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A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO

# INTERSECTIONALITY IN THE EARLY YEARS

This free document has been created to support childminders, nurseries and schools in having necessary conversations about intersectionality.

# INTERSECTIONALITY IN THE EARLY YEARS

## CONTENTS

Introduction

3

What is Intersectionality?

4

Understanding Power Dynamics

5

Integrating Intersectional Content

6

Tips to Ensure Inclusion

7

Supporting Racial and Social Justice Movements

8

Tips for Educational Professionals

10

Glossary

11

# A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO INTERSECTIONALITY IN THE EARLY YEARS

## INTRODUCTION

As early years education professionals, we understand that every child is unique and has different needs and experiences. This means being aware of the intersecting identities within our students—their gender identity, racial identity, socioeconomic status, sexuality, language and family structures all effect how they may engage with their learning environment. We must take into account intersectionality when creating inclusive programs for our young learners; this involves looking at multiple aspects of their life experience to better support them in their educational journey.

In this guide we will explore what it means to approach teaching through an intersectional lens while providing a practical guide on integrating intersectional practices within your classroom or school. With greater understanding of our students' lives comes increased opportunity for collaboration between teachers and pupils. As we dive deeper into the concept of “intersectionality” an even brighter picture begins to emerge; one filled with equality, empathy and inclusion for all - no matter who they are or where they come from!

# A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO INTERSECTIONALITY IN THE EARLY YEARS

## WHAT IS INTERSECTIONALITY AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR EDUCATORS WORKING WITH YOUNG CHILDREN?

Intersectionality was coined by the Black female scholar, Kimberly Crenshaw, to describe the overlapping experiences of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression that marginalised individuals face. When it comes to educating young children, it's important for educators to understand intersectionality to create an inclusive and supportive learning environment for all students. By acknowledging how systemic biases affect different aspects of a student's identity, educators can provide holistic support and affirmation to each child. Additionally, teaching intersectionality to young children can help break cycles of discrimination by fostering empathy and understanding among students. It's crucial for educators to recognise that racism and other forms of oppression are not isolated experiences, but rather intersecting systems that affect all aspects of an individual's life.

# INTERSECTIONALITY IN THE EARLY YEARS

## UNDERSTANDING POWER DYNAMICS IN THE CLASSROOM

In order to truly create an inclusive and equitable learning environment, it is crucial to understand the power dynamics at play within the classroom. White teachers, in particular, need to acknowledge their own potential biases and the systemic racism that permeates our society. Hostile classroom environments can often arise when teachers unknowingly label children based on their race, gender, or behaviours. This can lead to a perpetuation of power imbalances and discrimination. By being aware of these dynamics and taking steps to actively combat them, teachers can create a more welcoming space for all students to learn and thrive.

## STRATEGIES TO CREATE A SAFE SPACE FOR MARGINALISED STUDENTS

Creating a safe space for marginalised students is crucial in fostering a positive learning environment. It is important to acknowledge the barriers that these students may face, such as discrimination and anti-blackness. In particular, young children who come from marginalised backgrounds can benefit greatly from a safe space that is free of judgement and prejudice. To achieve this, educators must be empathetic to the needs and experiences of their students, and actively work towards creating an inclusive learning environment. This can involve implementing inclusive curriculum and language, promoting diversity and celebrating differences, and providing resources and support for students who may need it. By taking these steps, educators can help ensure that all students feel valued, seen, and heard.

# A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO INTERSECTIONALITY IN THE EARLY YEARS

## INTEGRATING INTERSECTIONAL CONTENT INTO LEARNING ACTIVITIES

In today's society, it is crucial to integrate intersectional content into learning activities. This not only benefits students in terms of providing a more well-rounded and inclusive education but also helps to reject racist practices that perpetuate inequalities. By utilising multimodal learning methods, such as visual aids and interactive activities, educators can engage students in a more meaningful way. It is important to see the potential in every student and embrace their differences, rather than ignoring or downplaying them. We must continue to challenge ourselves and our educational institutions to create an environment that celebrates diversity and promotes equity for all.

## HOW TO RECOGNISE PRIVILEGE AND CHALLENGE SYSTEMIC BIAS

It's easy to overlook privilege when it's something we've always taken for granted. White privilege, for example, is often invisible to those who benefit from it on a daily basis. However, as we continue to learn and grow, it's crucial that we acknowledge and speak up about the systemic biases that pervade our society. One of the most important steps we can take towards this goal is simply to believe what people say, especially when they're sharing stories that reflect experiences we may not have had ourselves. By doing so, we can begin to tear down the structures that perpetuate oppression and build a more equitable future for all.

# A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO INTERSECTIONALITY IN THE EARLY YEARS

## TIPS TO ENSURE INCLUSION IN THE CLASSROOM BY ENCOURAGING OPEN DIALOGUE BETWEEN STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

Ensuring inclusion in the classroom is not just about having diverse students, but also creating an environment where all feel heard and valued.

Encouraging open dialogue between students and teachers is an important aspect of achieving this goal. Teachers must actively listen to their students and be empathetic to their experiences, and students must feel comfortable speaking out and sharing their ideas. This dialogue should not only focus on academics, but also topics related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. It is crucial to establish norms for respectful communication and encourage everyone to participate. Along with creating a more inclusive classroom, this open dialogue can also lead to deeper learning experiences and positive relationships between students and teachers.



