

Making Our ECE Centres Inclusive and Welcoming of Diversity & Promoting Human Rights within an Early Childhood Setting.

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“When someone with the authority
of a teacher, describes the
world and you’re not in it, it’s
as if you looked into a mirror and
saw nothing.”

— Adrienne Rich.



Quick brainstorm- in pairs.

- Q1 What do you do right now for minority groups in your teaching space to be inclusive?
- Q2 How many things that you do now could be transferred over to include Rainbow families?



Welcome.

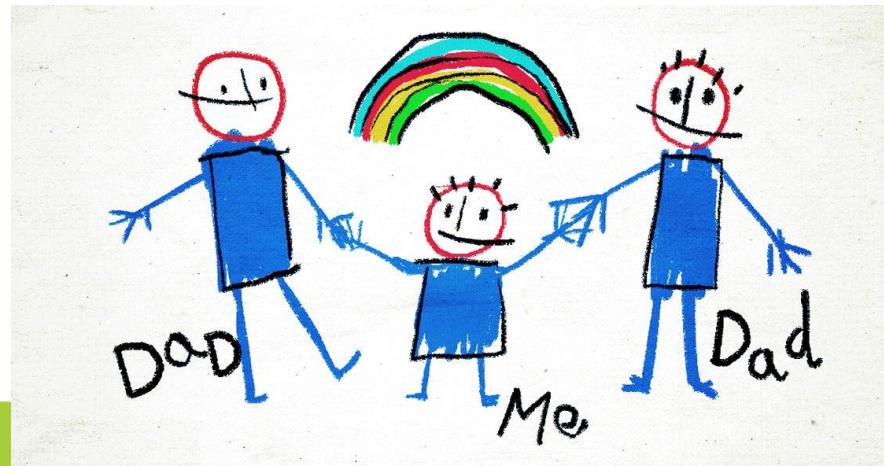
- What does Inclusion mean to you?
- What does and doesn't gender mean?
- Going to look at two examples today, gender discrimination, and family discrimination.

Inclusion:

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- Inclusion means being with one another learning with one another, caring for one another and how we deal with diversity
- (Forrest and Pearpoint 2003, p.2).

- In Aotearoa, many of the children we work with come from diverse family structures.
- This presentation explores how we can make our centres inclusive and welcoming of diversity.



Social Justice

- If we persist in denying children, families, and teachers within early childhood contexts opportunities to understand the world beyond heteronormativity, then social justice for many will be denied (Gunn, 2003).
- Similar to other social justice issues of the world, both today, and in the past.



Any of this ring true for you?

Many teachers “get” that it is inevitable that silence around this issue will have damaging outcomes for children. And yet, they fear raising the issue in their programs for a host of reasons:

- (1) lack of comfort with their own knowledge
- (2) personal dissonance regarding their own beliefs about homosexuality;
- (3) discomfort resulting from their assumption that if they advocate for engaging LGBT families, people will think they are LGBT; and
- (4) fear of reprisal from people associated with the setting in which they work. (Burt, Gelnaw, & Klinger Lesser (2010).

Heteronormativity.

1. A sense of familiar to the majority of the population.
2. We expect people to behave and be connected in certain ways.
3. Heteronormativity is a set of ideas and practices that privilege and secure the dominance of heterosexuality, Gunn (2003).

What is: Discourse ?

