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Working with diversity in services for children and young people

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Introduction

If you work with children or young people, whether as a professional or in a voluntary or supporting role, then you will be aware that the contexts in which that work takes place are increasingly diverse in many ways. A ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach is no longer appropriate, if indeed it ever was. But working with diversity presents a number of challenges, as well as some undoubted rewards. Practitioners need a good understanding of the diverse identities and experiences of the children and young people they work with and how best to respond to them. In this free course, *Working with diversity in services for children and young people*, you’ll be exploring the impact of diverse social identities on children’s and young people’s experiences of the services designed for them, and some practical strategies for working effectively with diverse groups and communities.

The course is designed primarily for those working with children or young people, for example in childcare, education, healthcare, social work or youth work settings. However, you will also find it of value if you are planning to work in one of these fields, or if you simply wish to improve your understanding of services for children and young people.

The course is structured around a series of activities which invite you to read an academic text, watch videos of a practice setting and an academic presentation, and reflect on your own experience of working with or supporting children and young people. Since there are no ‘right’ answers to most of the questions in the activities, and because this free course offers a taste of advanced study, in which students are expected to be relatively independent learners, feedback comments have not been included for all the activities.

This OpenLearn course is an adapted extract from the Open University course E809 *Frameworks for critical practice with children and young people*.

Learning outcomes

After studying this course, you should be able to:

- demonstrate an understanding of some of the ways in which diverse and intersecting social identities structure the lives and experiences of children and young people
- show an awareness of the relevance of theories of diversity and intersectionality for everyday practice with children and young people
- reflect critically on the implications for your own practice of the diverse social identities of the children and young people that you work with or support
- demonstrate an awareness of some practical strategies for working in an inclusive and participatory way with children and young people.

1 Working effectively with African-Caribbean young women

For this activity, you will read ‘Working effectively with African-Caribbean young women: an intersectional approach’, a book chapter by Jenny Douglas who is a Senior Lecturer in Health Promotion at The Open University.

In this chapter Douglas argues that, in order to work effectively with young African-Caribbean women, practitioners ‘must have some understanding of the lives and contexts of young black women’. She maintains that practitioners working with young black women need to understand the complexity of their lives and to resist the dangers of ‘homogenising and essentialising’ them: in other words, seeing them as all the same and reducing them to their ethnic identity. Douglas also argues that an ‘intersectional’ approach is needed to understand young black people’s lives and to work effectively with them.

Activity 1

Read the chapter now and, as you do so, make notes in response to the questions that follow.

Reading 1: Working effectively with African-Caribbean young women: an intersectional approach

1. What were some of the key facts that you learned from the chapter about African-Caribbean families in the UK? What have been some of the main popular misunderstandings about them?

Provide your answer...

2. What does the author suggest has been distinctive about parenting practices within African-Caribbean families?

Provide your answer...

3. What does the author mean by an ‘intersectional approach’, and how can it help to understand the social identities of young black women?

Provide your answer...

4. How might a better understanding of young black women’s lives help to improve practice?

Provide your answer...

2 Working with minority ethnic young people in Swansea

EYST (Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team) Wales is an organisation working mainly with black and minority ethnic young people in Swansea, South Wales. The video that you are going to watch for the following activity features a cross-section of EYST's work and staff and volunteers from the organisation. You will also see an extract from a film made by the organisation about the experiences of young migrants.

Activity 2

Watch the video now and, as you do so, make notes in response to the questions that follow.

Video content is not available in this format.
Video 1: EYST: Identity, gender, ethnicity

1. Which communities and groups of young people does EYST work with?

Provide your answer...

2. Why is there a need for an organisation specifically aimed at young people from minority ethnic communities?

Provide your answer...

3. What kinds of needs and issues do the young people who come to EYST face, and how does the organisation address them?

Provide your answer...

4. What role does EYST have in relation to mainstream services?

Provide your answer...

