Sees the lived experience of disability as a combination of impairment effects and physical and social environments which present barriers to participation and inclusion
- Advocates for the elimination of these barriers



# Barriers to doing

Anything that prevents participation (external to the child)

- Physical access – can be minimised by provisions such as ramps, modified play equipment, smooth paths, sound modifications
- Communication – can be minimised by visual images, sign language, alternative communication technology (apps & other devices), translation
- Participation – moderated pace or appropriate equipment

# Barriers to being

Anything that conveys a negative message about the value of a person because of impairment

- Can be caused by low expectations, inadvertently hurtful or discriminatory language or exclusionary actions
- Can affect self-image, confidence, self-esteem, which can then magnify impairment effects

# The myth of 'normal'

- Often unconsciously, we are all often influenced by the idea that there is a 'normal' child, and thus by the idea that we expect children to in some ways be 'the same'.
- When we meet a child who is way outside our unconscious beliefs about what is 'normal', then we will think that there is something 'wrong' with that child or something that we will need to change.
- The child is like a 'square peg in a round hole'.

# Ableism

- The idea that being 'able-bodied' or 'normal' is superior to being disabled. A view underpinned by medical model assumptions
- Ableism is like sexism or racism – often complex, subtle and pervasive. It leads to stigma and discrimination
- Example: we don't see children who experience disability in TV shows, advertising, many stories, toys, etc.



# Questions for today:

- Are children who experience disability 'broken' and in need of 'fixing', or whole but different?
- What are the barriers that children who experience disability and their families encounter in early childhood settings?
- What are the barriers educators face in working towards inclusive early childhood education?
- How can the arts minimise barriers to inclusion in early childhood settings?



# Busting the myth! Diversity sparks creativity



‘Creativity is the ability to challenge, question and explore. It involves taking risks, playing with ideas, keeping an open mind and making connections where none are obvious’





(Hands On Scotland, n.d.)

# Characteristics of creativity

- Open-ended play, involving experimenting and risk taking
- Being open-minded to new possibilities and connections between objects and ideas
- Flow - focused attention, deep engagement in the moment
- Satisfaction, sense of achievement during creative processes and perhaps with the outcomes

(Duffy, 2006; Robson & Rowe, 2012; Van Hoorn, Nouroot, Scales & Alward, 2014).

# The benefits of creativity for learning

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| • Experimenting and risk-taking supports positive dispositions for learning |    | • Confidence, persistence, resilience     |
| • Openness to new possibilities and connections                             |    | • Problem-solving, flexible thinking      |
| • Flow  |   | • Ability to focus/ concentrate           |
| • Sense of achievement  |  | • Positive sense of identity as a learner |

# Creativity: Valuing difference/ challenging 'normal'



Children as song-writers: One child's fascinations inspired other children's creativity

What are some barriers to inclusion you face as an educator?



# Questions?



# BREAK



# PART 2



# The creative arts as a tool for inclusion



# Children's natural artistry

- Right from birth, we experience the world through our senses.
- It is part of being human to derive aesthetic satisfaction from particular things we see, hear, touch, taste or smell.
- The arts provide many of these sensory and aesthetic experiences.
- Arts experiences, including music, should be an important part of early childhood and education for all children (Nutbrown, 2011).

# United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

(1) That every child has the right 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) That member governments 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 (United Nations 1989).

# Poll 1

*“Without music, life would be a mistake”*  
(Nietzsche)



Photo: Mana

## *Sing hello song*

Let's sing hello to everyone

Let's sing hello to everyone

Let's sing hello to everyone

And how are you today?

Accompany with drumming, turn-taking with an instrument /  
toy or key word signing

# *Rum a tum tum*

- Rum a tum tum
- Rum a tum
- It's Amanda's turn to play on the drum



*Amanda is playing on the drum*

Amanda's playing on the drum,  
On the drum, on the drum,  
Amanda's playing on the drum  
And then she.....STOPS





# Guiding behaviour/ supporting self-regulation through music

- Transitions – songs for moving a group of children from one area to another
- Songs to ‘rehearse’ expected behaviours – around meals, hand washing
- Songs to name emotions
- Turn-taking
- Valuing each other’s contributions
- Making decisions/ choices
- Stopping at the end of an activity/turn

# Greeting songs

- Inviting everyone to gather together
- Creating a feeling of being welcomed – including everyone's names
- Building a sense of belonging

- An example:

*Hello everyone* (uke/ beat & rhythm actions)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j2FPLLIAkYM>

*What's the weather?*

# World Awareness

What is the weather?



How does it feel outside?



What should I wear today?



# *What's the weather?*

What's the weather?