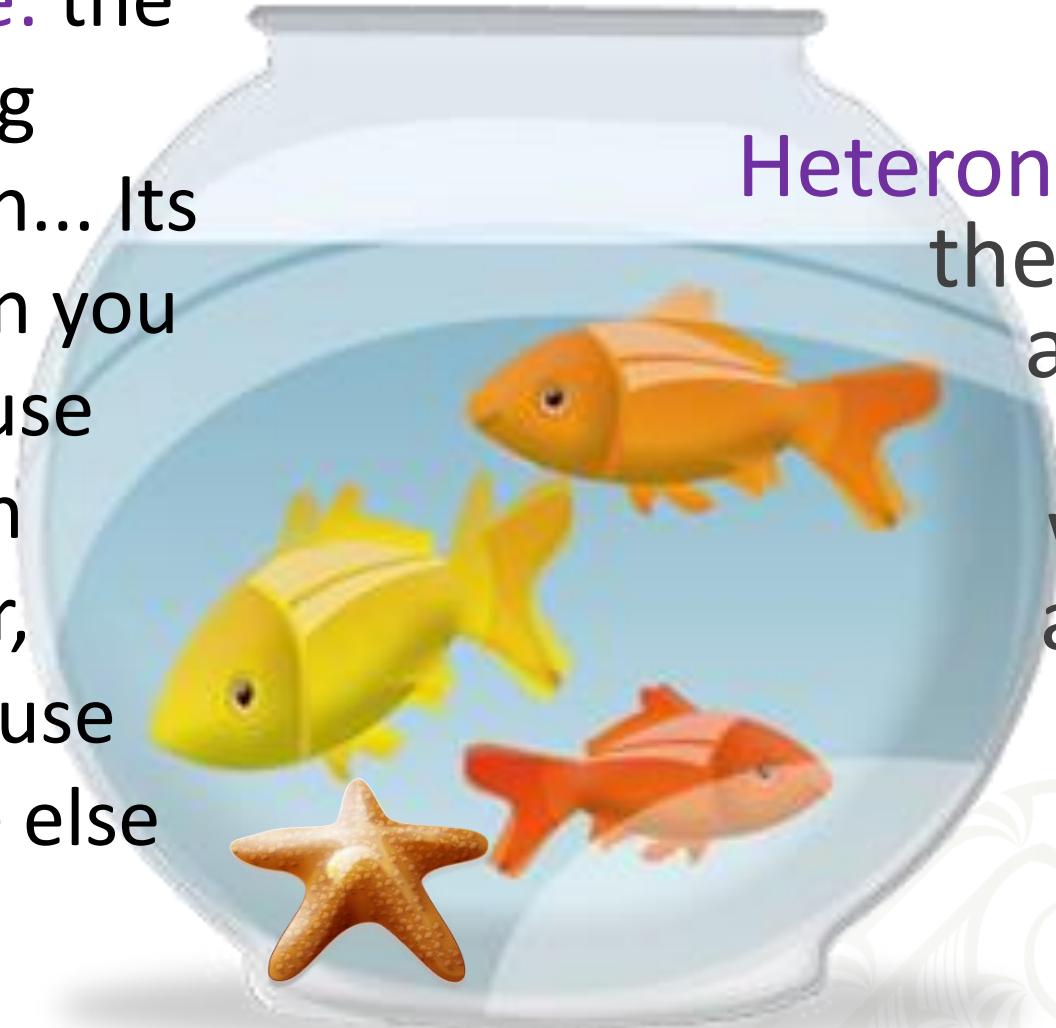
Discourses are situated within languages
and practices.

They become discernible through an
analysis of the ways people use language.

Through the ways practices order us, and
allow us to order ourselves.

(Gunn 2003, p3)

Discourse: the swimming of the fish... Its the action you do because you are in the water, and because everyone else does it.



Heteronormativity: the water around the fish, what we are in.

Research Questions

- What do lesbian teachers do to disrupt heteronormative dominance in early childhood settings?
- What barriers do lesbian teachers encounter when disrupting heteronormative dominance in early childhood settings?
- What strategies were used to overcome the barriers faced?



Theories used.

Feminist post-structuralism

- Feminist post-structuralism helps explain and understand the gendered “construction and assumptions of identities, diversity and learning” (Blaise, 2005, p. 3).
- Feminist post-structuralism offers a way to understand how power is exercised (Blaise, 2005).

Queer theory

- is about the acknowledgement that no particular set of categories is necessary,
- and even “the most entrenched categories are subject to revision” (Marinucci, 2010, p. 36).

What does the literature say?

Heteronormativity is the main barrier preventing teachers speaking about lesbian and gay issues.



Recognise that heterosexual-parented families receive constant affirmation through language, literature, and images.



As a result of this dominance, acceptance of lesbian and gay issues is still a contentious issue within Aotearoa/New Zealand.



There are expectations that teachers involve learners in critical discussion of significant issues in society (Teacher Council).

“Acknowledging gay issues and gay families in the classroom is different from asking teachers, children, or parents to accept or agree with homosexuality, the goal is to create educational environments free of harassment, homophobia and discrimination (p197).

