Chapter 2
Diversity and Pedagogies in Educational Transitions

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This chapter presents issues regarding diversity and inclusion from different perspectives, involving various aspects of children and young people's learning and development related to educational transitions and practices. Several factors and conditions are highlighted as part of the explanation of how diversity can be understood and addressed pedagogically in different educational transitions. The chapter takes into account important issues on meeting diversity from an inclusive perspective with regard to the variety of cultural, socio-economic and individual conditions relating to young children's learning and development.

2.1 Introduction

All children have individual backgrounds, and, during their learning journeys from preschool to compulsory school, they can encounter different educational environments with new cultures, rules, norms and relationships (Corsaro and Molinari 2006; Flum and Kaplan 2012). These journeys may pose challenges and difficulties (Fabian and Dunlop 2006).

Peters (2014) emphasised the importance of recognising diversity within groups, with the focus being placed on observing different transitions and taking into account the complexity of children's learning journeys from early childhood to later school years. Diversity includes different cultures, social backgrounds, ethnic origins and languages. Other aspects of diversity include children's development in

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different pedagogical settings, socialisation and identity development (Flum and Kaplan 2012; Lago 2014). The competence of teachers appears to be of great value in order to be able to meet children's needs successfully (Dockett and Perry 2009). It is thus valuable to look at inclusive schools from the perspective of different pedagogical ideas and traditions (Göransson 2006).

An ecological approach to a child's development (Bronfenbrenner and Morris 2006) makes it clear that children's individual experiences in different educational settings result from interactions between children and adults, requirements and expectations. Children, families and teachers may experience changes in relationships when entering the school context. For some children, entering school may present difficulty and even a feeling of anxiety (Dockett et al. 2011). Therefore, pedagogies are important for creating inclusive environments for all children's needs and requirements and are significant in educational transitions. This chapter introduces issues that are discussed in more detail in the following chapters in this section.

2.2   Diversity in Educational Settings

Diversity is an overarching concept, often used to describe the differences between children in educational settings. This term is also used when discussing the social backgrounds of individuals and their varying cultural, ethnic and language origins, as well as their learning and behaviour-related difficulties (Hjörne and Säljö 2014; Margetts 2002; Nusbaum 2013; Petriwskyj 2010). Other aspects of diversity include children's development in different pedagogical settings, socialisation and identity development (Flum and Kaplan 2012; Lago 2014). It is clear that the concept of diversity covers more than traditions and cultural expressions (Lunneblad 2006).

In recent years, diversity has been conceptualised as encompassing an increasing range of varied circumstances in relation to the needs and identities of individual children. Valuing these differences is central to promoting and achieving equality of opportunity and positive relations in the teaching and learning environment. The diversity of children in different educational activities can be perceived as either an asset or a challenge. Despite diversity often being associated with positive values, it is not an unproblematic concept (Hjörne and Säljö 2014). In other words, the term can be discussed from different points of departure and perspectives. One of the problems associated with discussions about diversity is the question of who decides or defines the differences and on what grounds (Lahdenperä 2011). The term can therefore be understood in different ways; it could be based on notions that are conceptualised in discussions about children in different educational environments, such as preschool and school (Markström 2005). The ways children are discussed and perceived influence how they are received (Hacking 1999; Harwood and Allen 2014; Mowat 2010).

Despite its potentially positive meaning, the term 'diversity' is often associated with problems and difficulties. There are different circumstances to be considered

when exploring this issue. The ways children's differences are viewed can be linked, during various periods, to society's actual ideals and attitudes towards deviation. During the course of history, different terms have been used to represent the concept of diversity. What was regarded at the beginning of the twentieth century as child-rearing problems or moral 'aberrations' are increasingly becoming seen as phenomena or conditions related to social factors or as states of ill health or syndromes (Hellblom-Thibblin 2004). The ideals that emerge during different periods can affect people's views and, thereby, understanding of differences and diversity.

Another concern is the way children's different preconditions for learning acquire significance in the transitions from preschool to the different levels of compulsory school. All children, with their individual backgrounds, need to be provided with opportunities in preschool and compulsory school to develop and feel the joy of learning and overcoming difficulties. Hellblom-Thibblin (2004) argued that knowledge and understanding about children's different abilities and experiences can contribute to a variety of educational measures on both an individual basis and at a more general organisational level.

