

Designing for Diversity: A Case Study Exploring Implications of Ecological Psychology for Inclusion

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The dominant psychological paradigm which underpins institutionalised learning has perpetuated a deficit rationality whereby children outside of normative developmental ranges are understood to be in need of catch-up or compensatory programs. This perennial approach magnifies and perpetuates difference, seemingly rendering the concept of inclusion in school contexts fallacious. This case study will exemplify an alternative way for schools to nurture and implicitly include young people and their families in a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The Studio Learning Project (SLP) was established to create an additional space for learning which allows children the freedom to engage in self-instigated or negotiated projects. Reconceptualising learning from an ecological perspective, as a transaction between actors and their environments, the study supports giving increased consideration to learning as an individual-environment transaction (Barab & Roth, 2006). This places the management of resources and design of learning spaces at the forefront of decision-making for schools and their communities concerned with inclusive education. Kalantzis and Cope (2008) have claimed that designing for learning is the new work of teaching. Ecological psychology describes effectivities and affordance networks (Barab & Roth, 2006; Barab & Plucker, 2002) which transcend the individualistic focus of the dominant theoretical paradigm affecting schools, and suggest the environment and its physical, temporal, and social resources are cause for exploration when it comes to inclusive education.

Keywords: Learning Environments, Inclusive Education, Parent and Community Engagement in Schools, Personalising Learning, Student-Centred Learning, Alternative Education, Ecological Psychology, Transformative Learning, Case Study

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