

Inclusive  
**PRACTICE IN  
THE PRIMARY  
SCHOOL**

*A guide for teachers*

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## CHAPTER 3

# MODELS OF DIFFERENCE AND DIFFERENTIATION

### Learning Objectives

After engaging with this chapter you will be able to:

- Understand the relationship between a positive professional identity and becoming a confident, inclusive teacher.
- Evaluate the helpful and unhelpful effects of a Normative Model of difference.
- Understand the Spiral Spectrum Model of difference.
- Explain your personal approach to modelling difference in your classroom.
- Choose from a range of starting points for differentiation.

### Introduction

In this chapter the importance of a positive professional identity will be explored with reference to two student teachers, Abigail and Lorna. Different ways of thinking about diverse learners will also be reviewed, starting with the 'Normative Model of difference' and then moving to an alternative model, the 'Spiral Spectrum Model of difference'. Finally, alternative starting points for differentiation will be outlined with reference to how these might trigger more inclusive ways of planning and teaching.

## Starting with you: professional identity and SEND

In previous chapters we have explained why *the way we think about SEND influences our practice* in strong and direct ways. We would also argue that *the way we see ourselves as professionals* will have an impact on our confidence and for SEND. The following is a case study of a student teacher, Abigail, during her first placement and is presented as an example of this. (The fuller case study was presented in Chapter 1, on page 17.)

### Case Study: Abigail's conceptualisation of SEND

*For Abigail, the term 'SEND' carried a lot of weight. In her view, SEND was a term applied to those children who are developmentally behind to a severe or extreme degree. It also brought to mind conditions that had associated medical facts and followed a diagnosis. Abigail knew that some of these conditions were things she had never heard of and had long names. She was daunted by the prospect of them.*

*She believed that the most difficult needs to meet were those that seemed extreme but were not yet diagnosed or confirmed as SEND. This was the case for Sophie (a child in Abigail's placement class) who was introduced to Abigail as 'an enigma' by Veronica (her mentor and the class teacher), since she and her previous teachers had not been able to get to the bottom of what the problem was although they had been informed that it was something to do with language processing. Generally, Abigail found Sophie perplexing and was not alone in this. Four members of the school staff (Veronica, Elaine, Jane and Sascha) had perceived in Sophie a spiky profile, meaning that she seemed competent in some areas (like number work) but was struggling in others (such as receptive comprehension). Veronica and Jane confirmed that they had developed a strong affection for Sophie but had been similarly perplexed on occasion. Working with Sophie had not been without its intermittent frustrations for that reason and both teachers believed that it was important to understand this before making any judgements about Abigail's competence.*

*Abigail explained that knowing Sophie had undiagnosed SENDs did trigger feelings of panic about where to start and about what she should be doing. No one could provide clear guidance on this since there had been no confirmed diagnosis. It felt like a waiting game for everyone. Abigail believed that the situation would have been helped by some 'proper medical facts' about what was wrong and what should be done from other professionals, perhaps those she had heard about from outside the school:*

*(Continued)*

(Continued)

*'You've got to know as much as you can about them, you've got to get to know the facts, you know, not an assumption, not a "I think this is this" and "I think this is wrong with her". You need to know if there is a problem there and if it's been diagnosed or whatever you've got, you need to know the facts and you need to know that from a professional, that it's not just hearsay or a word of mouth like "I think this is this" or "so and so thinks that because she knows a child that was very similar". You can't make those assumptions, you can't label them like that, you've got to get proper, proper medical facts and then you can build on that ...'*

You may identify here with Abigail's fear and anxiety about SEND and you may also have seen and heard this among other practitioners in your setting. I felt just like Abigail in my early career and tended to believe that I would never have the expert knowledge I needed to 'do the right thing' for learners with a label of 'SEND'. The fact that there was a TA working with me and watching me day after day added to my feelings of inadequacy. When we find ourselves in this position, it is natural to assume that there are others who have the expertise and knowledge to do a better job.

However, it is important to adopt a positive *professional identity* when it comes to SEND. While it is right and proper to acknowledge that there are other professionals who can help us improve our practice, it is also essential to understand that when teachers see themselves as professional, with *valid professional knowledge and skills in SEND*, rather than inadequate amateurs who are dependent on 'experts', they are more likely to take on the challenges of inclusive practice. It is important for teachers to understand and recognise the *particular skills and insights* they can bring to the *particular context of the classroom*. Confidence and self-belief are vital traits in an inclusive teacher, as has been demonstrated in research about the relationship between teacher identity and professional efficacy for SEND. For example, some early research by Sarason (1990) revealed that teacher preparation programmes in the USA had created a particular conception of preparedness for diverse learners. Graduates emerged believing that there were two types of human being (those with SENDs and those without) and that choosing to work with one type rendered you incompetent and inadequate in working with the other type. Sarason (1990) suggested that diverse learners might be better served if initial teacher training had been structured to promote a readiness not for a particular age or type of pupil but for *all* learners. Further, Kearney (2007) reports that in the case of disabled children who

had been marginalised from mainstream education, teachers had tended to assume permission to absolve themselves from responsibility for those children on the grounds that they were insufficiently trained or did not have the resources to cope.

