
Education in Emergencies: A Critical Toolkit for Reflective Practice

2026

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Image credit: Ally Shepherd

How we're defining EiE

Education in emergencies refers to any learning in various crisis situations:

E.g. Education in conflict settings (from international invasions to gang-related insecurity)

E.g. Education in displacement settings (IDP or refugee education in humanitarian or development contexts)



Image credit: Ally Shepherd

Why this toolkit?

Persisting gaps in EiE between:

- **Global principles** and local contexts
- Externally defined priorities and the expressed needs, aspirations, and constraints of communities living in humanitarian settings
- **Industry standards** and unseen or unrecognized actors
- **Democratic ideals** and rising authoritarianism or military interventions globally

Aims of the Toolkit

- Tools for **reflective, justice-oriented** decision-making.
- Engage with **decolonial approaches** to education in crisis.
- Challenge assumptions underlying mainstream inclusion strategies and deficit-based approaches.
- Encourage **alignment of values with practices**.
- Create conditions to **amplify perspectives from marginalized groups** and those experiencing intersecting barriers to accessing, or remaining and thriving in education.

Who is this Toolkit for?

- Practitioners
- Policymakers
- Activists
- Educators
- (I)NGOs
- Students of EiE

It aims to support those in EiE to:

- **Reflect critically** on practices and positionality.
- Navigate identity and **power dynamics**.
- **Challenge structures** and assumptions that perpetuate inequality, even inadvertently.
- Reflect on the design and implementation of interventions that are **inclusive, contextually responsive**, and socially just.

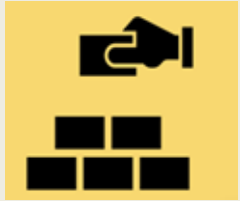
How the Toolkit works?

Ask questions to prompt **reflection**. ‘**Deep dives**’ to expand learning.

Apply a **critical lens** when thinking about planning, implementing, and evaluating our work.

To be used when practitioners can carve space for reflection, e.g. AGMs, before grant applications, when planning or evaluating a programme, or given to new employees as part of onboarding.

How is the Toolkit organized?