2.3 Educational Transitions and Pedagogical Approaches

Teaching professionals, parents and children's perceptions of the transition period are of great importance, as are the clear gathering of information, effective communication, a responsive environment and inclusive pedagogy for all children entering into an educational setting (Dunlop et al. 2008). The term 'transition' can be understood as a phenomenon 'involving a range of interactions and processes over time, experienced in different ways by different people in different contexts' (Dockett et al. 2014, p. 3). The transitions from a home environment to a preschool environment and then to formal schooling are important events in a child's learning journey (Ainscow and Miles 2008; Garpelin 2014). Moving to the first year at school is also an important educational transition for children (Einarsdóttir 2006; Sandberg 2012) and can have consequences for future transitions in school (Dockett et al. 2011). Knowledge of the variation in children's needs is important for developing different pedagogies in educational transitions (Dockett and Perry 2009; Peters 2014).

Transitions to school can be complex. In school settings, children of various backgrounds come together. Peers and Fleer (2014) emphasised the value of understanding how group affiliations or the sense of belonging to a group can alter and vary for a child in relation to transitions from preschool and first grade in primary school.

Teachers' knowledge and pedagogical strategies are important for supporting successful transitions to school (Petriwskyj et al. 2014). The ways in which children with various conditions are received, and the opportunities created for their participation in different groups, are important in developing a sense of belonging (Ackesjö 2014). While transition can be a point of stress and vulnerability for children and

families, it can also be a potential tool or opportunity for change (Fabian 2007). Transitions can be related to specific events or substantial roles or identities in a society (Garpelin 2003). Several studies have highlighted the teacher's role in successful transitions and for learning (Dockett and Perry 2004), as well as educational leaders' views on how to work with children who need additional support in preschool and school (Lindqvist and Nilholm 2013).

Educational transitions between preschool and school can pay attention to relationships (Corsaro and Molinari 2008) or processes. Lago (2014) regarded identity, culture, status and role as parts of these processes, while Noel (2010) saw the relationship between the preschool and the primary school, as well as other stakeholders, as important in the transition to school. Thomas and Dykes (2011) called for new practical and relevant proposals to promote successful transitions for all pupils. The importance of a well-established plan for the transition from preschool to primary school has been highlighted in several studies (Margetts 2002; Rimm-Kaufman et al. 2000). A transition-to-school programme may include planned activities or processes in which a number of people collaborate to contribute to a successful transition. Teachers' knowledge is a key factor in educational transitions and hence for educational strategies (Peters 2014).

2.4   A Dynamic Ecological Approach to Transitions

In current research there is consensus that development occurs through the interaction of many different factors. A dynamic ecological approach notes the importance of early transitions for later school success (Dockett and Perry 2004). The ecological systems model (Bronfenbrenner and Morris 2006) provides a framework for understanding multiple levels of influence on children's learning and development, such as those in various educational transitions. According to transitions researchers, there are several interactive variables to consider, such as the interactions between individuals and the contexts in which relationships are created (Corsaro and Molinari 2006; Dockett et al. 2014; Peters 2014):

> The combination of interactions, change and time sets up a dynamic model in which the transition to school can be explored by focusing on the overlapping or intersecting contexts of children's experience. (Dockett et al. 2014, p. 5)

Learning can be regarded as a social activity arising from interactions between individuals and the environment. Research shows that learning, inclusion and diversity interact with one another (Aalsvoort et al. 2012). Learning is a process in which identities are formed, and, during transitions from one school form to another, these identities can change and develop (Mowat 2014). To promote learning and development for all children, it is important to consider their different backgrounds in order to adapt successfully to their needs and hence provide opportunities to experience meaningfulness, comprehensibility and context in their educational lives (Antonovsky 1979; Krasny et al. 2010). In a study undertaken by Mowat (2014),

issues of the stigmatisation of pupils with emotional and behaviour-related problems were reported. The study demonstrated the need for a deeper understanding of the variables affecting children's group identification and interactions with one another, in order to create a feeling of inclusion rather than a feeling of social isolation in educational settings.

The diagnostic process encompasses a form of identification, mapping and assessment, implying a categorisation. To understand the emergence of certain categorisations, Hacking (1999) takes his point of departure from a model he calls the 'ecological metaphor'. 'Ecological' refers to the fact that there are different conditions in the environment that are significant in a categorisation process. The model focuses on medical, biological and social conditions. Based on this perspective, it is likely that many factors are important for learning.

2.5 The Implementation of Inclusion in Practice Regarding Children with Special Educational Needs

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the concept of inclusion in education for children with special educational needs has become widely recognised, and the 'presumption of mainstreaming' entered legislation in 2003 in Scotland, following the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act (Scottish Government 2000). The concept of inclusion focused attention on understanding the needs of children with disabilities and the importance of the responsiveness of the education environment in promoting mental well-being in, and encouraging active participation from, these children.