Essentially, there is strong evidence to support the argument that where teachers identify *within themselves* relevant skills and knowledge for SEND, they are more likely to take responsibility for all learners and also more likely to secure positive inclusive outcomes. This is reported widely in the research literature (Campbell et al., 2003; Lambe and Bones, 2006). The following task explores this in more detail.



### Task 3.1 Constructing a positive professional identity for SEND and inclusive practice

Read the following case study of Lorna (a PGCE student). Though she had found the process of meeting the needs of diverse learners challenging, she does seem to have emerged from the placement with higher levels of confidence than Abigail. What do you notice about how she evaluates her own skills?

#### Case Study: Lorna's conceptualisation of inclusion and SEND

*To Lorna, inclusion meant educating everyone together within the same class and she had come to believe, from her experiences during placement, that this was possible. For her the term 'SEND' related to children who may have more severe needs and have been allocated additional support.*

*Lorna learned that it was very challenging to meet diverse needs. This extended beyond planning for groups and involved planning very specific adaptations for individuals. The most challenging needs to meet and plan for were among those children who were struggling but were not identified as having SENDs and so did not have allocated additional support. There were a number of children who were in this position in Lorna's placement class.*

*There was clear evidence that Lorna did meet the challenge and she developed some important professional skills and perceptions that she believed would be transferable into her next placement. She valued these. Her understanding of how to personalise learning had developed and brought rewards. Key among these rewards was seeing tangible*

*(Continued)*

*(Continued)*

*evidence of children's progress and developments in their self-esteem as learners. She could demonstrate this progress with clear evidence arising from assessment. Selina and Sascha (the TAs working with Lorna during her placement) and Elaine (her mentor) also confirmed that Lorna had made an early, determined start in knowing children's needs and providing for these. She was committed to doing so from the outset and strove to find ways to include everyone.*

*During the placement, Lorna developed pedagogic approaches that had a positive impact on children's progress and inclusion (such as breaking things down into smaller chunks or designing simpler tasks). She came to understand that this depended on really knowing children's starting points and how they were likely to see things. Finding children's starting points through day-to-day observation and assessment was a vital step towards undertaking planning that would meet their needs. To Lorna, it seemed essential that teachers should become experts on all of the children in their classes as soon as they possibly could. She was beginning to think about ways that she could achieve this at the start of her next placement because she wanted to ensure that children continued to move forward in their learning. If they took a backward step because she was planning poorly matched learning experiences, this would feel disastrous. Hence, this became an absolute priority for her next time around.*

*The task she had to carry out in school (known as the Personalised Learning Task) was an important scaffold for learning how to personalise for individuals in a whole class environment in her view. Knowing the focus children well led to pedagogic adaptations that benefited the whole class, including those who were working at an advanced stage of development. Lorna believed that the Personalised Learning Task kick-started the process by which she learned to personalise. The early successes she had were motivating and she learned from these. Without the early focus on individual needs (as required by the task) she believed that her journey would have been slower and that she would have achieved less in terms of meeting individual needs. The children may have benefited less too.*

*Lorna also noted that in the school there was a strong commitment to meeting all children's needs. She felt included in the team and valued. Together Lorna and the team worked towards making sure that children's wellbeing and progress were secured. She had a close working relationship with the TAs and she believed that this benefited children directly because it brought continuity of experience.*

*Lorna gained from the expertise within the school and from the team's commitment to supporting students' learning generally and in*

*(Continued)*

*(Continued)*

*the area of SEND and inclusion. Her professional development felt like a priority in the school. As a result of this placement she had developed awareness and professional skill in the areas of inclusion, SEND and differentiation that she felt were suitable to take into her next placement.*

*Her only worry was that as a full-time classroom teacher, she would not have the time to become as expert in every individual as she would like. However, she was reassured by her experience of working with the TAs. Their knowledge and insight into the children's needs could compensate for teachers' lack of time. She had come to value their insight and to recognise this as a resource for personalised planning.*

