



Working with Families in the Community and Voluntary Sector

DEVELOPING INCLUSIVE PRACTICE

Working with families in partnership with the community and voluntary sector gives the Further Education and Higher Education sector an opportunity to access 'hard to reach' families who are traditionally under-represented within post compulsory education. Inclusive practice and widening participation continues to be high on the government agenda. The Tomlinson Report (1996) provided a significant impetus for the FE and HE sector to adopt inclusive practice, and defined inclusion as:







“the greatest degree of match or fit between individual learning requirements and the provision that is made for them” page 26

There has been a shift in attitude within education from one of the learner fitting into the education system to the education system trying to differentiate its services to accommodate the learner.

In order for the FE and HE sector to adopt an inclusive approach when working with under-represented groups of people, this requires a process of consultation with these families. According to Cook (2004) the pre-requisites for developing more inclusive thinking and practice include:

- an understanding of what inclusion may mean for individuals, settings and families
- an understanding of the need for and willingness to change
- support from managers to allow time for self reflection and to encourage change.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER INFORMATION

-  FEFC (1996) *Inclusive Learning: Report of the Committee on Students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities* ('the **Tomlinson Report**'), HMSO
-  Cook T. (2004), "Starting where we can: using action research to develop inclusive practice", *International Journal of Early Years Education*, Vol. 12, No.1, p3-16
-  Houghton, A-M (2002) 'Reaching out and reaching in', *Journal for Further Education and Lifelong Learning: Learning and Skills Development Agency* 5 (3)
-  Briefing Sheet 1: Engaging Families
-  Briefing Sheet 2: Families On Campus
-  Briefing Sheet 7: Working in partnership with the Community & Voluntary Sector

LANCASHIRE INTERGENERATION MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION PROJECT (LIME)

LIME was a family learning action research project funded by Lancashire County Council's Adult Learning, and delivered by the Community Access Programme, Lancaster University. The aims of the LIME Project were to:

- investigate how intergenerational and multicultural learning opportunities contribute towards developing community cohesion.
- identify issues associated with fostering intergenerational and multicultural education.
- explore how members of a family influence and are involved in the learning process.
- develop a range of culturally, socially relevant, learning opportunities targeted at different members of the family and delivered in partnership with different agencies.

When working with 'hard to reach' families, an overt Higher Education focus is not always the most successful way of attracting learners who do not have a history of Higher Education within the family and do not therefore assume HE is for them. For example, advertising a course e.g 'HE for your Child' is not necessarily effective in attracting hard to reach families. The LIME project adopted a longer-term 'gentle' approach, which focused on family learning and learning opportunities that addressed:

- Personal interests
- Individual needs
- Agency objectives
- Community goals

Despite this less direct approach, the LIME project was successful in introducing higher education to families, breaking down some of the myths and encouraging young people and their parents that they might choose to study in higher education.

FAMILY LEARNING OPPORTUNITY WORKING IN THE COMMUNITY:

Case Study 1: A Family Day Out

This activity involved working in partnership with an East Lancashire Sure Start. As part of their activities over the school summer holidays, they organised a family trip to the Butterfly House at Williamson Park in Lancaster. Before they went to the Butterfly House, the families first came to Lancaster University where they went on a short campus tour and took part in family learning activities that involved using the university facilities and meeting staff and students. Activities included:

- Using the computer facilities to find out information on butterflies – *IT and study skills*
- Making a collage of symmetrical butterflies, and geometric shapes and recording information that they had found from the computer activity – *IT, Mathematics, and Art*
- Quiz – *Key Skills, teamwork*
- Learning through singing - *Music*
- Writing poems about butterflies – *Creative writing.*

The families had their lunch on the university campus before going onto Williamson Park. Subjects or study skills, which students might study or gain at university

Enabling features:

- ✓ The university facilities, staff and students enhanced and supported a community visit by providing a way of building in an explicit learning activity
- ✓ Parents and grandparents were shown how they can turn a simple trip of going to a butterfly house, into a family learning experience
- ✓ Although Higher Education was not the main focus, by using the university facilities, families saw for themselves, examples of resources available to students
- ✓ For people without experience of higher education, attending with a 'safe group' of familiar faces meant that they were more relaxed. As there were summer schools and courses on at this time of the year within the university, there were many families around. This helped to remove the stigma of the 'ivory tower' image of universities.
- ✓ By using the topic of butterflies, that was of interest to the families this meant that they were motivated to get involved in the activities
- ❶ School holidays are a popular time to organise campus visits with community partners, who are always looking for activities for families.



