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Cultural Diversity and the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* in England

Author:
Dr. Lynn Ang Ling-Yin

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Abstract

This paper is concerned with how and to what extent cultural diversity and difference are promoted in early childhood education and the curriculum. With reference to the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* in England (2000), I argue that dominant discourses of cultural homogeneity continue to powerfully inform the curriculum, and work to sustain pedagogical practices of monoculturalism and monolingualism. This paper adopts a qualitative approach, using discourse analysis as its main methododology. The discussion draws on a poststructuralist theoretical stance in arguing that language is 'not transparent', and offers a close reading of how assumptions of culture and diversity are constructed in the discourse of the *Curriculum*. It argues that the language of the document is inherently ambiguous and open to interpretation, and offers a critique of the *Curriculum Guidance* in the construction of its narrative and rhetoric.

Cultural Diversity and the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* in England

Introduction

Cultural diversity is one of the ‘burning’ issues of early childhood education. It is also a complex one as notions of culture, diversity, race and other formative categories are often complicated in wider issues of equality and inequality, and attempting to define them is in itself a problematic task. This paper is based on my concerns that definitions of culture are often conceptualised within fixed and definite categories of ethnicity. It considers the assumptions that underpin our understanding of culture and ethnicity, and offers a critique of the *Curriculum Guidance* as a written discourse with limitations in challenging social and cultural inequalities. With increased migration, a rapid pace of change is being urged upon the education system and all who have a stake in it – the children, practitioners, parents and the wider community, and it is important that key issues are raised about the impact these changes have on the curriculum. Apple (2001) argues that the curriculum is bound up with struggles and history of class, ethnicity, and race. Early childhood institutions and the curriculum are microcosms of the broader society, and it is essential that we discuss the implications of diversity issues on early childhood provision, not least because we are constantly reminded of the importance of offering an ‘inclusive and appropriate’ curriculum; a curriculum for all children which values their different cultural and socio-cultural backgrounds, and one which welcomes cultural diversity and equal opportunity (Siraj-Blatchford, 1994; Brown, 1998; Burgess-Macey & Crichlow, 2002; Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke, 2005; Rhedding-Jones, J. 2005; Duffy, 2006).

Poststructuralist Thoughts

As a theoretical paradigm, post-structuralist theory offers us a useful starting point for contextualising the issue of cultural diversity and the curriculum. I argue, like many others who have taken a poststructuralist, social-constructivist stance (Mac Naughton G., 2005; Cannella, 1997, Dahlberg G. & Moss P., 2005), for the need to explore, engage with, and question the forms of knowledge and discourses which structure the

very basis on which we formulate our understanding of the child. As early as the 1970s, the work of theorists such as Michel Foucault (1977; 1984), Jacques Derrida (1978; 1997; 2002), Lyotard J.F. (1984), and Gilles Deleuze (1986) have come to be associated with poststructuralism in the way that they have reshaped how knowledge is perceived across disciplines, by arguing that texts, language and discourses are sites of power, and imbued with political and cultural meanings (Sarup M., 1993). As Foucault perceives it, all types of knowledge are the result or effect of a particular set of power relations which serve to construct our sense of reality, perspective and sense of identity in the world. From a poststructuralist perspective, the notion of 'truth' and knowledge are perceived as human constructions which mask the acquisition and maintenance of power, and the Derridian concept of 'deconstruction' challenges us to uncover the notion of 'truth' in these dominant discourses by deconstructing or revealing the hidden layers of meanings behind them.

In the field of early childhood, recent developments have seen a poststructuralist movement towards reconceptualising of those dominant frames of reference that have traditionally informed our understanding of the child. For instance, Cannella (1997), Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999), Mac Naughton (2005), Grieshaber & Cannella (2001) and Yelland (2005) to name a few, have taken a poststructuralist, even postmodernist stance in challenging the 'grand narratives' (Lyotard, 1984) of child development. They call into question the canon of work generated by early researchers and psychologists such as Erikson, Freud, Bowlby, Piaget, the majority of whom were European and American men who wrote from a particular cultural, economic, and gendered position, but yet whose names have become synonymous with universalist notions of the child. The crux of poststructuralist thought then, is to bring about a heightened critical reflection of the forms of thinking, language, and texts that govern our understanding of childhood. Indeed, Mac Naughton (2005) stresses the importance of poststructuralism as a theoretical framework in informing the larger social project of equality and emancipation in early childhood. Adopting a poststructuralist perspective, she argues, is to engage with 'the politics of knowledge in early childhood studies in order to create greater social justice and equity' (Mac Naughton, 2005 p.2).

