TEACHING ASSISTANT

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion in Work with Children & Young Individuals
Evaluate how own attitudes, values and behavior could impact on work with children and young people

As someone who acts as a role model for the children under your care, and whose responses to their achievements and mistakes are likely to have an effect on their learning, you may be prepared to agree that your own attitudes, values, and behaviour are likely to impact on your work, and on the children and young people with whom you work.

You would hope that any effects and impact on the children you work with would be positive, but in order to tell if they are, you must first assess your own attitudes and values, and the way you behave, and then look for signs of impact.

Speaking to someone respectfully and courteously, regardless of age, gender, occupation, race or anything else, is a great way to demonstrate and help foster the same behaviour in the children under your care.
**Being self-aware**

Reflective practice is the ability you have of being able to look back over your day (or even at the time) and see what messages you are giving others, how you come across, and what attitudes and values your behaviour reveals.

One of the best ways to do this is to talk openly with the teacher you work with, or with your manager, preferably at the end of each day, however, this kind of guided reflective practice may not be possible given the time constraints and busy-ness of the people involved.

Another way you can do this is through keeping a short journal that details particular situations that have occurred throughout each day, and how you dealt with them. You can then look at whether or not you would deal with each situation differently in the future, if there was a better way to handle it, or if you have learned any lessons from what happened. This is a very useful method of evaluation, and is a good habit to maintain throughout your career.

As you become more used to reflective practice, you will find that you are able to apply reflection in action, as well as retrospectively. So, if you have learned a particular lesson about the way you speak about someone or the way you say something, you may in the future find it easier to apply the lesson at the time, rather than thinking about it afterwards and relearning the lesson.

**Areas to evaluate**

If you first work out the areas of your work that may be affected by your attitudes, values, and behaviour, it is easier for you to then work back to how you actually behave, and what attitudes and values that behaviour demonstrates.

**Relationships with others**

How you treat other people when you are observed by the children in your class is likely to have an effect on them. If you are courteous and respectful of other people - whether they are a child or an adult - this is likely to be reflected in the way the children treat others too. If they have a strong role model to follow, they are more likely to behave in the same way as the role model.

If you treat some people differently; for example, if you are more likely to be dismissive of the views held by a child with learning difficulties, you may quickly observe that other children in the class also treat children with learning difficulties differently.
Look back over your recent experiences, and think about whether or not you do treat some children differently from others. It may be necessary to be brutally honest with yourself, but it is a useful exercise, and it makes it easier for you to recognise when others do the same thing.

**Effect on learning**

Learning, and the ability to learn, is in part related to how open we are to taking in new information. Someone who is uninterested in other cultures, or in the way certain other people live, or in the things they think, is unlikely to be interested enough to learn about them. It may also be indicative of a more closed mind in general, and this type of attitude tends to reduce curiosity about the world and genuine interest in unfamiliar ideas.

Children are not, as a rule, closed-minded, so if they display disinterest in new things or in certain new things in their lives - there may be an influence in their lives that is causing this. It may not be you who has influenced them in this way, but your values and attitudes can help or hinder their progress in this area.

Healthy values for you to demonstrate to the children under your care include an interest in other cultures, other people's views (regardless of perceived 'ability') and other people's experiences.

**Accepting others**

Regardless of where someone is from, what their ethnicity, religion or culture is, what age they are, or whether or not they are able or disabled, it is strongly felt that accepting others for who and what they are is the best way to approach everyone.

Physically or learning disabled children often have a hard time fitting in with other children because their differences tend to be amplified by those who are more able. Children can be terribly cruel, and may imitate less advantaged children, or they may exclude them from activities in class and games during break time.

If you reflect on the way in which you speak to a disabled child, compared to how you interact with typically able children, are you able to identify any differences? Do you 'baby' a disabled child more, by speaking in cute tones of voice, or by helping them do everything? Do you listen properly when they speak, with good body language and using active listening skills, or are you only likely to do that if the child speaking is a more able child? Again, it may be necessary to be brutal with yourself when it comes to questions like these.
It is very easy to give a disadvantaged person less time because they may be harder to understand, or it may take them longer to effectively communicate with you, but they should not be given less acceptance and respect for all that.

Make comparisons

If you do find instances where you feel your behaviour may not have been as well modelled as it should be, also look for times when you have done well. Compare the two situations and consider how to change the negative behaviour for something more positive and inclusive.

Evaluation can take a lot of honesty, and looking at our own work in a reflective well makes us better workers, more effective at our jobs, and more mindful generally, so it can only be a positive exercise in the end.