In several studies, inclusion is described as a process rather than a fixed condition, with the key objective of offering education to all children (United Nations Educational Science and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO] 1994, 2007). The emphasis on inclusion of all children and young people in mainstream schools presents major challenges for all teachers and marks a new agenda in the perception of diversity (Ferguson 2008; Petriwskyj 2010). According to Ainscow and Miles (2008), inclusion implies (based on the purpose of providing effective education for all children and young people) the biggest challenge yet seen for the schools of our time. These authors noted the importance of paying attention to strategies that may be causing barriers in children's learning and participation and of studying the underlying ideas of the approach adopted in inclusive educational practice. They argued that the implementation of inclusion in practice requires a regard for diversity.

Arguments remain about the effectiveness of inclusion of all children with special educational needs, and opinions on how inclusion can be achieved vary widely (Obiakor et al. 2012). An important outcome when examining inclusive practices is the focus on considering the needs of all children in an educational setting and the appreciation that for any child, a need for support can arise from a range of factors.

These may include a temporary illness or transient family circumstances, as well as long-term health conditions. This understanding informs the concept of additional support needs (ASNs) in Scotland, which acknowledges that the need for additional support can arise from multiple situational factors, which may be short or long term in nature and can occur for any children at different points in their experience.

It is important to create opportunities for all children and young people to learn and develop in spite of their diverse backgrounds. Teachers' knowledge of children's different learning conditions and development can contribute to pedagogical strategies to meet the variety of learning approaches of different children. The view of a child's different capabilities may be relevant to the pedagogies to which teachers contribute with regard to inclusion and educational transitions.

2.6   Pedagogies in Inclusive Educational Settings

In an inclusive school, it is assumed that all children and young people, regardless of disability or other potential obstacles, are to be integrated into the school community. Current research shows that the teacher's role is of great importance when working towards achieving inclusion and when working to create learning opportunities for all children. Language and communication are important aspects to consider in studies dealing with transitions from preschool to school (Ackesjö 2014).

A study conducted by Göransson et al. (2015), in which students with intellectual disability and students with no disabilities participated together in lessons in mathematics, showed that children with varying abilities could attend the same class and learn together. This demonstrates the importance of creating conditions for collaboration between different educational settings (Peters 2010). The educational models to which this applies imply both inclusion and peer learning (Vygotsky 1978). Research has also shown that it is relevant to observe children or pupils in their everyday environment in order to be able to gain in-depth knowledge regarding their needs (Westman Andersson 2013). Studies have highlighted the importance of teachers' knowledge of a child as a pedagogical asset in meeting all children's different needs sufficiently and efficiently (Harwood and Allen 2014), especially in connection with transitions and inclusion (Ferguson 2008; Petriwskyj 2010).

Achieving positive results at school is a challenge for many young people, especially those with disabilities. Transitions to school should be based on cooperation between those involved in this process, to ensure that children have positive experiences during their time in school (Ainscow and Miles 2008). A study conducted by Dunlop and colleagues (2008) found that communication between parents and teachers was essential in supporting a positive transition experience for children entering formal schooling. The study also pointed out the importance of creating an engaging and welcoming environment when working towards the aim of successful inclusion for all in the educational setting. This is believed to have a positive impact on the sense of belonging experienced both by the children and their parents. It is clear from the results of a study undertaken by Moen (2008) that the ways in which

teachers invite children to learn are of importance to the children and thereby also for children's continued learning journeys.

Children develop different strategies for dealing with school requirements, which means that their experiences of schooling and learning journeys can vary. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) stressed the importance of the interaction between adults and children in creating opportunities for 'healthy' development. Students' well-being has an impact on their learning as well as on their social development (White et al. 2013). Research has shown there is a need for deeper understanding of what different school environments and transitions could actually mean for various children's learning and development, especially in the early school years. The idea of inclusion is based on understandings about, and moves for, prevention of social isolation. This is something Slee (2013) identified as a challenge. He problematised the way inclusion works in practice and argued that more focus needs to be placed on the way children in need of special additional support can be provided with opportunities for involvement and participation in class activities. He called for the implementation of learning communities that can accommodate all children working in an inclusive school.

2.7 Vulnerability of Children and Inclusive Educational Settings

The number of diagnoses of children with special needs in educational settings, and therefore categorisations of children's needs, is increasing. This has an impact on the way these children are met in various educational transitions. Studies of inclusive practices have highlighted the importance of educators' attitudes and beliefs about disability. Children's behaviour problems are often described in terms of difficulties in concentration, problems in attentiveness or interaction difficulties, but also more specifically as part of a medical condition, such as ADHD, ADD or other syndrome diagnoses (Jacobsson 2004). These diagnostic terms have been prominent in various debates in the educational world during the last few decades (Mooij and Smeets 2009).

Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) (Scottish Government 2016) is an approach that provides support for children and young people and their families through the integrated involvement of all people working with the child. A process of staged intervention is outlined, to enable support for a child to be in place at the earliest point of concern, rather than when a crisis has arisen. Issues remain, however, for supporting all children in reaching their potential and experiencing positive well-being in their school environments. Research has, for example, indicated the vulnerability to bullying of children on the autism spectrum, when attending mainstream educational settings (Humphrey and Hebron 2015).