The ideas of poststructuralism therefore serve to help us critically reflect on the effects of privileging one form of knowledge of early childhood over another. More importantly, they provide a theoretical basis from which we can explore how language and discourses are cultural and ideological constructions, bound up with assumptions and meanings that affirm or distort our perceptions of children. To start thinking about cultural diversity and the curriculum then, entails taking a critically reflective stance, and questioning those dominant body of knowledge which govern our way of thinking about cultural diversity and the child. Essentially, as Mac Naughton writes, taking a poststructuralist stance is about placing 'an additional political edge to the 'critical' in critical reflection' (Mac Naughton, 2005, p.16).

The English Context: The Language and Rhetoric of Cultural Diversity

England has never been a monocultural society and is very much characterised by a plurality of cultures and identities. Part of offering an inclusive curriculum, is to first of all acknowledge that this very diversity exists. We are living in a time of rapid social and cultural shifts, where more children have multicultural and multiracial backgrounds that incorporate many different traditions and values. Few individuals, I argue, can identify themselves as a member of a single cultural or racial group. Jan Pieterse's book on *Globalisation and Culture: Global Melange*, is particularly illuminating as she describes her family background as 'hybrid in a genealogical and existential sense', with a mixture of Javanese, Portuguese, French, Germans and others, and asserts that 'one way or another, we are all migrants' (Pieterse, 2004, p.3). The term 'cultural diversity' is therefore used in this essay in a broad sense, to include issues associated with identity, race and ethnicity, and is defined in this context as a condition characterised by a plurality of cultures and socio-cultural beliefs. As Pieterse maintains in *Global Melange*, the intermingling of diverse cultures is more than just a phenomenon of our increasingly modern and globalised world, 'Intercultural mingling itself is a deeply creative process not only in the present phase of accelerated globalization but stretching far back in time (p.54)'.

In Britain, the language of cultural diversity and difference is constructed in different genres and at various levels, in institutional and government documents. The

emphasis on diversity and inclusion has brought about a plethora of thinking and writing - research reports, policy documents, standards, curricula - all of which contribute to a dominant discourse in advising, guiding or insisting on how and what should be done to achieve a standard of practice and expectation in providing an inclusive and diverse provision. The Qualifications Curriculum Authority (QCA) for instance, states on its website that valuing cultural diversity and inclusion should apply across the spectrum at all levels of education, asserting that the notion of 'inclusion' entails 'valuing all pupils' cultures and diversity and of challenging racism through the curriculum.' (http://www.qca.org.uk/8859_2514.html, accessed 1 July 2006)

The CRE (Commission for Racial Equality), another public organisation, provides guidance to schools and other public authorities on how to fulfill their responsibility in promoting an equal opportunity curriculum. The website states clearly that their mission is to 'work for a just and integrated society, where diversity is valued …' (http://www.cre.gov.uk/). It stipulates that the 'general statutory duty' for all schools in England and Wales is to take proactive steps 'to promote equal of opportunity and good race relations'. In meeting this general duty, all schools in England, including Early Years settings, are to comply with specific duties, one of which is to have in place 'a written statement of their policy for promoting race equality'. The legislation that underpins this policy of cultural diversity is The Race Relations Act of 1976, which stipulates that all governing bodies of schools are to prepare a race equality policy by 2002. The Race (Amendment) Act of 2000, further extends the application of the 1976 Act to other public authorities and to 'eliminate unlawful racial discrimination' and 'promote equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different racial groups'.

More recently, the issue of valuing cultural diversity is also discussed in a larger theoretical framework of inclusion, social justice, equity and participation; concepts which all share common ground in suggesting that education, at all levels, must be more equitable and just for children of all races and cultures, especially for those who have historically been disadvantaged; be it on the grounds of ethnic background, language, gender or socio-economic class, intentionally or unintentionally. The underpinning view of these issues is that social inequalities need to be addressed if

children are to participate equally in society. Within this framework, the aim of providing a curriculum that takes into account cultural diversity is to therefore provide an education environment that is inclusive and equally accessible to all children, and yet responsive to the individual child's socio-cultural experiences.