Foundations and principles



Navigating power dynamics



Intersectional approach to inclusion



Co-production with communities

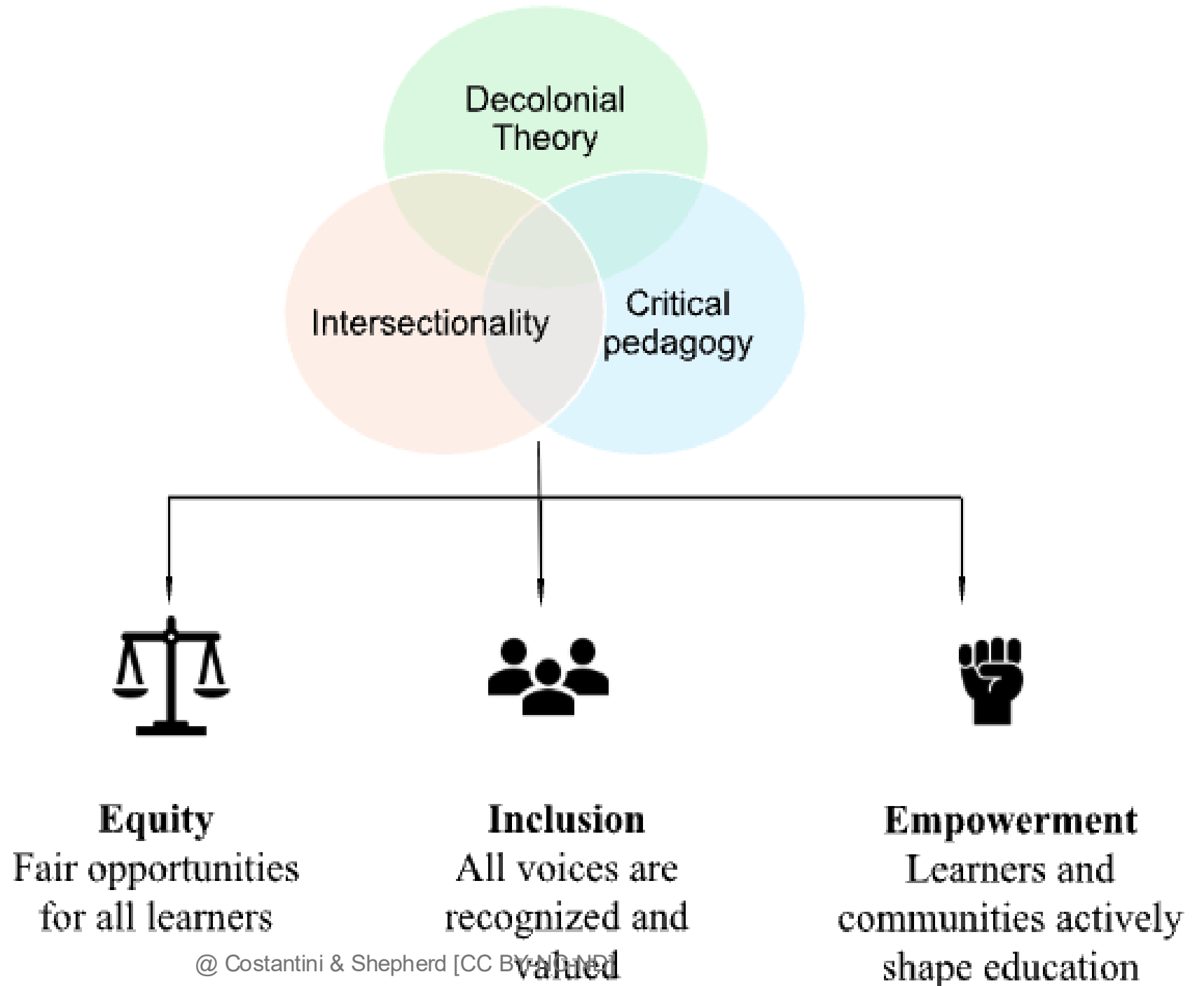
+ 'Language is Power' = key terms and their usage in the Toolkit

Image credit: Ally Shepherd

Foundation and Principles

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Our Critical Practice Framework



Our Core Principles



Awareness of power

Recognize and address structural and relational inequalities



Inclusion as a process

Move beyond tick-box participation



Contextual grounding

Center local knowledge, history and practices



Ethical reflexivity

Reflect on your assumption and positionality

Language is Power

We know that **language is not neutral**: it reflects histories of inequality, colonialism, and exclusion, and can either reinforce stereotypes or challenge them.

E.g.