What's the weather?

What's the weather like today?

Is it sunny, is it cloudy, rainy or windy out today?

It is ....., it is ....., it is ..... Out today

That's the weather, that's the weather,

That's the weather out today.

(Tune: Oh My Darling Clementine)



How can we respect every child's agency and meet diverse needs when gathering for group musical experiences?



# Songs/games

- *Snail*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OqhoGdG0QZI>

- *I'm a train that goes*
- *Walk and stop* (Ella Jenkins)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=08HjcbYfnJA>

- *Do what I'm doing*

# Using recorded or live instrumental music

- Create a calm, happy, focused mood – choose some music and move with students – allow children to respond in their own ways (perhaps use scarves/ ribbons/ seated movement/ lying down and closing eyes). Try using music as a background for painting or drawing.
- If anyone in your setting plays an instrument, invite them to play for the children, and encourage children to move/ respond as they wish.
- Be strategic in when background music is played – don't use it all the time. **Why???**
- If possible, find moments for quiet listening to silence/ ambient sounds. Use light when appropriate (eg. low light).

# Singing

Sing without recorded accompaniment

Why????



# 5 Reasons to sing without a recording:

- to communicate more directly with children
- to be responsive to their spontaneous creative ideas
- to adjust the pace and pitch of singing: often recordings are too fast or too low in pitch for very young children
- to enable children to hear and process a song more successfully without many layers of accompaniment
- to provide an alternative musical experience to the electronic, busy, beat-heavy music and singing which are common in our lives: on TV, radio or online in homes and public places.

# Making music together – inclusive music pedagogy

- Working with children's innate musicality
- Using their interests and strengths
- Encouraging creativity
- Encouraging social connections
- Valuing all contributions - 'presuming competence' (Biklen & Burke, 2006)



# Research story 1

*Children were using big blocks in the outdoor area to build a house. Lara noticed it and went inside. I started singing 'Jack in the Box'. This is a game that we often play in the end of group time as a transition to the next activity. Lara really enjoys participating in this game and when I started singing the song, she immediately understood that the house of big blocks was the box and that she was 'Jack'. We played together for an extended period and this started grabbing other children's attention. M. and another child stood observing and Lara called them - 'come co-o-ome'. They went into the 'box' and Lara started singing, with my help. After that, I backed out a bit and let the children continue their game, only assisting with the turn taking that appeared to be challenging for some (Cara, pedagogical documentation).*

## Research story 2

*'He [Aiden] gave me the instrument eventually and he looked at me and I wasn't sure what he wanted but then I just started playing one of his favourite songs and I was beating the drum to it and singing, and he started clapping exactly in rhythm and started to copy and it was really amazing, and he kept on giving me different instruments. He did this a couple of times, just from himself, like starting it'.*

*'I started with the ABC song, because I know he likes letters and it must have been a good choice because he straight away knew the rhythm to it and was really happy about that'*

## Research story 3



*Today we used the Cajon for our 'Welcoming song', because this morning Georgio had shown a great interest in it. He had been sitting on it and singing 'We will rock you' (his favourite song from Queen). He gave 2 beats with his heels and 1 beat by tapping small cymbals together. He had a good time and because he performed this song in a very entertaining style, some other children joined in by singing along*

# Integrating music and drama

## Old Gray Cat

Folk song



2. The little mice are creeping, creeping, creeping,  
The little mice are creeping through the house.
3. The little mice are nibbling...in the house.
4. The old gray cat comes creeping...through the house.
5. The little mice all scamper...through the house.

The old grey cat is sleeping





# Creative musical play



# Inclusive pedagogical strategies for group music

- Establish a predictable routine – but find some ways to introduce surprise/ novelty for children who need this
- Allowing time – lots of repetition
- Accept and value all contributions (unless unsafe) – avoid right/wrong responses
- Slow down your natural tempo when singing/ moving
- Accept all ways of engaging, including staying on the sidelines, or even quietly doing other things
- Find gentle, nurturing ways to invite unwilling or shy children to join with the group – work to find out what the barriers are and what are their special interests



# Adaptations to include all communication and learning needs and preferences

- Visuals
- Modelling
- Options
- Resources that everyone can use (different motor skills capabilities)
- Adaptation for sensory preferences (avoid over-stimulation/ distress)
- Non-verbal possibilities
- Peer-to-peer scaffolding/ support
- Vocalising without words
- Echo/ call & response games (songs and vocal play and instruments)

