

Let Them Eat Cake!

Exclusion for everybody is not the same as inclusion

I recently completed some CPD at another setting and as is often the case in these situations, experiences were shared between delegates. One in particular stood out. In this practitioner's school, games such as football had been banned because one child was unable to take part due to medical reasons. It was felt that if one child couldn't access sports, than none of them should because it wasn't fair. But is this blanket exclusion, inclusion?

The definition of inclusion is "The action or state of including or of being included within a group or structure". It does not state anywhere within this definition that inclusion is everyone getting the same thing. It is about adapting the situation so that everyone is included.

In a recent Facebook post, a nursery practitioner asked if they should ban parents from supplying birthday cakes to share with the children, because one child in the class won't be able to partake due to a dairy intolerance. One person argued that everyone eating cake and one child eating a dairy free biscuit was not inclusive, but I actually think it is, the situation has been adapted so that everyone receives a sweet, celebratory treat and nobody does without. Anyway, who says it has to be a biscuit? We always have Vegan Brownie in the freezer on standby if such an eventuality presents itself. Obviously, in an ideal world, all of the children would be eating dairy free biscuits/cake, but we don't live in an ideal world. I think that it is wrong to create a perfect bubble of life in nursery, learning to adapt to situations is a taught skill, glossing over the faults just sets us up for a greater disappointment later on. Besides, there are a great many more examples of foods which children are either allergic to, intolerant to, or choose not to eat because of ethical or religious reasons in my nursery alone, should these be excluded too? If not, why not?

In response to the Facebook post, one follower shared the fact that her child has a dairy intolerance, but their siblings do not. She hadn't removed dairy from the family grocery list, the child with the intolerance was learning to adapt to her diet, after all she is going to be on it for the rest of her life and being able to rationalise why not everyone should miss out just because she couldn't do something is a key skill; one which perhaps we are all needing to work on, particularly in this age of entitlement. Feeling comfortable eating the dairy free dessert, whilst your friends are treating themselves to a Baileys topped dairy ice-cream extravaganza is about learning to be comfortable in your own skin, this can only be achieved through experience.

I am allergic to penicillin. I wouldn't expect others to do without this life saving anti biotic just because my body has chosen to reject it. Why should I do without dairy just because my friend can't tolerate it? As we move through childhood we develop empathy for other people's situations, using this information we can make our own decisions about what we eat/or when. For example, eating vegetarian when going out for a meal with a phytophagous friend, out of respect for their beliefs.

A few years ago I worked on a project reviewing inclusive play in Scotland. It was hoped that all future playgrounds would be designed so that any child would be able to play in them, for example the inclusion of swings modified to fit a wheelchair, or the installation of play equipment which stimulates the senses. Playgrounds which will be accessible and fun to all children. One question which was raised during the project, which stimulated a lot of debate: The development of playgrounds solely for the use of children with disabilities; are they inclusive? What are your thoughts?