

Every Child Matters and the Concept of Education



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SETTING THE SCENE

The government's policy agenda for children and young people - referred to here as Every Child Matters or ECDM - encourages an holistic approach, both in the way children and young people are viewed and in the way that different services and different occupations work together. It brings together within one policy and departmental framework, a very wide range of settings and occupations that are engaged in working with children and young people. It promotes that common outcomes (being healthy, being safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution, and achieving economic well-being and, in some jobs, well-being) affective communication, and engagement with children, young people and families, child and young person development, supporting and promoting the welfare of the child, supporting transitions, multi-agency working, and sharing information, should be applied across **all** these settings and occupations. It also sets for the universal provision of ten items of integrated services such as Children's Centres and Integrated Schools. This holistic approach is spearheaded clearly by the government.

The outcomes for ECDM are inter-dependent. They show the relationship between educational achievement and well-being. Children and young people learn and thrive when they are healthy, safeguarded from harm, and supported.

(DfES Government 2004: 40)

This approach makes topical and urgent a question with a long history: what is education? Or, put in a more topical way, what concept of education is most relevant to, and appropriate for, the wide-ranging and holistic approach of the ECDM agenda? Education has always been a contested concept. Unfortunately in the continuing public focus on technical and operational 'how' questions, the critical and fundamental 'what' question has been neglected.

Every Child Matters also confronts all university institutes and departments of education with a number of similarly critical questions, answers to which have major implications for their future identity and development. How do they answer the question: 'what is education?' What part of the broad policy area covered by ECDM does their understanding of education include - what services, what occupations? How should they

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This publication is the product of a working group at the Institute of Education that came together to consider what concept of education is most relevant to, and

supportive of, the wide-ranging and holistic approach of the Every Child Matters agenda. It aims to stimulate discussion about how Every Child Matters relates to the concept of education, treating it 'not as a prescription to be followed but as a provocation to democratic debate'.

作者介绍:

目录:

[Every Child Matters and the Concept of Education 下载链接1](#)

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