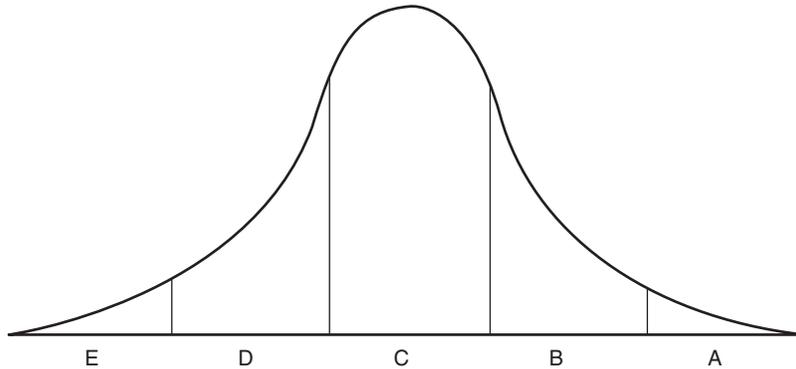
Lorna is able to describe the skills and insights she developed. She is also able to see their transferability to her next placement. It seems very important to Lorna to celebrate that she was learning to use assessment and in-depth knowledge of individual children as a basis for planning appropriately matched learning experiences. She also seems to have taken responsibility for this from the start. Her colleagues reported that she had been effective in this respect also and attributed this in part to her mentor's philosophy and expectations. Interestingly, Abigail reports that she had developed similar skills and insights about assessment, teamwork and pedagogic adaptations. She saw these as 'common sense' and was not sure that they were transferable to meeting the needs of children with exceptional needs. Lorna however (along with other students who reported developments in their confidence and readiness for SEND) conceptualised these as professional skills that were transferable to all children including those with SENDs. It could be suggested that there is a link between Lorna's professional identity and her effectiveness as an inclusive teacher.

Developing a positive professional identity for SEND is not an easy or straightforward thing to do. Some experienced teachers find it difficult to attain. Part of the solution lies in being dexterous and flexible about the conceptualisations of SEND that you adopt. The following section explores dominant and alternative ways to conceptualise difference and will consider how some approaches might be more supportive of professional self-efficacy for SEND than others. This adds to the discussion of the medical social models of SEND that were discussed in Chapter 2.

In summary, it has been argued that the route to inclusive practice includes the adoption of a positive professional identity for SEND.

## Critiquing the Normative Model of difference

Arguably, the Normative Model of difference is dominant within our education system (Florian, 2007; Hart et al., 2004). This model is based on the statistical image of the bell curve as represented in Figure 3.1.



**Figure 3.1** A bell curve representing normal intelligence

The ‘norm’ is identified through a process of quantitative data gathering where specific characteristics within a large sample of individuals are measured and the results plotted in frequency graphs. This commonly results in a bell curve with the *most* frequent outcomes in a population lying in the central range (C), *relatively frequent* outcomes lying either side of this (D and B), and the less common outcomes lying in the outer range (A and E). Outcomes in the central range are then conceptualised as ‘normal’ within a population, with C being ‘the norm’. Outcomes lying further and further from the norm are considered to be more and more deviant or ‘abnormal’.

This statistical concept is applied in a number of contexts. For example, during their babyhood and early years, children’s weight, body length and head circumference are measured and plotted onto a graph representing the normal distribution for these characteristics. For example, when my first daughter was born her body length was plotted onto the 15th centile. This meant that 85% of babies had a body length longer than hers. Hence her body length deviated from the norm to a significant degree. However, her head circumference was on the 99th centile which meant that only 1% of babies had a head bigger than hers. This meant that her head circumference deviated from the norm to a very significant degree. This led to some follow-up medical investigations. It turned out that her parents and grandparents had unusually large heads too and so

there was nothing to worry about. (I wished that someone had warned me about this before I gave birth!) In this way, the Normative Model is used to identify potential diseases or defects in medical contexts to direct treatments or therapies. However, it is also used in educational contexts, sometimes inappropriately.

Figure 3.1. represents the normal bell curve for intelligence. When psychologists design tests or assessments to measure IQ they trial them across a large sample of individuals and plot these on a frequency table to establish which results are most common (or normal) within a population and which results are uncommon (or deviant) within a population. For example, in the Stanford-Binet Scale (1922) and the Weschler Intelligence Scale (2001) an IQ of 100 represents the norm. An IQ of less than 70 is significantly deviant from the norm and represents abnormally low intelligence. An IQ of more than 120 is significantly deviant from the norm and represents abnormally high intelligence. These tests are sometimes used to identify SENDs such as ADHD and autism. However, the reliability of these tests is much contested (Deary et al., 2010).

Arguably, the bell curve representation of diversity is somewhat dominant in educational contexts (Florian, 2007). Hart et al. (2004) are critical of the validity and impact of bell curve thinking in education. They argue that the Normative Model of intelligence promotes a fixed model of ability that limits teachers' and learners' beliefs in their capacity to progress. Most importantly, a fixed model of ability promotes the belief that teachers cannot make a difference to young people's future development. This limits their self-efficacy and willingness to transform their practice in response to diversity. Hart et al. (2004: 166) urge teachers and the education system to adopt the concept of 'transformability' in place of ability labelling or Normative models, with this defined as 'a firm and unswerving conviction that there is potential for change in current patterns and achievement and response, that things can change and be changed for the better sometimes even drastically, as a result of what happens and what people do in the present'. By this, the authors are emphasising the value of adopting fluid models of ability and potential. You may wish to reflect on what implications this has for your professional development.



### Reflection Point

What impact might the Normative Model of diversity have on our attitudes towards children with SENDs?

