

Discuss how childcare workers can combat the effects of oppression, racism and discrimination, making reference to the relationship between personal and professional values.

“The kind of society we create emerges from the kind of education we provide”
Deconstructing special education and instructing inclusion – Thomas & Loxley

If this is true, in a discriminatory context, it is essential that childcare workers operate under a good practice is an anti-discriminatory practice’ ethos, to prevent a thwarted society.

Inequalities do exist within society and minority groups can experience particular types of oppression and disadvantage. These inequalities operate through the use of language, stereotypes, individual’s behaviour and policies and include discrimination on the basis of: gender, age, race, economic background, religion, culture, language, disabilities or sexual orientation.

Workers are in a pivotal position between children and their tenets. They have a position of care, control, power & oppression. Which aspect comes first is very much down to the actions of the worker.

It is natural to have an opinion about different behaviours and groups within society. However, good carers have to disassociate their personal beliefs from work ethics and learn not to bring their prejudices into practice.

A child, very early on in life, builds up his self-perception through the way others treat him. According to Millner (1993) children as young as 3 have already attached values to skin colours and see ‘power’ people as white skinned people.

Discriminatory attitudes in behaviour, language and actions must not be shown so that children can grow up determining a positive self-attitude.

Infants are adept at interpreting signals. They learn through watching and imitating. Workers are powerful impressionists. It only takes one sneer, one ‘paki’ comment, for words to empower.

As we see parents’ attitudes being passed down, the same happens with workers.

It is vitally important that workers realise how influential they are in a child’s life as it is not until we develop ourselves as young adults that we start to question and judge our beliefs.

Minors learn quickly that we live in a richly diverse and complex world. Through a completely inclusive care setting, they will learn that all people and groups are equally important.

As a result of an anti-discriminatory policy, children will understand that all people should be recognised as individuals.

The development of self-esteem as a child is vital to his well being throughout life.

Discrimination and oppression lead to a damaged and undervalued child, as we saw in the video ‘Class divided – The eye of the storm’.

No matter what the workers’ views, however discriminatory, they MUST be left outside the classroom to give every child a fair and equal opportunity.

A child that develops in an oppressive situation will never learn, achieve or excel.

The way workers imagine children to behave, they will actually behave. This is ‘Self-fulfilling prophecy’. Children who have already been labelled by the colour of their skin, are part of subtle discrimination and will already have the odds stacked against them. This is according to Ashmore (1970), who also says “If they don’t try they cannot fail”.

A poignant extent of this was seen again in the video from 1984, 'A class divided – The eye of the storm', where academic capability was drastically changed within 24 hours, when pupils were discriminated against.

An awareness of anti-discriminatory practice is necessary in order to prevent being an involvement in the problem.

The political slogan "*If you're not part of the solution you must be part of the problem*" is very true. A work practice, which does not take into account discrimination in any form, cannot be seen as good practice, no matter how good other standards and aspects are. Children receive influential messages about roles allocated to them within society. This is due to colour, race, gender, but also to anyone perceived as a minority.

Workers should be aware that their behaviour sends out strong messages and make an effort to combat their own discriminations before they can tackle such problems within schools and nurseries.

Since 1989, stated in the Children Act – *Childcare provision must take into account; religious, racial, cultural and linguistic needs or beliefs* .

A workers practice, which fails to recognise its pupils needs, runs more risk of doing a disservice than a service.

Children should be aware of differences but instead of focusing upon those, it may be more beneficial to look at shared commonalities between the children.

The main principles that workers should take into consideration with an anti-discriminatory practice are:

- Equal treatment for all people
- Protection from derogatory stereotypes, myths and abuse
- Protection of religious and cultural diversities
- Equality of opportunity

Neil Thompson

Anti-discriminatory practice should not be restricted to particular groups. Workers should always try to include for example, the old, the hospitalised, gender stereotypes, the disabled and impaired, people with different sexual orientations, races, cultures, behavioural difficulties and mental issues. These are all minority groups.

Instantaneously as we meet new people, we categorise them into identities and groups. We judge by colour of skin, clothes they wear, accent they speak with and even materialistic items such as cars they own.

According to these labelled identities, people are treated differently. Treatment can be detected in behavioural attitudes and thoughtlessness that we are unaware of doing.

However, some, including workers, will be well aware of their expressed prejudices.

The PCS model by N. Thompson, explores many conflicts between **P**ersonal, **C**ultural and **S**ocietal beliefs, for both children and workers. Thompson says that many conflicts occur between professional and personal views, where professional beliefs view equality and the right for equal concerns.

It has been found that although workers believe their treatment of all children is equal, when they were observed it was discovered that in subtle ways they were favouring white children more. They were given greater verbal interaction, more attention and workers used better standards of English.

Culture and cultural beliefs will be the aspect that causes most difficulties between carers and children.

Culture has a large impact on how a child develops and each culture has its own set of values and ways.

For example: In some communities it is strongly unacceptable to let a child cry. They must be picked up and comforted immediately. Western influences urge us to leave the child for a few minutes first. This may be particularly important in an early years setting.

Culture can affect diet and ways of eating, discipline and child rearing issues.

Both parents and workers should make each other aware of conflicting grey areas and try to come to an amicable solution, with the child in mind.

Culture can also affect the way a child learns. If a child has toys and cultural materials that are more appropriate to his norm, it appears that he learns and performs better.

This is highly impacting upon equipment used in care settings with an anti-discriminatory practice that encourages each child to excel.

It is likely between any parent and worker, that there will be differences of opinions. With cultural issues it is important to remember that neither are right or wrong, unless one is harmful to the child. Differences should be openly discussed with emphasis on how they can affect and better the child.