In the carefully produced text of the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage*, the rhetoric of inclusion and cultural diversity is explicit. Introduced in 2000, the *Curriculum Guidance* provides a common curriculum framework for all Early Years settings in England that caters for children aged 3- 5 years. This raises questions surrounding the term and its implications for Early Years practice. Some of the questions that arise revolve around what does 'cultural diversity' actually mean?, how can Early Years educators ensure a truly inclusive curriculum while balancing at the same time the contradictions that exist in our society today? If inclusion means recognising the diverse needs of children with their different cultures and ethnic backgrounds, then in what ways can practitioners promote this in the classroom, and are these sufficient?

The discourse of the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage*

The *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage* was introduced in September 2000 by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) in England, and is a curriculum which caters for all children aged 3 to 5 years. As a curriculum document, it is text which attempts to construct and value cultural multiplicities, but it is also, I argue, a potential site for ambiguity and tension.

The introductory section of the document highlights key principles of the curriculum. These include:

- Practitioners should ensure all children feel included, secure and valued
- Experiences should build on what children know and can do
- Practitioners should meet the diverse needs of children
- Practitioners and parents should work together in an atmosphere of mutual respect

- No child should be excluded or disadvantaged

In its underpinning principles listed above, the curriculum states clearly that one of its overarching principles is to 'ensure that all children feel included, secure and valued' (p.11). This principle of inclusion recurs throughout the document, as reflected in another poignant statement:

> 'No child should be excluded or disadvantaged because of ethnicity, culture or religion, home language, family background, special educational needs, disability, gender or ability.' (p.11, p.14)

It is evident that the language of equality and cultural diversity underpin the document. The overall purpose of the curriculum is clear. It is to ensure that all children, regardless of their culture, economic, social or ethnic background, have an equal right to an early childhood curriculum that supports and affirms their cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The principles of 'equal opportunity' 'inclusivity', and 'meeting the diverse needs of children' permeate the discourse of the Curriculum.

However, while the rhetoric of 'equal opportunity' is embedded in the discourse of the *Curriculum Guidance*, I argue that this rhetoric also raises questions and ambiguities. Firstly, while the *Curriculum Guidance* advocates an inclusive and culturally diverse provision, the text of the document as yet, is available only in English, and no minority languages are named; the languages of immigrant and community groups remain unknown. Hence, the ways in which children from these groups might develop their home languages, and how they might learn the language of their host or new country go unmentioned. It is also striking that in a curriculum which purports to take into account the multiplicity of cultures and cultural identities, the perspective and voice of parents on language and multilingualism are obscured. The effect of this absence, from a poststructurlist perspective, works only to marginalise diversity, and privilege homogeneity through the language and culture of the dominant group.

Secondly, there is also nothing in the text which alludes to the notion of 'cultural diversity' as beyond the physical and material environment of the setting. In this

respect, the *Curriculum Guidance* I argue, needs to engage with a deeper analysis of cultural difference. For instance, as an example of what it means to put the principle of equal opportunity into practice, the *Curriculum Guidance* recommends:

> 'For example … the setting has a multilingual practitioner who relates with families from a range of ethnic and cultural traditions. She ensures that families know about the services available and is a link between the families, key staff and other agencies. The practitioners ensure that the displays and resources reflect children's home and community experience.' (p.12)

Similarly, in the section on 'meeting the diverse needs of children', the *Curriculum Guidance* recommends that in order to help all children make the best possible progress, practitioners should:

- plan opportunities that build on and extend children's knowledge, experiences, interests and skills
- provide a safe and supportive learning environment; free from harassment, in which the contribution of all children is valued and where racial, religious, disability and gender stereotypes are challenged
- use materials that positively reflect diversity and are free from discrimination and stereotyping

While these measures as listed above, are essential for valuing diversity, the *Curriculum Guidance* I argue, makes essential but nonetheless cursory recommendations of what practitioners can do to promote diversity. The *Curriculum* emphasises the importance of inclusion but it nevertheless falls short of identifying exactly what such an environment would be like and how it can be achieved. As Siraj-Blatchford contends, 'neither are staff told 'how to work with children' (Siraj-B;atchford 2006, p.67). Valuing cultural diversity is as much about ensuring that the physical material and resources should positively reflect the children's home environment, as it is about actually understanding the differences between and within ethnic groups. It is about designing the curriculum to help children learn about ethnic groups and specific underrepresented groups, but it is also about focusing on

interpersonal and inter-group relationships, and nurturing a growing sensitivity to cultural difference. As Siraj-Blatchford writes, 'In modern, diverse societies, it is essential that children learn social competence to respect other groups and individuals, regardless of difference.' (Blatchford 2006, p.107)

