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Differentiation

Do

Arrange the activities in the community setting so that people with varying abilities can all make a contribution.

Story

All the adults and children in Sandra's family had a tradition of going to the pantomime together every year. Recently, however, the theatre introduced strobe lighting, which triggers Sandra's epilepsy. At first we thought that this would exclude Sandra from the panto. However, a detailed check revealed that seats

tucked under the balcony had only a 'letter-box' view of the stage. The flashes of strobe lighting bounce around the building, but in these seats everything comes from the front and there is little impact on peripheral vision. As an extra precaution, they both bought programmes. When the strobe started, the supporter nudged Sandra to get her attention, and then looked down and held her programme over her face. Sandra likes to copy, so looked down too and held her programme up until it was over. They had fun at the panto!

Hints & Hazards

This is a term most commonly used in education. Every environment, whether educational or not, offers a range of differentiated opportunities for participation, and this range might be broad or narrow, suitable for the person concerned or not. In the example overleaf, the initial assumption was that the seats were undifferentiated, and all high-risk for strobe effects. In fact there were both high-risk and low-risk seats.

Recognising differentiation can help people find a place, and it can also help to identify what changes can be made by the community

organisation to increase opportunities for people to participate. This is especially useful for people who have good and bad days. It also allows people to move freely up or down a ladder of skills, pace of activity or achievement without being obliged to leave the environment. It can reduce the number of people for who the environment is deemed unsuitable.

This approach is more difficult in environments which are competitive or where everyone has to reach the same point at the same time.