How might this impact on classroom practice?

There are a number of reasons why the Normative Model is not always the most helpful conceptual basis for inclusive practice:

- It might lead us to label children who differ from the majority as abnormal or deviant. In this way they can be devalued or separated in ways that are not supportive of inclusion. Children who are perceived as outside may be conceptually positioned as marginal outsiders or outliers with exclusive consequences.
- The Normative Model can lead to a *majority first approach*. In practical terms, this is a model of differentiation that *prioritises the majority* in planning appropriate learning experiences. Thereafter there is some tinkering at either end of the 'ability' scale to fit those who are in the minority. Black-Hawkins and Florian (2011) are particularly concerned about the dangers of a majority first approach since it means that the education system never has to innovate or transform to include all learners. In this way, it continues to favour the majority over the minority in ways that are incompatible with inclusion or social justice.
- The Normative Model represents one dimension of diversity. However, individual children are richly and deeply unique. If we take 'ability' as the dimension under consideration, we must recognise that this is variable across time, contexts and subjects. It is even variable within subjects. For example, some children may write fiction more ably than non-fiction. Their grasp of spatial maths might be much stronger than their grasp of number problems. Further, while a child may have autism, the impact of that autism may be less when that child is working with skilful teachers and more when working with less skilful teachers. The normative conceptualisation of difference cannot capture this diversity or complexity in ways that inform responsive teaching.
- As argued by Hart et al. (2004), the Normative Model can promote fixed views of capacity and low expectations of learners by teachers. It also reduces the self-efficacy of teachers since they may not believe in their capacity to transform the potential of learners, believing that their abilities are fixed.
- It is likely that learners with SENDs would be conceptually positioned in lower quartiles of the bell curve. Teachers are likely to have been successful in the education system and hence occupy the upper or 'normal' quartiles. This may lead them to see themselves as spatially distant (and hence professionally distant) from them. Therefore, as in the case of Abigail (the PGCE student considered earlier), everyday practices may come to be seen as irrelevant or inadequate in meeting

the needs of such ‘extreme’ or distant learners. Teachers may also come to believe that learners with SENDs are unreachable outliers that cannot be supported by the effective pedagogies that they already use and understand.

However, it has to be recognised here that this model of difference is still very influential in schools and often reveals itself in rigid ability grouping (Cornwall, 2013; Marks, 2013). Working within this context means its relevance or usefulness cannot be undermined entirely but we do need to be aware of its dangers and limitations. This is explored more practically later in this chapter when the issue of differentiation is considered in greater depth.

Florian (2007) argues that the initial training of teachers should *demote* the Normative Model of difference whilst *promoting* the following alternative conceptualisations:

- An acknowledgement of difference as an essential, *normal*, everyday and typical characteristic of human development.
- A professional identity which embraces all learners and competencies for all learners.
- The incorporation of knowledge of human difference into a collaborative, problem-solving, solutions-finding context.

In this way, although student teachers will come across learners whose skills, competencies and learning styles are differently packaged, they will understand that it is their responsibility to shape their broader understanding of effective teaching and learning around individual differences. Florian (2007) argues that student teachers may come to see SEND as part of a spectrum of diversity rather than distinguishing these learners as separate and in need of specialist pedagogy of which they can never be availed. In developing and applying such alternative ways of thinking consider Task 3.2, and later an account of the *Spiral Spectrum Model of difference* which follows.



### Task 3.2 Constructing your personal model of diversity

If you were going to draw a picture representing how you see and respond to diversity in your class, what would this look like?

Student teachers tend to operate a Normative Model of difference in the earlier stages of their training but this becomes more sophisticated as

they progress through their programme. Sometimes they will acknowledge that while their placement classes and schools might demand that they use ability grouping in quite a rigid way, they will apply more flexible ways of working and thinking. Below are three examples from third-year undergraduate students. You may wish to compare your drawing with theirs and consider how strongly they represent their philosophy about inclusion in their work.

### Example 1: James and the jigsaw puzzle

James drew a jigsaw puzzle (see Figure 3.2). The pieces were different shapes and sizes but some of them shared the same pattern. James saw diversity in this way and he believed that it was his job to know about the similarities and the differences between all of the children in his class. For James, really *knowing the children* was key and assessment and interaction were the tools for this. In the end, it was his job to find ways of bringing all of the children together within one classroom community. This was why he had drawn all of the puzzle pieces fitting together into a whole picture. All of the puzzle pieces fitted together without losing any of their individuality or uniqueness. It was also noticeable that there was no distinct pattern for SEND as a separate or definable group. The approach to assessment and personalised provision explored in Part Two of this book adopts a similar conception of diversity and how to respond to it in the context of the mainstream classroom.