It is also interesting to note that while the language of equal opportunity is embedded in the discourse of the *Curriculum Guidance*, in practice, however, the task of offering an inclusive curriculum is difficult and complex. This is because the use of the term 'cultural diversity' is in itself problematic, and the meaning of the term 'culture' on which the phrase is posited, remains complex. The *Curriculum Guidance* uses the term 'cultural diversity' to describe 'children from all social, cultural and religious backgrounds, children of different ethnic groups including Travellers, refugees and asylum seekers, and children from diverse linguistic background' (p.17), and within this definition includes children from immigrant and ethnic minority groups, 'for whom the home language is other than English'. The document defines the cultural and language diversity of children as such:

> 'Many children in early years settings will have a home language other than English. Practitioners should value this linguistic diversity and provide opportunities for children to develop and use their home language in their play and learning. … ' (p.19)

The paragraph here rightly emphasises the need to recognise the indigenous language and culture of children from a wide range of backgrounds, and the importance of 'providing bilingual support' (p.19) in the children's home language as well as English. However, the categorisation of children as suggested here, between those whose home language is English and those whose home language is not English, suggests somewhat a cumbersome and polarised way of classifying children – some of whom may possess the ability of more than one languages, not necessarily English, but who are nonetheless defined by their use (or lack of use) of English; the language of the dominant group. The result of this is that there is only one particular way of identifying children from different ethnic groups, and that is by their language competence. At the same time, the *Curriculum* mentions children whose native language is English, and identifies ethnic minority children as those whose home

language is other than English, but there is no mention however, of children whose background is neither, such as those whose first and only language may be English, but who are culturally from a minority ethnic group. Or, for those children who belong to a mixture of more than one or two cultural heritages. We live in a time of rapid social change, with children from multicultural backgrounds who may have inherited a mixture of cultural traditions and values. Few individuals, and indeed children, can identify themselves as a member of a single cultural or racial group, and the *Curriculum Guidance* needs to adequately reflect this.

Thus, while the *Curriculum Guidance* may be successful in constructing a double difference in its discourse in recognising children's cultural diversities and a double construction in its recognition of bilingualism and bilingual support, it is not, I argue, as successful in working towards recognising fluid cultural identities and cultural hybridisation, where children can belong simultaneously to a range of different ethnic categories. The poststructuralist ideas of Foucault (1972; 1980) and Derrida (1997; 2002) provide a useful framework in this instance, in helping us consider the limitations of drawing on such binarisms. Both Foucault and Derrida draw attention to the use of binary oppositions as extreme depictions of difference – man/woman; black/white; adult/child, oppositions that represent a binary system which work to only produce a particular construction of reality. Derrida's concepts of 'difference' and 'otherness' confront this very process of duality, where cultures or cultural identities are identified by their polarities or difference from other cultures. The problem with such binary systems is that they suppress ambiguity or interstitial possibilities between the opposed categories, and establishes a partial perception of the world in terms of the binary oppositions. In the discourse of such polarities, Foucault's notion of 'power' alerts us to the relation of dominance between the opposing categories, and the inevitable domination of one form of cultural construction over another. The notion of 'difference' and 'otherness' thus requires us to deconstruct meanings within such binary analyses, and to subvert them in order to affirm the myriad possibilities and diversities that exist within and beyond the polarised categories. In the discourse of the *Curriculum Guidance*, the drive towards challenging binary oppositions and moving beyond polarised ways of defining children becomes all the more urgent, especially in a document where children are placed in polarised categories, in terms of those whose first language are English or

non-English. Practitioners, and indeed children, need to understand that human similarities and differences are manifold, complex, and not polarities. To promote inclusivity and cultural diversity beyond a binary position, therefore, remains a manifold challenge.