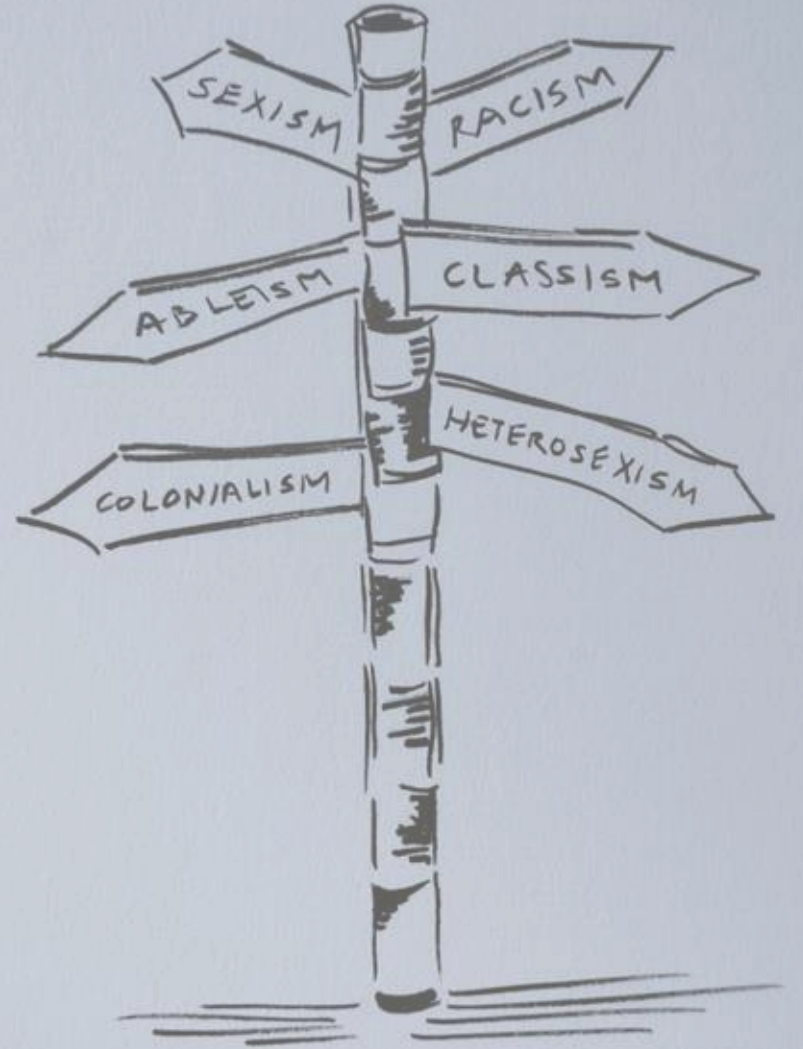
- First World, Second World and Third World;
- Developed/ Developing Countries;
- Global North/South;
- Minority v Majority World.

Also

People first v identity first language (asylum seeker v people seeking asylum)

Asset-based v deficit-based language (illegal v undocumented)

Navigating Power Dynamics



Aims

- Understand the **multiple dimensions of power** in conflict, displacement, and post-crisis contexts.
- Recognize how their **organizational role, social identity, access to resources, and affiliations** confer power or impose constraints.
- Reflect on the **ethical implications of power dynamics** in practice.
- Take steps to **mitigate inequities** and foster more participatory education interventions.

Power, Positionality and Privilege in EiE

Stage	Power Dynamics	Positionality	Privilege
Needs Assessment	Who sets the agenda? Whose voices are heard? Whose perspectives are prioritized?	How do the identities of those assigning needs shape what they see as a “need”?	Whose experiences are treated as credible or important? Who is assumed to have valuable knowledge insights?
Resource Allocation	Who decides what is available, to whom, and how? Are community assets valued as contributions?	How decision-makers’ positions influence what is “fair” or “necessary”	Who benefits from existing institutional power and access?
Community engagement	Which groups are empowered to participate in decisions?	Which groups’ identities are seen as legitimate community representatives?	Who has easier access in public decision-making spaces?
Monitoring and Accountability	How is informed consent gained for data collection? Who holds decision-makers accountable? Who is excluded?	Can you ensure confidentiality within participation to protect identities? How evaluators’ experiences and identities shape what they see as “success” or “failure”.	Whose complaints or feedback trigger action - and whose do not.