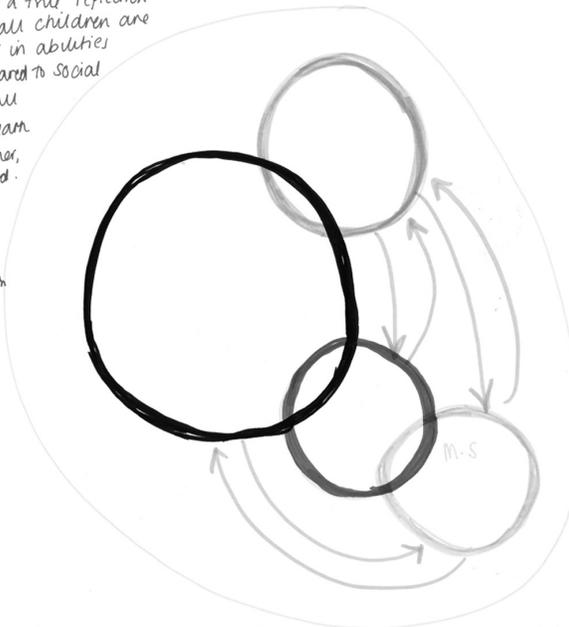
Figure 3.2 Model of diversity (James)

## Example 2: Lauren and the overlapping circles

Lauren acknowledges that children in her placement classes might be grouped by ability but also believes that it is important to recognise that these groupings are not always a true or full reflection of their developmental profile. With this in mind, she shapes her learning environment so that all the children can work and learn together. The circles and arrows in her picture show this interaction and overlapping. She has drawn a large circle around those representing groups within the class, and noted 'the circle around the model represents the teacher facilitating the learning and development of all children as well as learning from the children themselves'. A collaborative approach (with children learning together and teachers learning with children) is important to Lauren and part of her definition of inclusion.

Although children are grouped within ability groups - this is not a true reflection of children's abilities, as all children are individual and may differ in abilities regarding intelligence, compared to social or physical etc. Therefore, all children can work and learn together and from each other, so all children are included.

The circle around the model represents the teacher facilitating the learning and development of all children, as well as learning from the children themselves.



Lauren

**Figure 3.3** Model of diversity (Lauren)

## Example 3: Sian and the pyramid of development

Sian has drawn individual spirals of different colours within a pyramid and written 'Individual needs in different areas within a pyramid of development'. This represents the developmental profile of one child

who may be at different stages in different areas (such as social, emotional, mathematical, language, etc.). The spirals represent dynamic development (i.e. the child is moving forward and learning actively) and the pyramid represents this child's unique journey and their innate capacity to progress. Sian believes that it is important to have confidence in every child's ability to learn and make progress rather than focus on what they cannot do.

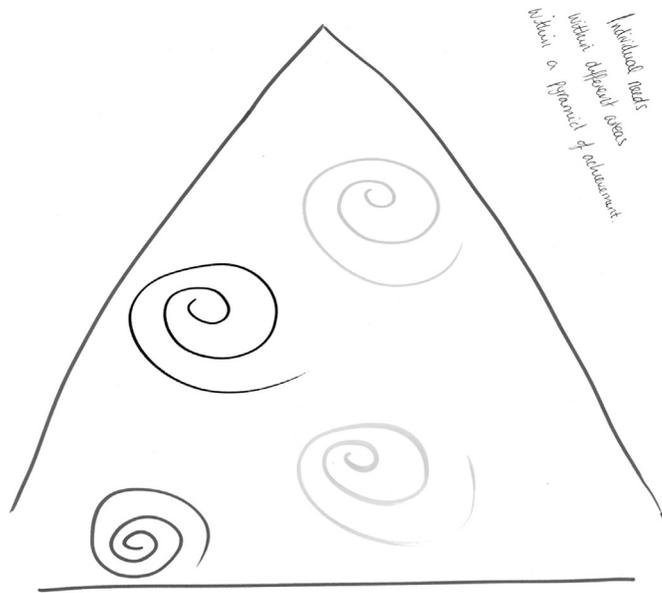


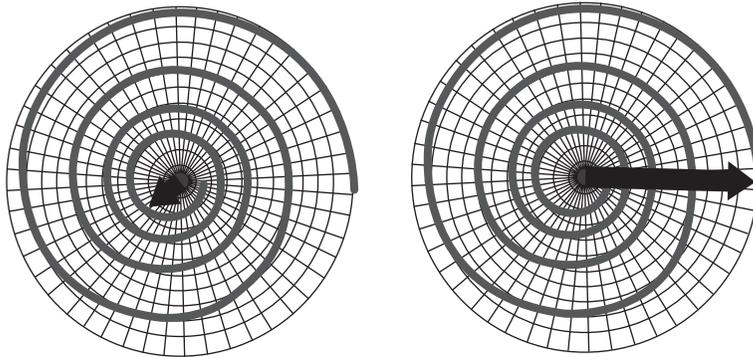
Figure 3.4 Model of diversity (Sian)

## Introducing the Spiral Spectrum Model of difference

As a result of our research with teachers and student teachers (Trussler, 2011; Robinson, 2014), we have developed an alternative picture of diversity, the *Spiral Spectrum Model of difference*. When working with student teachers we present this as an alternative to the Normative Model. We do not wish to impose this or claim that it is the only and best way to picture diversity. Rather, we want student teachers to use the model when it is useful or view it as another option which has a number of positive possibilities. It offers a more inclusive conceptualisation of diversity as well as a tool for assessment and planning in the inclusive classroom.