In addition, while the *Curriculum Guidance* may have highlighted the importance of cultural diversity, it does little to discuss the differences within ethnic groups. Stuart Hall (1991), an authority on cultural studies, argues that there are often contradictions within categories of race itself and that cultural identity is never fixed but continually changing. In Britain, for example, a child who is a second generation British Indian will invariably have a different identity from his or her parents who is a first generation immigrant from India. The child's identity and sense of self and culture will inevitably vary from his parents because of his or her experience of being born and living in England, the host country, and of being socialised and brought up in Britain. Jan Pierterse uses the term **'**migration melange**'** to describe this phenomenon of migration and its effects on culture and the generations. She writes:

> Another phenomenon is hybridity as migration melange. A common observation is that second generation immigrants, in the West and elsewhere, display mixed cultural traits – a separation between and, next, a mix of a home culture and language (matching of the culture of origin) and an outdoor culture (matching the culture of residence' (p.73).

Thus, while the *Curriculum Guidance* may have done well in acknowledging the importance of cultural diversity, it falls short of attaching sufficient weight to cultural differences within ethnic minorities. Our social experience and identities are multifaceted, and these experiences and differences, even within individual ethnic groups, make the issue of cultural diversity and the curriculum a complex one. Part of offering an inclusive curriculum, is to move beyond a mono or even bi-cultural positioning, and to look towards one which engages with multiple positionings: multiple identities, multilingualism, and multiple belongings. It is important for practitioners, as well as children, to be aware of the nature of these shifting and changing identities, as no child or individual should be treated as having a

homogenous experience with others just because they belong to the same ‘ethnic group’.

The issue of ‘cultural diversity’ that this paper has focused on is also part of much wider controversies. Siraj-Blatchford argues that while ‘most early childhood settings appear to be calm and friendly places on the surface, … there may be a great deal of underlying inequality’. In many ways, the *Curriculum Guidance* serves to remind us of the dilemmas of raising and caring for children in a world full of contradictions and inequalities. The notion of equality and valuing diversity is commonly espoused as an essential component of any Early Years setting and indeed, curriculum (Duffy, 2006; Siraj-Blatchford, 1994; Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke, 2005). As Duffy writes in an essay on the curriculum:

> Education is not just about what goes on in the school or setting; it is about the child as part of the community and society, and the curriculum should reflect the child’s culture.
>
> (‘The Curriculum from Birth to Six’ in *Contemporary Issues in the Early Years*, p.81)

In practice however, children see and experience inequality daily. On one hand, the *Curriculum Guidance* advocates that all children are ‘equal’ and that all individuals are treated equally regardless of their race or cultural backgrounds. On the other hand, the harsh reality of our world is such that discrimination and racial divisions do continue to exist and some groups are valued more than others in society. How then, can we support children to embrace and respect cultural diversity, but at the same time help them to negotiate and make sense of our very imperfect world? Practitioners face the monumental task of trying to make complex issues like cultural difference and diversity meaningful to young children without oversimplifying or trivialising them, and raising these issues and concerns without making children fearful and hopeless. It would appear that the ambiguities and contradictions in our society echo, albeit awkwardly, in the attempt to deal with the issue of cultural diversity in the *Curriculum Guidance*. These complex issues of cultural diversity and indeed, inequality, illustrate the challenge of bringing these issues in the classroom or setting,

yet importantly, they also underscore the necessity of doing so; as children learn to engage with these complex issues.

One of the aims of providing an inclusive curriculum should therefore be to help children learn how to navigate these contradictions and ambiguities in the world, and to challenge the injustices that divide and diminish their world. In their book on *Diversity and Difference in Early Childhood Education* (2006), Robinson and Jones Diaz argue that research has shown that children are themselves active agents, capable of critical thinking and engaging with issues of culture, diversity and difference. As they write:

> 'Children from early ages constitute, perpetuate and negotiate normalising discourses around their identities, and are actively regulating not only their own behaviour accordingly, but also that of others around them.' (p.5).

If children play an active and critical role in their understanding of diversity and difference, then the role of the adult is to facilitate this process, and to help children negotiate and understand their perceptions of culture and identity.

In view of current curriculum developments in England, a draft Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) document was produced in May 2006 as a potential new curriculum framework for children 0-5 years in England (*Draft Early Years Foundation Stage*, Dfes, 2006 http://www.surestart.gov.uk/_doc/P0001902.pdf). Currently in its public consultation stage, the document brings together the current *Curriculum Guidance* and *Birth to Three Framework* by offering a single quality framework for services to children from birth to five, with a view of implementation from September 2008 onwards. Drawing on the principles laid down in the current *Curriculum Guidance*, the *EYPS* reinforces the importance of ensuring an anti-discriminatory and 'inclusive practice', and it would be interesting to consider how the rhetoric of 'diversity' is constructed in the discourse of the final published document. With the current *Curriculum Guidance*, much has been left to the intuition and professionalism of professionals to make sense of the document. It also lies in the agency of Early Years professionals to deliver the curriculum in a way that is effective for the child, and more specifically, to the social and cultural context of the

child. The challenge for educators is how to deal with these complex issues of race, culture and identity honestly, yet optimistically with young children.