Additionally, a child's social background and communication environment have been found to significantly affect later language development outcomes and school

'readiness' (Roulstone et al. 2011). In Scotland, for example, a marked gap in attainment has been identified for children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds in comparison to children from more economically advantaged backgrounds (Sosu and Ellis 2014), and this gap widens as children move further through the school system. Household income and parental educational attainment level are two other factors that have been found to be associated with distinct discrepancies in language development and cognitive abilities in children at the ages of 3 years and 5 years (Bradshaw 2011).

Almost 10 % of children in UK schools are reported to have a mental health diagnosis (Layard and Dunn 2009; Scottish Government 2008), and a focus is being placed on supporting children's mental health (HM Inspectorate of Education [HMIE] 2011). Marwick and Sosu (2014) found that the most frequently identified type of ASN for 6-year-old children in Scottish schools was 'social and behavioural' needs, and this ASN was linked strongly to parental perceptions of hyperactivity and difficulties in conduct and peer relationships in the children at the ages of 4 and 5 years. Social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) describe a range of difficulties that children might experience that can be understood to be the result of nonoptimal early experiences, difficult family relationships, lack of effective behaviour management or lack of ways of engaging children effectively within the school.

All of these aspects point to the importance of creating conditions that are effective for supporting all children's development and learning, based on the idea of an inclusive education. Research has shown that despite inclusion, it is difficult to avoid categorising children's abilities, especially those with challenging behaviour, as a basis for special educational efforts (Graham and Harwood 2011).

2.8 The Link Between Inclusion, Pedagogies in Transitions and Diversity

The importance of teachers' pedagogies regarding diversity, inclusion and learning is evident in research today. Teachers have an important role in building knowledge about the different needs of children and creating the prerequisites for diverse learning communities (Slee 2013). It is clear that the challenges and dilemmas related to transitions have a common starting point in the task of meeting the diverse needs of children. Several studies have made connections between inclusion and diversity and children's sense of belonging (Crouch et al. 2014; Leggett and Ford 2015; Mineur 2013; Peers and Fleer 2014). Research has shown the need for a special focus on pedagogical changes associated with transition to school and diversity (Petriwskyj et al. 2014). The learning environment is key in supporting the diverse needs of children, and it should include flexibility of curricular arrangements and appropriate approaches to teaching and learning (Scottish Government 2009). An

inclusive pedagogy approach in classroom practice should respond effectively to the diverse needs of all children (Moscardini 2014).

Inclusion means that all children, regardless of their different capabilities and experiences, should be able to be active participants in a community. Differences are regarded as an asset or as a natural variation among different individuals. The work of developing an inclusive school means deepening the knowledge of obstacles in the environment for those with disability, how these obstacles can be addressed, and highlighting the importance of different types of disabilities in relation to 'inclusive measures' (Bines and Lei 2011). Issues relating to these areas are complex. Studies have highlighted the need for teachers' skills and knowledge about different disabilities and the different needs of children to be developed in order to create conditions that enable successful transitions (Petriwskyj et al. 2014).

2.9 Conclusion

The issues and areas highlighted in this chapter include conditions that are significant for understanding opportunities associated with pedagogies in educational transitions. The question still remains as to how understanding can be deepened to address diversity from an inclusive perspective, regarding individual capabilities and experiences.

Various explanations, theories and perspectives contribute to views about how diversity can be understood and met within pedagogical approaches. The different perspectives referred to in this chapter show the complexity of educational transitions, diversity and pedagogies. Knowledge regarding how to create and evolve relevant pedagogies in different educational transitions is required by those who work with children. In summary, current research highlights both challenges and obstacles based on equivalent aspects and democratic conditions in the inclusive school that children can be faced with during their development.

As presented in this overview, recent research has shown a clear link between children's diversity, ambitions for inclusion and teachers' pedagogical strategies in supporting children in their transitions between the different stages at school. Well-established planning is crucial for giving children the best opportunities to make these transitions a positive experience. In an inclusive school, children's different prerequisites and experiences are of importance and special attention is paid to this in early transitions. Research has shown that a successful transition experience has a positive impact on a child's continued learning journey.

Pedagogies in educational settings deal with attitudes, environmental accommodations, learning opportunities, teachers' knowledge and collaboration strategies. In this section, several chapters have examined the key areas of studies within inclusive criteria, such as cultural identity, poverty, disability and teaching professionals' perceptions of inclusion and diversity. There are many challenges in trying to gain in-depth knowledge, based on relevant pedagogies, for the purpose of creating good conditions for all children in their learning journeys in educational transitions.

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