5. How does the organisation help young people to develop a strong sense of identity?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

EYST works mainly with young people from the local Asian and Muslim communities. However, the organisation also runs activities aimed specifically at young migrants and refugees from other ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Staff at EYST argue that there is a need for an organisation specifically aimed at minority ethnic young people, because parents from some communities do not want their children to go to mixed-gender youth clubs and are generally wary of mainstream services, which they do not feel address their cultural or religious needs.

The young people who attend EYST experience a variety of needs, including confidence issues and a lack of support in relation to education and employment. Some of the young people have experienced racism, and the organisation provides them with a safe place to share their experiences and to be safe from discrimination.

The staff see EYST as a bridge connecting young people from minority communities to mainstream services: in the video, we see young people attending a scuba diving class and learning about support services in relation to mental health issues, for example.

The organisation supports young people in developing a strong sense of identity by providing a safe space where they can share their experiences with others from a similar cultural background. However, they also learn about the cultures and beliefs of other communities: the video made by the young people and the exhibition of photographs about being ‘young, migrant and Welsh’ were examples of this.

3 Applying intersectionality to practice

In the chapter that you read for Activity 1, Jenny Douglas cites the work of influential theorists of intersectionality such as Kimberlé Crenshaw. But what does intersectionality mean in practice? In the video you are going to watch in the next activity, Kimberlé Crenshaw explains what intersectionality is, why it is important, and how practitioners can apply the theory. Although Crenshaw is addressing those who work in schools, what she says can also be applied to work with children and young people in other contexts.

Activity 3

Watch the video now, and as you do so, make notes in answer to the questions that follow.

Kimberlé Crenshaw: what is intersectionality?

1. Crenshaw states that intersectionality is just a metaphor. What does she say it's a metaphor for?

Provide your answer...

2. What example does she mention involving school suspensions, and what does she think this example illustrates?

Provide your answer...

3. 'Identity isn't simply a self-contained unit. It is a relationship.' What do you think Crenshaw means by this?

Provide your answer...

4. Crenshaw gives examples of what schools can do to ensure they provide equality for all students, taking into account their intersecting identities. Can you think of an example of something that the practice setting with which you're most familiar could do?

Provide your answer...

4 Reflecting on diversity

Activity 4 provides time for reflection on your own experiences relating to diversity in relation to children and young people, in a practice setting which you know well. If you don't have any recent practice experience, you could think about a social setting in which you have interacted with a group of children or young people.

Activity 4

1. Think of a practice setting with which you are familiar. Make a list of the different social identities of the children and/or young people who use that service: for example, the diverse ethnicities, nationalities, religions, genders, sexualities, and abilities/disabilities represented.

Provide your answer...

2. Now select two or three children or young people that you have worked with and list their different social identities (e.g. 'Faiza is female, Somali, Muslim, has a learning disability … .').

Provide your answer...

3. Make a brief note of how you think each child or young person's social identities interact in their experience and what the implications are for practitioners working with them.

Provide your answer...

Conclusion

In this free course, *Working with diversity in services for children and young people*, you read a book chapter by Jenny Douglas which provided you with an understanding of the experiences and needs of black and minority ethnic young people and an introduction to the concept of intersectionality. The video that you watched about the work of a project for minority ethnic young people in Wales provided some practical examples of working with diversity. The video featuring Kimberlé Crenshaw provided further insight into the meaning of intersectionality and its relevance for everyday practice. Reflecting on the diverse social identities of children and young people that you know and the implications for your own practice will have provided you with insights that will help to make that practice more effective.

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Text

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Audio-visual

Video 1: Images: Girl with Welsh flag, Young girl in gold hijab, Woman in karate suit, Girl with hand covering half her face, Young Migrant and Welsh group sitting on fence, Young Migrant and Welsh group in a church, Woman weightlifter, Young Migrant and Welsh girls on a beach, Girl drawing in sand on a beach, Young Migrant and Welsh timeline, 2 girls in field with sheep – EYST. Footage: Coast, Series 3 Cardiff to St Davids – BBC; Young Migrant and Welsh – EYST.

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