Within culture, is religion. At present within the UK, Christianity is the dominant religion. Strict religious beliefs incorporate principles on dress and dietary issues that affect everyday lives, which we may be un-aware of. Hindus for example, may not eat cow, as it is a sacred animal to them. Certain religions may "interfere" with the smooth running of the day. Religions have very different beliefs, The Middle East is a good example where these have clashed violently. It is important that the worker teaches all children that not one race, culture or religion is better or more intelligent than another – UNESCO (1950). They should also have a brief understanding of what each religion incorporates, and different procedures so as not to offend or discriminate. I wonder how many teachers would be aware that a Buddhist child could not take part in a dissection, as they are not allowed to kill or harm. Although a minor detail, this can make all the difference to a good practice.

Workers should also realise that calendars are not the same the world throughout. Rastafarians follow a 13-month year, which starts in September. As children are taught months of our year, they should be given an understanding of other countries beliefs and ways. Even if it is not what the worker believes, they should have a basis of knowledge. Rastafarians also have to wear hats covering their locks. A worker who might, for example, pull off his hat and say, "*We don't wear hats inside. It's disrespectful*" would offend and oppress this child.

Once children are informed of differences, they will accept with grace the fact that John has to wear his hat inside and Fabian cannot eat sausages. This will open up the mistrust, hostility and jealousy that comes with miscomprehension.

While small children contend with language comprehension, the impact of visual images is more pervasive. Images have a stronger, lasting effect than words and can portray who belongs in our society.

There should be positive images of children and families involved in everyday activities on posters, in books and toys that portray a racially diverse society.

Children should not receive negative images about one country, more than another.

Example: All African children are poor, hungry and unhappy. They receive enough racial negativity through media sources that make positive images all the more important.

Childcare workers are described by Bennett & Hakenstad (1973) as 'people workers'. A worker's position encourages the communication of information and the sharing of knowledge. It is therefore vital that they communicate the right information that does not prejudice or damage.

There will always exist a difference in personal interests and work ethics, however workers must realise that their positions hold statutory powers and influences. This could lead to problems if the worker uses that power in an oppressive way, or if the worker is not sensitive enough to the issues of oppression.

If a worker is discriminatory, it will affect a child's self-esteem and identity. The child will feel isolated and alienated, they will lack confidence and also the drive for social and educational expectations.

Workers must realise the drastic impact they can have upon children.

In order to tackle such problems, workers must firstly combat their own personal discriminations.

Anti-discriminatory practice challenges own values and a sense of reality. Exposure to such radical ideas can be threatening and de-stabilising to the worker. If not handled sensitively, such new conceptual ideas might bring much resistance and alienation and more prejudice.

There are no simple or easy answers to a non-discriminating practice.

Firstly workers could set out clear, ground rules that define acceptable behaviour and what contributes to a positive, learning environment. Anti-oppressive behaviours should be an integral part of daily care routine.

Workers could develop a planning cycle, so they can see which activities have benefited high children with different play experiences.

They should not only incorporate special festival days but should do it on a daily basis to include and integrate all children.

Early years settings should reflect a mixed race societal presence to show that they are working towards equality.

The children may benefit from being read stories and having group discussions on issues raised, such as: racism or sexism and allow them to express their views.

If racist comments are made, the worker must tackle the problem immediately to avoid hurt, humiliation and a lasting damage.

The victim must be supported with care and must be taught of the severity of the crime. As must the perpetrator, who should be present at all times and witness the hurt caused.

Apologising is not enough. He must be made to understand, through clear and gentle explanation that he is wrong and it is unacceptable within society. Perhaps the parents could be present and made aware of the care setting rules.

It may help to centre activities around the early years curriculum. This will ensure they learn a broad range in a positive manner.

Children should always be allowed to explore and play, with toys, in art, with dressing up, or even acting out. They should not be made to conform to gender or race roles.

In Art, it is beneficial for all children to have flesh coloured tones so they can create a realistic representation of themselves.

If workers do cooking classes with the children, they should take into account dietary issues and fasting periods. Using a different country's recipe every week would possibly introduce children to new and exciting foods, prepared in different ways.

Body language is important but again cultures differ on spacial concepts. For some cultures standing close and touching is forbidden, as is eye contact with adults.

Workers should consider proximity with both children and their parents.

Language is also vitally important so as to not portray wrong images. For many children however, English is their second or even third language. They may not have the vocabulary of a child learning one language. They need opportunities to practise their language skills and need positive encouragement.

Workers should refrain from speaking for a child and encourage them to use words they know.

Some children may have 'silent periods'. Workers should not take this as a sign they are 'low', as they are listening, taking in and understanding the language. They will speak when they are confident.

Every measure should be taken to ensure positivity, such as smiles, praising and hand clapping.

Workers could have music workshops, where styles from countries around the world are played. Eg: flamenco, reggae or jazz.

It should be an enjoyable occasion where children are allowed to freely express themselves. They could be shown costumes that are associated with the styles.

Voices and instruments could also be used.

This could be another way of including parents. If education is to begin at home, they too must understand that an anti-discriminatory practice is the future.

If care settings are going to be successful in an anti-discriminatory practice, they need a radical process for change.

They need to:

- Look at existing resources and materials to see what messages are portrayed.
- Learn from others. Involve parents and outside speakers.
- Look at the role models within the setting. What message does an all white staffing give?
- Monitor and improve existing ways.

If workers are committed to providing a completely anti-discriminatory/oppressive care setting, they should try following these points, set out by Rosalind Millam in Anti-discriminatory practice.

- Respect and value all children as unique individuals
- Provide opportunities for all children to explore their identities
- Not use derogatory, discriminatory or negative language, talking about certain groups.
- Have resources with positive images for all groups in society, not just children in the nursery.