Conclusion: A Personal Vignette

I would like to conclude this paper with a personal anecdote to further exemplify my argument about the complexities of cultural diversity and the problematic task of offering an inclusive curriculum.

I have a two year old daughter Ashley[1] who by birth is British, but by culture and ethnicity, is very much an embodiment of all the cultures that she was born into. From me, she has inherited a Chinese-Singaporean identity, but more than that, she has also inherited a family lineage that goes back to Singapore in the early 1800s, to a local community called the Straits-born Chinese whose identity was derived as a result of intermarriages between the local Malay and ethnic Chinese community. From her father, she has inherited a Chinese-Malaysian identity, with an ancestral lineage that can be traced back to the Canton province in Southern China, to a community whose people first migrated to Malaysia in the 1900s. We are what can be described as a 'diasporic family', with relatives all around the world, in Singapore, Malaysia, England, Europe and the United States. We are very much a 'global family', and my daughter's identity as such, is the embodiment of the diverse cultures that she was born into and has come into contact with.

Thus, in writing this paper and reflecting on the question of cultural diversity, the question emerges: how does a child like Ashley fit into the discourse of the *Curriculum Guidance*? As I watch her experience the world, I wonder how her identity as an Anglo-Chinese living in Britain will shape her expectations and worldview. I also wonder whether she will be able to negotiate the cross-cultural gap between her Chinese culture and traditions, and her Anglo-British identity. As a British born Chinese, Ashley's sense of culture and identity is invariably different from us, her parents. Her identity, I suspect, will never be fixed, as she is engaged in a continual process of negotiating and (re)negotiating, and her experience shows that

[1] The name has been changed for ethical reasons.

our sense of identity, the way a child conceptualises his or her sense of identity, can be racialised or culturalised in more than one way, within different discourses, and different temporalities.

What does this all therefore say about providing an effective early childhood curriculum? One answer is that any child's cultural and ethnic positioning must be taken into account in all its complexities, as notions of race, culture and ethnicity are always complicated. A second answer is that to first help children negotiate their understanding of cultural diversity, we, as adults, need to first develop a critical consciousness of the way we ourselves perceive and interpret the world; teachers, practitioners and educators who themselves come from a dominant culture and speak only a dominant language must become more aware and critical of the effects of their own cultural and linguistic perspectives and positioning. Johnson and Jones Diaz (2006) write:

> 'Early Childhood educators are in an ideal position to make a positive difference in the lives of children and their families. This is possible not only on the broader level of advocating for their rights, but also challenging and disrupting normalising discourses through the curriculum that we teach, the policies that inform our practice and the pedagogies that we utilize in teaching children' (Johnson and Jones Diaz 2006, p.8)

As discussed at the start of this paper, current work on re-conceptualising early childhood education highlights the need to take a more critical stance in questioning our own assumptions and understanding of childhood (Cannella, 1997, Blenkin, Geva M. & Kelly, A.V. (eds.), 2002; Robinson and Jones Diaz (eds.), 2006; N. Yelland (ed.), 2005). This re-conceptualising movement has largely stemmed from the paradigm of the new sociology of childhood with the use of post-structuralist theoretical framework, and these perspectives have particular significance for our understanding of diversity and difference amongst children and their families. The impetus throughout my discussion has been to interrogate the notion of cultural diversity and what it means to provide an inclusive curriculum. In doing so, I suggest that we need to engage with discourses such as that of the *Curriculum Guidance* in order to engage with their underpinning meanings and politics.

Ultimately, to provide a truly inclusive and diverse education for children requires consistent dialogue. This paper has raised more questions than answers, but it has done so in the hope that the questions illustrate the complex challenges and debates that surround the issue of cultural diversity and the curriculum. If an inclusive curriculum provision is to become a reality, then these issues have to be highlighted and engaged with, in an ongoing dialogue with all stakeholders - educators, parents, policy makers, families, and the children.

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