Example Activity

WHEEL OF POWER/PRIVILEGE

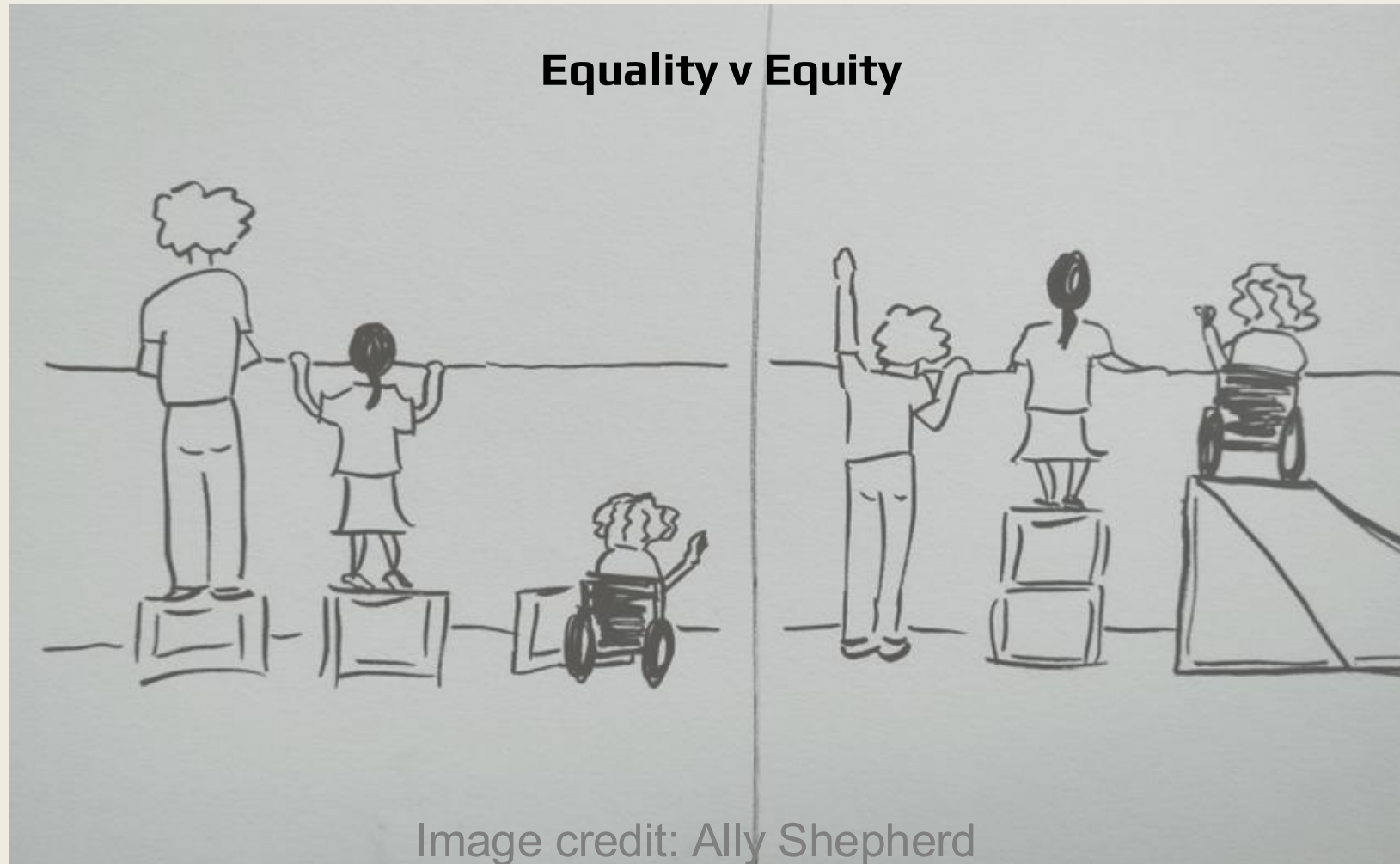


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Intersectional Approach to Inclusion



Aims

Provide support for designing and delivering EiE that is inclusive, equitable, and responsive to overlapping forms of marginalization by:

- Understanding **intersectionality**;
- Reflecting on **case studies** of intersectional exclusion;
- Designing a **checklist for inclusion** in your context.