### Spiral Spectrum Model

We have used the Spiral Spectrum Model throughout this book. The spiral itself is intended to represent a continuum of development. The arrows have been used to depict where a particular individual is assessed to be, at a point in time, on the continuum of development for each characteristic.



This would represent an individual at an early stage in their development

This would represent an individual at an advanced stage in their development

**Figure 3.5** The Spiral Spectrum Model of difference

This model offers some conceptual advantages to inclusive practice and thinking as follows:

- It is more dynamic than normative or linear models and characterises development in a transformative way. Children are positioned within a dynamic developmental space that encourages us to see their capacity for forward movement.
- It represents the child holistically and captures the complex nature of their developmental profile. Hence, it counteracts a focus on deficits or on mono-dimensional conceptions of who a child is and what they are capable of. For example, rather than labelling a child as ‘autistic’ and assuming that this means holistic deficits, we can picture the unique developmental profile of that child and thereby secure more fitting, respectful responses.
- The spiral is value free with no representation of a ‘norm’. Instead it conceptualises all development as normal. While a child with SEND may be at the earliest stages of development, this does not mean that those stages are not part of any other child’s development or any teacher’s understanding. Rather they are part of a natural and *acceptable* continuum of human development. In this way the spiral answers the challenges presented by Florian (2007) for ITE, because it encourages

a conception of diversity as a natural and inevitable characteristic of humanity.

- In not presenting a norm, the model detracts our focus from deficits and abnormalities.
- The spiral has all children *in* it and they are spatially close, rather than representing some features of diversity as marginal, outlying or other. In this way it can have a positive impact on professional identity since the stages of development it captures are not beyond the understanding or practice of ordinary classroom teachers. All children are *in it* and *ours*.

The second part of this book applies this model to the process of planning responses to diversity and SEND, and provides contextualised explanations for how it can be used to support you in developing more inclusive practices.

In summary, this section has critiqued the Normative Model of difference and presented alternatives to it. The aim is to help you identify and understand the impact of these models on our response to SEND. The following section takes this further in exploring the concept of differentiation and in offering new starting points for this important process.

## Ways of thinking about difference and differentiation within the classroom

### Alternative 1: The Normative Model as a starting point for differentiation

Many teachers may use the Normative Model as a shorthand way of conceptualising the diversity in a class and this can influence their approach to planning. For example, the nature of different classes may be visualised in the way shown in Figure 3.6.

The picture is different according to what proportions of children are attaining levels above, below, or in line with national expectations. Class 6B had less children working at significantly below age-related expectations and no children had been identified as having SEND. Class 3B had a smaller number of children working significantly above expected levels. Class 2R and 6B had a similar proportion of children working at expected levels but larger numbers of children of 'low ability' were in class 2R. You may have come across similar ways of thinking about diversity within a class but this way of thinking can lock teachers into particular starting points for differentiation that are not always promising for the purposes

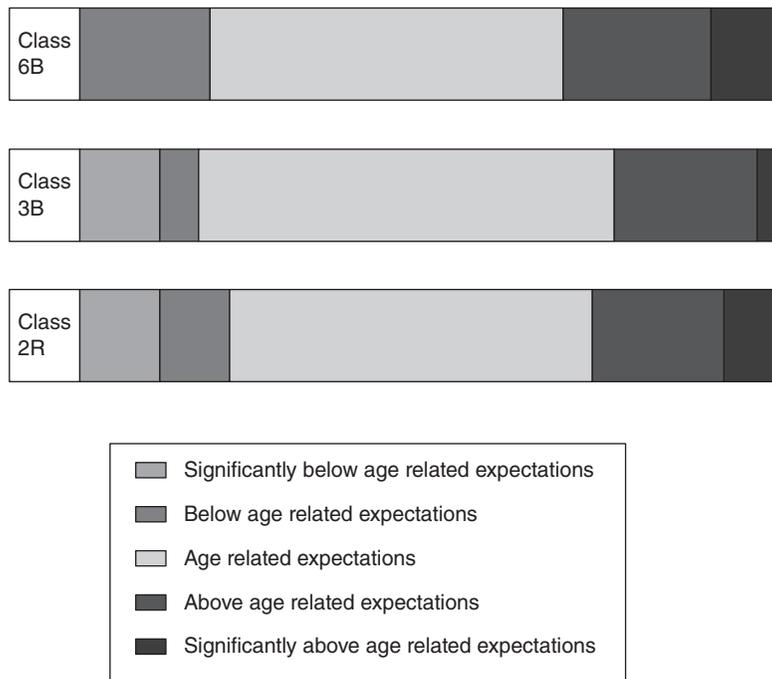


Figure 3.6 Range of 'abilities' in a class

of inclusion. It may reinforce particular ways of imagining or picturing diversity, as represented in Figure 3.7.