# INTERSECTIONALITY IN THE EARLY YEARS

## SUPPORTING RACIAL AND SOCIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENTS IN EDUCATION

The importance of supporting racial and social justice movements in education cannot be overstated. As educators, we have a responsibility to ensure that all students have access to a safe and welcoming learning environment that affirms their diverse identities. This means acknowledging and dismantling the systemic racism and oppression that permeate our education system and actively working to create inclusive curriculum and pedagogy. It also means advocating for policy changes that prioritise equity and justice. While this work can be challenging and uncomfortable, it is essential for creating a more just and equitable society. As we navigate these complex issues, it is important to approach them with both critical analysis and empathy, centering the experiences and voices of marginalised communities.

Overall, intersectionality is a vital concept for educators working with young children to understand in order to create an equitable and inclusive learning environment. As our world continues to evolve, it is essential that we teach the topics of intersectionality, power dynamics, social justice movements and privilege from a young age in order to build a more tolerant society. Each individual must do their part by reflecting on their own privilege and consciously changing the status quo wherever it's needed.

As educators, it's important to learn about intersectionality and its nuances so that you can ensure your classroom is safe and comfortable for all students regardless of demographics or backgrounds. By implementing strategies such as integrating content related to identity and marginalisation into classes activities as discussed above, educators can lead by example when encouraging open dialogue between students and teachers. With this in mind, we hope this guide has helped remind you of the importance of teaching intersectionality and has given you actionable tips on how to support racial and social justice movements in education. Now it's over to you - let's learn about intersectionality, reflect on our own privilege, and together actively strive for positive change in our education system!



# A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO INTERSECTIONALITY IN THE EARLY YEARS

## SUPPORTING RACIAL AND SOCIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENTS IN EDUCATION CONTINUED

Discrimination and prejudice can take many forms, even in the classroom, and unfortunately, children are not exempt from it. Here are some simple examples of how young children may face discrimination and racism or ableism in the classroom:

- **Racial profiling:** Teachers may unconsciously profile students based on their race or ethnicity. For example, they may assume that a Black student is less intelligent or more prone to misbehavior, which can lead to unfair treatment.
- **Stereotyping:** Teachers may rely on stereotypes when evaluating students' abilities. For example, they may assume that a girl is not good at maths or science or that a boy is not interested in reading.
- **Ableism:** Teachers may unintentionally discriminate against students with disabilities by assuming they cannot perform certain tasks or by not providing necessary accommodations.
- **Language Racism:** Students who are English Language Learners may face discrimination because of their limited English proficiency. Teachers may assume they are less intelligent or less capable than their peers who are 'native' English speakers.
- **Classroom environment:** Teachers may create a classroom environment that is not welcoming or inclusive to all students. For example, they may use materials or teach in ways that do not accommodate students from different cultural backgrounds or with different learning styles.

# A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO INTERSECTIONALITY IN THE EARLY YEARS

## TIPS FOR EDUCATIONAL PROFESSIONALS

Here are some specific tips for educational professionals looking to incorporate intersectionality into their practice:

1. **Educate yourself:** Take the time to learn about intersectionality and how it affects your students. Attend trainings, read books and articles, and seek out resources to help you deepen your understanding.
2. **Listen to your students:** Actively listen to your students' experiences and perspectives, and use this information to inform your teaching practices and curriculum choices.
3. **Create a welcoming environment:** Make sure your classroom is a safe and inclusive space for all students. Use inclusive language, promote respectful dialogue, and challenge bias and discrimination when you see it.
4. **Incorporate diverse perspectives:** Include diverse voices and perspectives in your curriculum materials and teaching strategies, and encourage students to share their own stories and experiences.
5. **Advocate for change:** Work with colleagues and administrators to advocate for policies and practices that promote equity and inclusion for all students.

# INTERSECTIONALITY IN THE EARLY YEARS

## GLOSSARY

### **Intersectionality**

A word to describe how people's lives can be different because of who they are. It means that your race, gender, sexuality, class and ability can all play a role in how you live your life.

### **Marginalised**

Some people are kept from having power because of their race, gender, sexuality, ability or money.

### **Anti-Blackness**

A specific form of racism that targets Black people and their culture. It is characterized by the devaluation and demonisation of Blackness and the denial of Black people's humanity.

### **Language racism**

Students who are English Language Learners may face discrimination because of their limited English proficiency. Teachers may assume they are less intelligent or less capable than their peers who speak “English fluently”. Students who may not speak “standardised English” also face discrimination as teachers may assume that the way they speak is “broken, slang, informal”.

### **Ableism**

Discrimination or prejudice against individuals with disabilities. This can take many forms, such as assuming that people with disabilities are unable to perform certain tasks or denying them access to services or opportunities.

### **Systemic racism**

The ways in which racism is built into social, economic, and political systems and institutions. This can include practices and policies that result in disproportionate harm to people of certain races, as well as the cultural attitudes and beliefs that perpetuate racism.

### **White privilege**

Inherent advantages possessed by a white person on the basis of their race in a society characterised by racial inequality and injustice.