Understanding Intersectionality and Inclusion

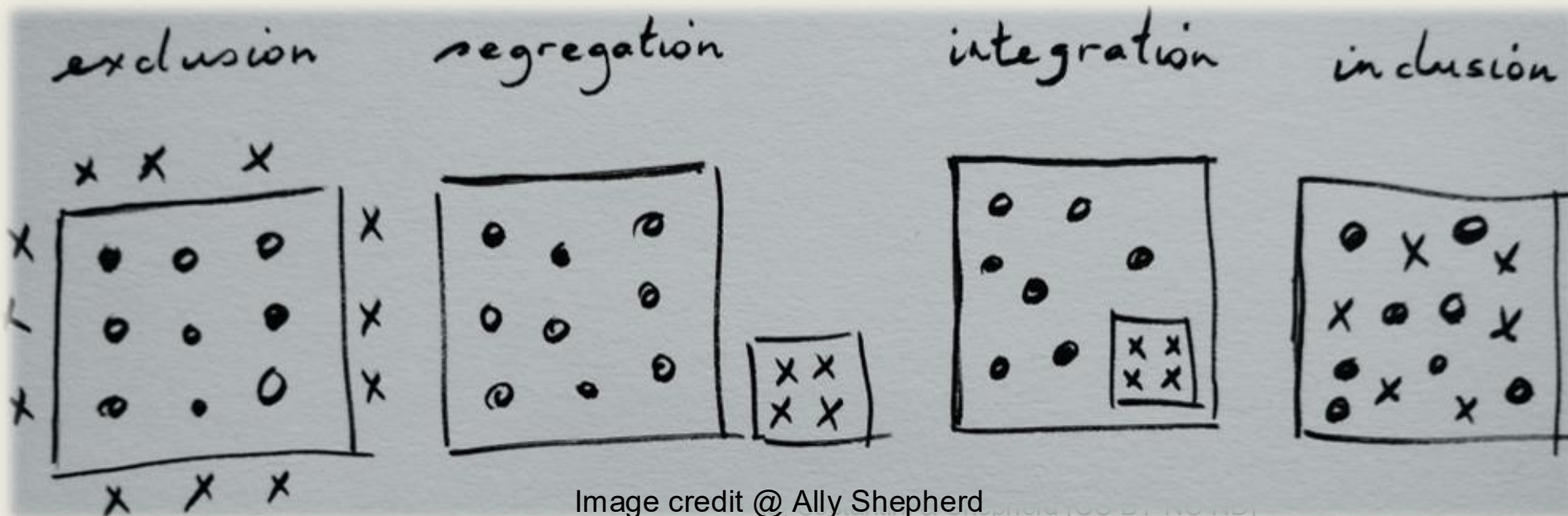
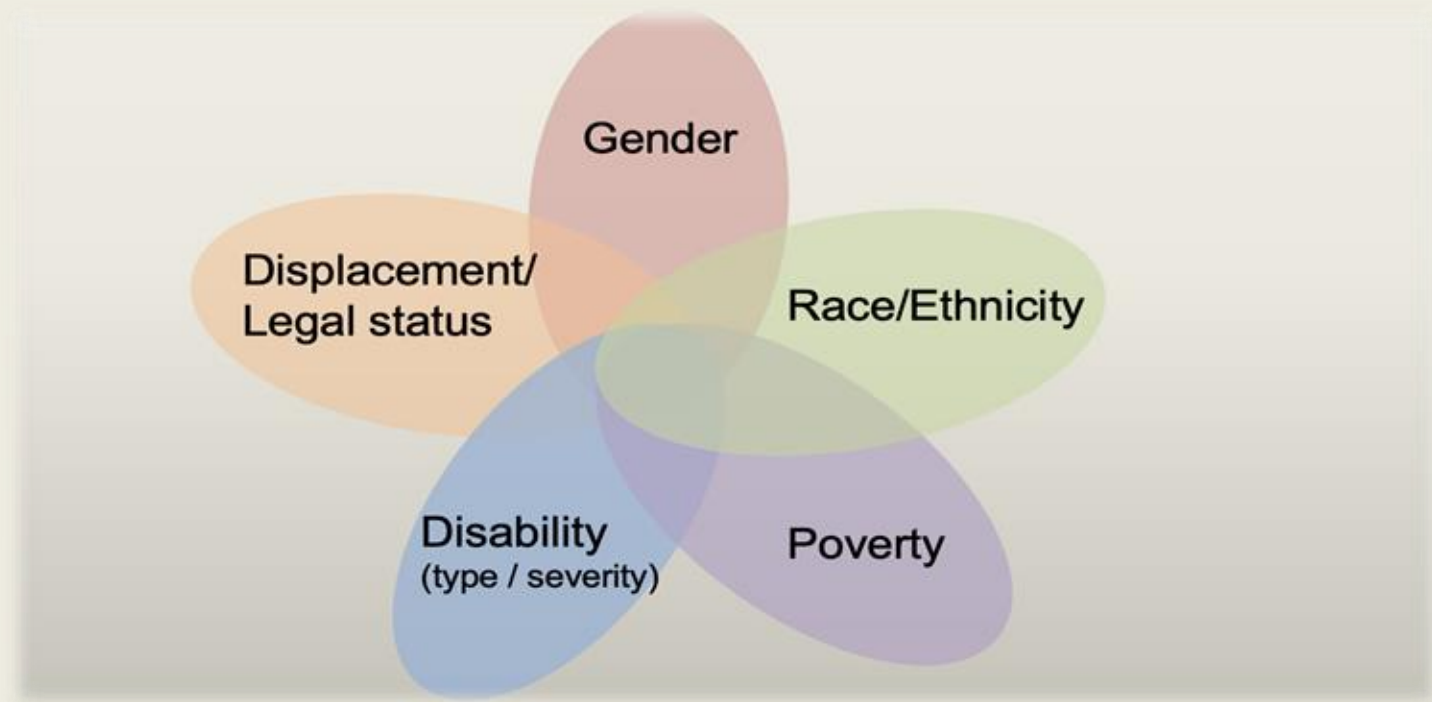