Case Study 2: Saturday Schools The Gujarat Hindu Society in Preston deliver GCSE classes in Gujarati for children and adults of all ages, and the Nguzo Saba Centre (an African and Caribbean cultural community centre) in Preston, run a homework centre and cultural activities for school aged children and young people on a Saturday. A joint visit to Lancaster University campus during Black History month was organised for the families of the children and young people who attend these two Saturday Schools. During the visit families engaged in:

- A campus tour, using role model students, paying particular attention to facilities that would address families' cultural and faith needs e.g. mentioning about the multi faith Chaplaincy Centre, the Asian and African Caribbean Student Societies.
- Black History month computer activity, where computers were pre-set up with interactive web sites in relation to African and Indian history.
- Young people also used this opportunity to research information for their school homework, and look at some HE web sites such as Uni4Me.
- A learning hand on which they recorded HE facts on each finger

Enabling features:

The visit encouraged multicultural understanding of African and Indian culture, thus encouraging community cohesion.

- ✓ Families met each other and a number of overseas students. They were encouraged to learn from, with and about other cultures and different generations.
- ✓ Families were shown how university facilities can be a resource for community groups to enhance and complement their own community groups activities
- ✓ Families became more aware of useful web sites that their children and young people can use to help them with their homework
- ❶ FE and HE sector have resources that the community and voluntary sector could benefit from. Working together can be a useful way of providing support to the community and voluntary sector, which can help to breakdown barriers.

REACH OUT AND REACH IN

Houghton (2002) describes how widening participation activities with under-represented families can involve activities that raise awareness of families as well as staff in higher education. Thus what starts as a process of reaching out to work with families can be transformed by consulting and listening to parents and using their feedback to reach in and review HE practices so that they are more inclusive and responsive.

Reach Out:

Consulting parents (Reach Out) is beneficial because it allows an institution to gain awareness about parents' hopes and concerns as well as find out what services they would like and expect, for example, student support facilities. This process of reach out also contributes to developing links with potential learners who traditionally have a low participation in higher education and the communities from which they come.

For effective reach out it is necessary to ask the following questions:

- ? How can we improve the way we engage with families?
- ? What services does the institution provide or offer to families?
- ? Who uses these services?
- ? How effective are these services?



Some Community and voluntary groups also have resources such as meeting and training facilities that can be used to deliver HE activities. Why not hold some of your staff developments or meetings within a community centre.

Reach In:

Information gained from parental consultation can help raise an organisation's awareness of its strengths and weaknesses. This feedback can contribute to the development of inclusive family activities; for example, passing on information to staff responsible for campus visits so that they may be adapted and thus address specific areas of interest. The Briefing Sheets on College Open Days and Campus Visits outline strategies based on feedback from parents and community practitioners. Reach In can raise FE and HE staff awareness about how to develop student support services and facilities to respond to the social and cultural needs of particular groups, for example, creation of a non-alcoholic social space. It is important to avoid one-off consultation, and to build in appropriate monitoring opportunities.

- ? Is there evidence of change in practice?
- ? What are the barriers to developing inclusive practice?

Prepared on behalf of Lancashire Aimhigher

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Sethi, J., Houghton, A. (2007) 'Working with Families from the Community and Voluntary Sector' *Aimhigher Lancashire Families Briefing Papers*

<http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fass/projects/reap/Documents/Briefing%20Sheet%207.pdf>