# Diverse opportunities for movement



# Puppetry in early childhood

- Imagined characters, pretending to be alive
- Valuable means for children to show/ express feelings
- Shy children may feel more confident to interact with a puppet than with an adult
- Can be a tool for self-regulation/ behaviour guidance, eg. for modelling appropriate behaviour for children
- Children may identify with the experiences and feelings of the puppet
- Allow children to step into another's shoes (supporting empathy)

# Tips for using a puppet

## How to bring your puppet to life

- Give your puppet a name
- Look at your puppet when speaking to him/her  
(If you watch the puppet, the children will too)
- Ensure your puppet is angled to make direct 'eye' contact with the children
- Allow your puppet to speak/gesture to the children  
(use your voice/ no need to hide this)
- Practice to learn the full range of possibilities for animating your puppet

- A link for you to refer to for further tips:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ERsIEFGwKgE>

# Make your own puppets



# Making puppets with children

- Use puppets with the children first, so that they have gotten to see the different 'personalities' of each puppet
- Have a range of simple materials available, so that each child can create a character, not just an artefact





# *Nurturing Early Learners* (MOE, 2012)

<b>Aesthetics and Creative Expression</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Enjoy art and music and movement activities</li><li>• Express ideas and feelings through art and music and movement</li><li>• Create art and music and movement using experimentation and imagination</li><li>• Share ideas and feelings about art and music and movement</li></ul>
<b>Discovery of the World</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Show an interest in the world they live in</li><li>• Find out why things happen and how things work through simple investigations</li><li>• Develop a positive attitude towards the world around them</li></ul>
<b>Language and Literacy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Listen for information and enjoyment</li><li>• Speak to convey meaning and communicate with others</li><li>• Read with understanding and for enjoyment</li><li>• Use drawing, mark making, symbols and writing with invented and conventional spelling to communicate ideas and information</li></ul>
<b>Motor Skills Development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Enjoy through participation in a variety of physical activities</li><li>• Demonstrate control, coordination and balance in gross motor tasks</li><li>• Demonstrate control and coordination in fine motor tasks</li><li>• Develop healthy habits and safety awareness at home, in school and at public places</li></ul>

# Creative arts in the Singapore curriculum

## **Learning goals:**

- Enjoy art and music and movement activities
- Express ideas and feelings through art and music and movement
- Create art and music and movement using experimentation and imagination
- Share ideas and feelings about art and music and movement

(MOE, 2012)

## **The challenge:**

**How can we support all children to reach these goals together?**



# Learning and development examples:

- Use a variety of lines, colours, shapes and textures to express ideas and feelings in their drawings, paintings, constructions and craft work
- Move in various ways to express ideas and feelings
- Experiment with using the voice, objects, different parts of the body and percussion instruments to create sounds

(MOE, 2012)

# *Index for Inclusion Early Years*



- Producing inclusive policies
- Evolving inclusive practices
- Creating inclusive cultures

## **Indicators of inclusive practice**

- Activities are planned with all children in mind
- Activities encourage all children to communicate
- Activities encourage the participation of all children
- Activities develop an understanding of differences between people
- Practitioners encourage a calm atmosphere based on respectful relationships

# Visual arts

- <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/tyc/feb2014/process-art-experiences>
- What is art? What does it mean to an artist?
- What does art-making mean to young children?
- Does art-making need to lead to an artefact? Must it be permanent?



# Art as.....

- ... a language
- ... expression
- ... imagination



# Art for inspiration – Joan Miro





# Wassily Kandinsky



# Visual art materials

- How can we provide a range of art-making materials to suit each child's preferences and capabilities?
- Consider:
  - Time: When?
  - Space: Where?
  - Materials: What? How?
  - People: With whom?
- What is the educator's role in visual arts play in early childhood?



# Poll 2



# Creativity as a tool for inclusion

Celebrating difference – seeing it as a GOOD thing

The arts can contribute to Disability Equity Education

- Recognition of our shared humanity
- Regarding disability as a positive aspect of human diversity
- Exploring differences and ways to include them

# The arts, identity and expression

- An arts-rich environment gives children **diverse tools and contexts** for communication and expression
- An arts-rich environment is also potentially inclusive, when educators recognise that **not all children will give voice to their thoughts, feelings and knowledge in the same ways**
- **Children's 'voices', as an expression of their identity**, will reflect their individual interests and preferred means of expression, as well as their individual abilities, strengths and challenges
- **A child who does not use the dominant forms of language** may share her thoughts and feelings through the arts

Thus, **no child is silenced.**  
Silencing can be a serious  
form of exclusion, for  
children without access to  
the dominant language of  
their early childhood setting



# Final reflections

- I used to think .....
- Now I think .....



All the best with your inclusion journeys  
May they be creative and nurturing



Thank you



# Questions?