Image credit @ Ally Shepherd

Implications of Intersectional Inclusion in EiE

EiE Area	Towards an intersectional approach to inclusion	Practical Examples
Programme design	Inclusive programmes must be flexible and responsive to overlapping needs, rather than designed for an “average” learner within a group.	Accelerated learning programmes may suit boys who work during the day, but not married adolescent girls
Access & participation	Being physically present in school does not guarantee meaningful inclusion and participation in learning.	Physical access may exist, but language barriers or stigma due to learners belonging to specific ethnic, and/or religious groups or displacement status can still prevent participation.
Data collection & monitoring	Inclusion efforts risk reproducing exclusion if data categories are too broad.	Having data about disability that is not disaggregated prevent us from seeing who are the people most at risk of being left behind.
Resource allocation & funding	Donors often fund broad categories (“gender programmes”, “refugee education”, etc.), missing the diversity within groups. Funding strategies should support intersectional analysis, allowing programmes to respond to nuanced needs rather than generic categories.	A flexible budget allows programmes to adapt when intersecting barriers emerge during implementation.

Activity example

Activity 2. Aligning values with practices.

Read your organization's mission statement. What language is centred e.g. inclusion, equality or equity? Are specific groups or identities mentioned or excluded? If so, why?

In what ways does your work clearly align with the mission's values? Where are the gaps between intention (mission) and practice (implementation)?

Write down 1–2 actions you could take to better align your work with values, including who you may need to consult or what support you may need.