Figure 3.7 The 'Majority First' Model of differentiation

For example, it may lead teachers to consider the *majority first* in planning a learning experience. In this way, learning objectives and activities are designed to suit the majority. From there the objectives, task, resources and level of adult support would be adapted for those who were 'less able' or 'more able', resulting in different levels of task and children working in distinct ability groups. Arguably, this way of approaching planning for diversity dominates because this is the model encouraged by England's system of testing and accountability. English schools are judged on how many pupils reach or exceed expected levels

of attainment. The school inspectorate expects to see such overt forms of differentiation as a sign of strategic intervention to secure progress (Ofsted, 2011). Incidentally, as noted in Chapter 1, the legislation in England also encourages teachers to associate provision for children with SENDs with doing something ‘different and extra’ as the definition of SEND in England also implies:

1. A child or young person has special educational needs if he or she has a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her.
2. A child of compulsory school age or a young person has a learning difficulty or disability if he or she—
  - i. has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others of the same age, or
  - ii. has a disability which prevents or hinders him or her from making use of facilities of a kind generally provided for others of the same age in mainstream schools or mainstream post-16 institutions. (Children and Families Bill, 2014, section 20)

With all of this in mind, the fact that teachers may adopt this way of thinking about differentiation is understandable and a reflection of the current policy context rather than their values. However, if you find yourself (for career or political reasons) having to adopt this or work within it, it will be necessary that you know about its limitations.

Corbett (2001) argues that ability grouping and individual interventions are perfectly acceptable as means of differentiating if they operate alongside other flexible, innovative and creative responses. Corbett created the term ‘connective pedagogy’ to describe her conception of inclusive practice. She notes that ‘connective pedagogy’ applies to all children including those with SENDs, and is concerned to demote the idea that children with SENDs need a different, extra or specialised approach. Corbett (2001) presents a Three-stage Model of differentiation and argues that where all three stages are at work, a school is more inclusive of all children including those with SENDs.

Differentiation operating at the shallowest level of inclusiveness (stage 1) will be limited to different levels of worksheets, tasks and interventions outside the class. Stage 2 will take responses to diversity to a deeper level. Varied pedagogies will be used to engage all learners and ensure accessibility in the context of whole class teaching. For example, a child with a visual impairment may be offered raised shapes to support learning during a lesson on 2D shapes, whilst these are also available to all children should

they wish to use them. At this level, practitioners will make the effort to get everyone participating and children will be given opportunities to make their own choices and help each other. Teaching staff will be listening to the children's ideas and taking these forward. Stage 3 differentiation extends this into the whole school culture and ethos. Multiple pedagogies will be used within a culture that celebrates difference and there will be a concern to support individuals within a community where people work together to improve practice. Stage 3 differentiation is about attitudes and belief systems and is infused with the belief that all children can learn and that solutions can be found to secure the inclusion of all learners.

Hart et al. (2004) and Black-Hawkins and Florian (2011) are highly critical of an approach to differentiation that takes a majority first approach and which conceptualises responses to SEND as 'different and extra' for two key reasons. Firstly, this approach frames as 'different and extra' that which should be a natural, embedded part of inclusive practice. Secondly, it makes the minority an afterthought with the eventual consequence being an education system that continues to serve the status quo, leaving the minority as a group to be considered once the needs of the majority have been served.

There are some alternatives to the 'majority first' approach that have inspired more innovative and inclusive teaching. An explanation of these follows.

## Alternative 2: Starting with everyone

Black-Hawkins and Florian (2011) argue that the question '*How can I design this learning experience for everyone including Johnny?*' tends to be underused to the detriment of inclusive practice. This is because it can trigger innovative and substantial changes that can benefit all children, including those who are most vulnerable.

You could ask this question as a starting point for planning differentiation in ways that may make learning more accessible for everyone. For example, Johnny might find it difficult to write fluently and if you were planning a science investigation you could ask 'What will make this learning experience and achievement possible for everyone including Johnny?'. This could lead you to choose a video recording or photographic recording over written forms. All children could access the learning and having 'everyone' in mind rather than 'the majority' means that overt forms of support (such as TA deployment or adapted worksheets) become unnecessary. It is not that such forms of overt differentiation are 'bad' but that they are sometimes unnecessary, and that it is important not to use this approach as the only one.

The cartoon in Figure 3.8 (Giangreco, 2007) is a metaphor for the value and logic of this approach. If the path clearer had asked ‘What is the quickest way to get *everyone* in school?’ the child in the wheelchair would not have been left waiting.