Community Participation

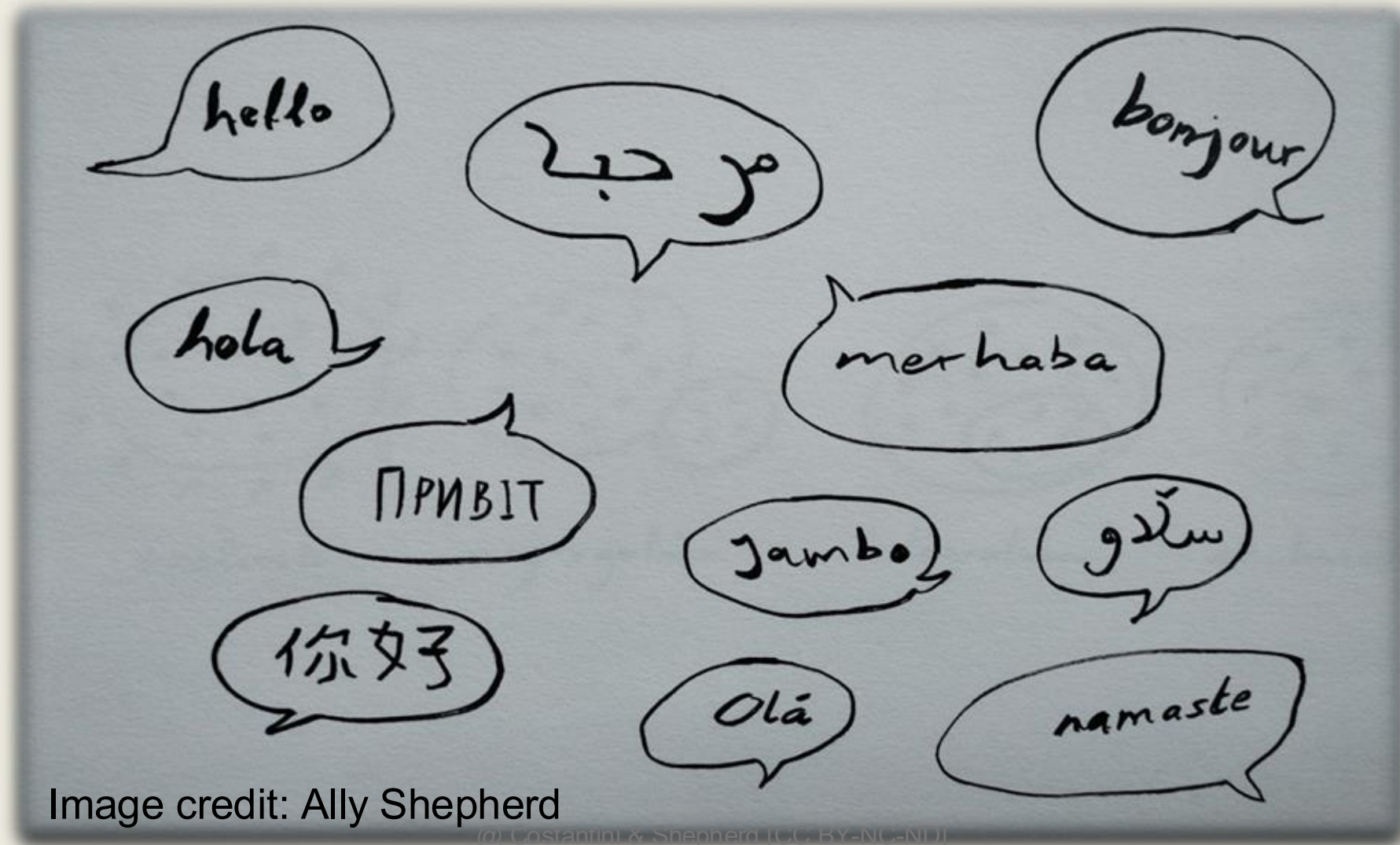


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Aims

Explore the **motivations, benefits, and barriers** associated with participation in EiE.

Understand that **participation sits along a spectrum** from consultation to collaboration to self-governance.