**CLEARING A PATH  
FOR PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS  
CLEARS THE PATH FOR EVERYONE!**

**Figure 3.8** Starting with everyone

Source: Reprinted with permission of the copyright holder, Michael F. Giangreco, © 2007

Another illustration of the value of the ‘everyone’ starting point is illustrated by the following scenario. Zobia was a second-year undergraduate student teacher and had been very proactive in meeting the needs of the class. One of the children in her class (Ben) seemed to find it very difficult to get started with his independent work. Although Zobia explained the independent task during the introduction, Ben avoided starting it and would wander about the classroom, sharpen his pencil and talk to others instead. To get him engaged, Zobia had put an individual reward system in place. Ben had an egg timer on his desk and if he started his work before it had run out he would get a sticker on his chart. This was working and it was pleasing to see that Zobia had given thought to this. However, when starting the task, children other than Ben were a little hesitant and were checking with each other what was needed. It is possible that if

Zobia had asked herself ‘How can I make sure everyone understands the task?’ and had built in some visual supports and reminders that may have resulted from this question, Ben would not have needed this individual intervention. In this way, using ‘everyone’ as a starting point can bring new ideas and ways forward and those approaches can benefit a wide number of children. Doing so can also save you time.

### Approach 3: Starting with the individual

Another starting point is asking ‘*How can I plan this learning experience so that Johnny can succeed in the context of my whole class teaching?*’. Sometimes this can lead to changes of pedagogy that can have a positive impact on the learning of everyone, including Johnny. A second-year undergraduate student, Helen, found this to be the case. Johnny was a pupil in her placement class who had some difficulty staying attentive during a part of the lesson that we call ‘carpet time’ in England. Carpet time usually involves gathering all the children on the ‘carpet’ so that the teacher can lead learning in an interactive way. During this time there will be questions, discussions, explanations, modelled tasks, sharing of ideas and instructions. Johnny found it hard to attend to this so Helen developed a countdown system. When there were five minutes left to listen she would hold up a green card: she would then hold up a yellow card when there were two minutes left to listen and a red card when there was just one more minute. She found that this helped Johnny but that it also improved the attention and behaviour of many other children as well.

What is useful about this approach is that it triggers the design of new solutions and innovations. It can also reframe a child who is finding it difficult to learn as a solutions catalyst rather than a problem. Learning difficulties become triggers for innovations in our teaching so that all children can learn more effectively.

In summary of this section, there have been some alternative starting points for differentiation which can trigger new inclusive practices. No one model or starting point is perfect but the important thing is to use flexible and varied approaches in a creative way. Corbett’s (2001) account of an inclusive pedagogy suggests that an inclusive connected pedagogy adopts the following character:

- It draws from many sources of ideas according to suitability.
- It is led by children rather than dominated by teachers – they have choices and options too.
- It draws on best practice from a wide range of sectors (including the special education sector).

- It involves stage 1, 2, 3 differentiation, but in relation to what works best for particular learners at particular times.
- It learns from the learners.
- It makes learning fun.
- It is not about convenience and routine. Always allocating a TA to a child with SEND or using different worksheets is not differentiation. Using identical group structures (including ability groups) is not differentiation.
- It has connections to sharing, supporting and encouraging.
- It recognises that no teacher or support staff should feel isolated and alone.
- It is based on support systems for children and teachers, which are flexible, non-judgemental and safe places in which creative solutions can be found without fear or bias.

Corbett's conception of inclusive pedagogy as connected pedagogy is important and useful as it emphasises the creative, problem-solving, collaborative, innovative nature of inclusive practice



### Reflection Point

Which starting points for differentiation have you seen used most commonly during your placements?

Which starting points for differentiation do you use most commonly?

How would you like to develop your approach to differentiation?

### Summary

It has been argued that a positive professional identity for SEND is essential. If teachers recognise the relevance of their general skills to SEND they are more likely to engage in taking responsibility for learners who have this label. The chapter has also reviewed the strengths and weaknesses of various models of difference and differentiation, noting that normative models may lead to the domination of a 'majority first' approach which does not always give rise to the most inclusive practices. It has been argued that while the 'majority first' approach is helpful in

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some circumstances, it is useful to have other starting points to hand when planning a learning experience, specifically considering the question 'What would help everyone to access this learning experience?' or 'What would help this child (who has the label of SEND) to access this learning experience?'. The aim of the chapter has been to support you in understanding and then operationalising a range of models so that you can select an approach that may result in the most inclusive outcomes for diverse learners.

## Additional resources

The articles in this journal explore the impact of fixed ability thinking on teachers and children: [www.worlds.co.uk.ezproxy.derby.ac.uk/forum/content/pdfs/55/issue55\\_1.asp](http://www.worlds.co.uk.ezproxy.derby.ac.uk/forum/content/pdfs/55/issue55_1.asp)

This website explores alternatives to fixed ability thinking: <http://learningwithoutlimits.educ.cam.ac.uk/>

This resource examines (in a balanced way) the negative consequences that might arise from labelling children and not labelling them: [www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01411920802044446?journalCode=cber20](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01411920802044446?journalCode=cber20)