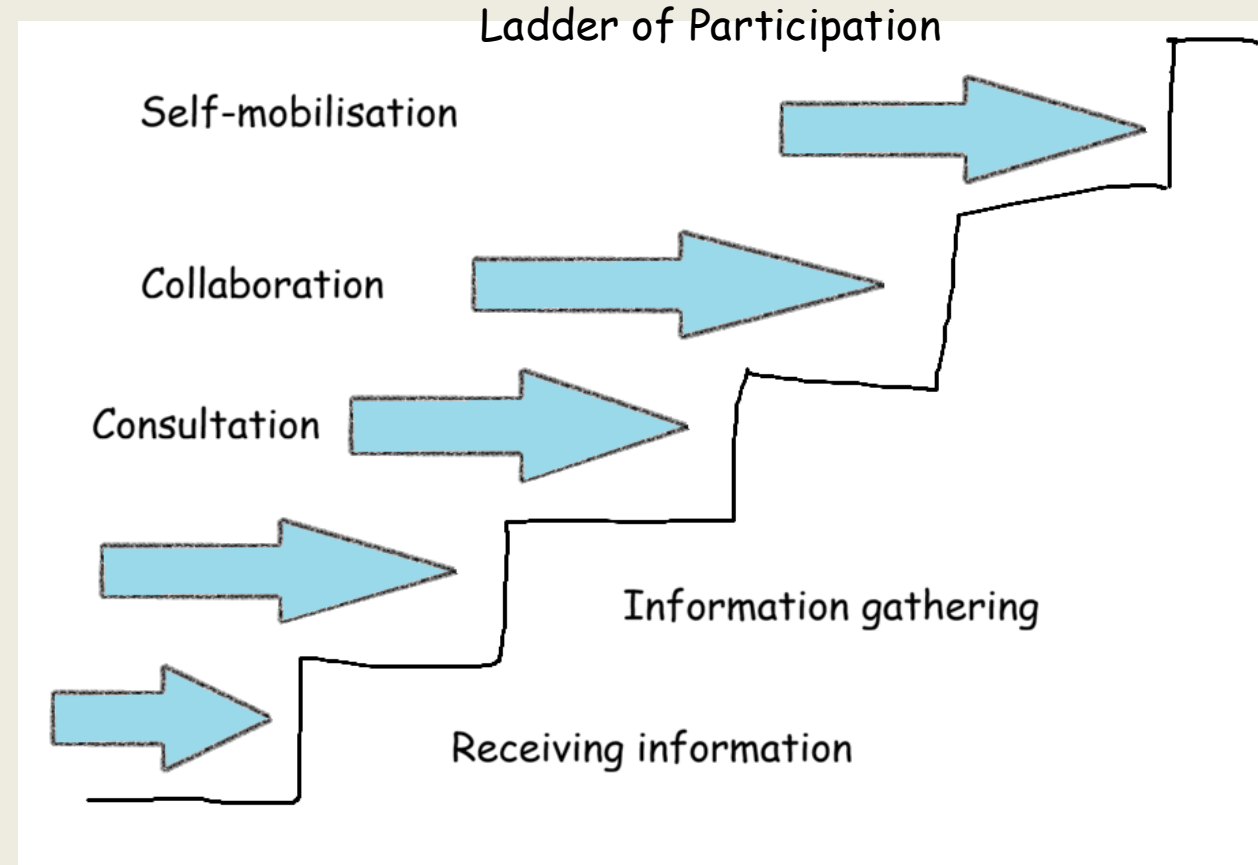
Consider participation in distinct **case studies** as well as in practitioners' own contexts.

“To alienate humans from their own decision making is to change them into objects.” — Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1980)

- Participation as a **right**
E.g. UN Convention Rights of the Child
E.g. Core Humanitarian Standards on Quality & Accountability
- Participation improving efficiency, trust, relevance, outcomes.

Asset mapping
Co-design
Co-delivery
Participatory evaluation
Participatory budgeting
Co-governance and autonomy

- Participation as a **spectrum**.
- **Barriers** to participation.
- Participation as tick-box tyranny?



“True participation has to mean something more than witnessing the logic that excludes you.” - Jessica Oddy-Atuona (2026)

Example Activity: Reflection 1 (5 mins)

Doing one survey to say that people were consulted is better than not asking at all. Do you agree or disagree? Consider things like **tokenism**, the **right** to participate, and the **ladder of participation**.



If you have questions or would like to request a workshop, please contact Giada or Ally via:

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