“Rather than asking for agreement on the issues of homosexuality, we are asking for support and respect for all children in that community” (Wolfe 2003 p. 199).



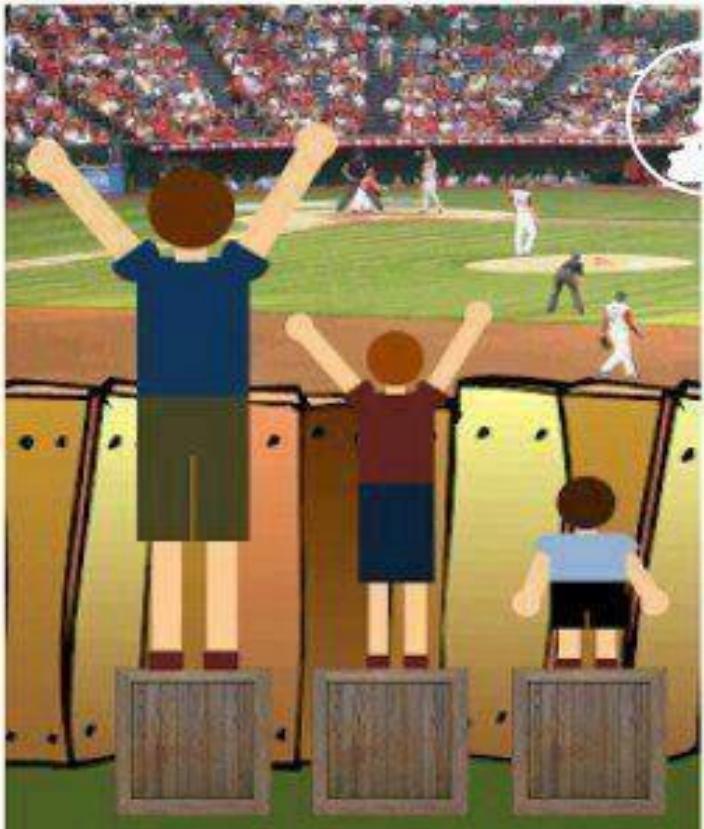
By being conscious not to make heteronormative assumptions about the families they work with and ensuring that curriculum activities are not shaped by heteronormativity, teachers can demonstrate they are being responsive to the needs of gay and lesbian headed families.

Terreni, Gunn, Kelly, & Surtees (2010)

Equality Vs Equity

"A lot of people think that equality and equity are the same thing. They're not. Equality is treating everyone the same. Equity is treating people differently based on their needs."

Equality



Equity



Teachers should aspire to be positive role models for children and demonstrate a commitment to equity, justice and social inclusion.



This can be providing teaching resources that display non-heterosexual images, and promote the idea that a wide range of family structures are acceptable within our society.

Terreni, Gunn, Kelly, & Surtees (2010)

Gay parents point of view

- Want to be seen as ‘just like any other family’.
- Teachers were generally welcoming and warm.
- Direct contrast to lack of provision made for lesbian-parented families.
- Parents stayed silent about issues- not wanting to be seen as ‘others’, or appear demanding.
- Lee and Duncan, (2008)

A teachers point of view

- While we live in a society that surrounds children with negative stereotypes of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals and families, there are tangible and significant steps educators can take to create an inclusive curriculum.
- Teachers can make a difference in the self-esteem and safety of a child in simple ways— through the language they use and by including children’s books, matching games, and puzzles that reflect diverse family structures.
- For example, instead of saying, “Take this home to your mother and father,” we can say “Take this home to your family.”

Wolfe, (2003) states:

“If new teachers are to be capably prepared to meet the challenges associated with classroom and community diversity, teacher educators have a responsibility to incorporate such issues in teacher preparation course work, even when there is controversial or political overtones to such issues,” (p. 195).

A gay teachers point of view

Managed Risk- be a turtle

And then there have been other times when... for whatever reason and usually because I'm not sure about them [people she is talking to], I guess it's my personal safety thing, like I wouldn't necessarily be talking about being gay, or rainbow families. Sophie.

Gay Teachers are future focused

- They worked in a range of ways that helped others to see them for who they are, thus disrupting the discourses in their work spaces.
- For three participants, it was deemed vital to pursue visibility for the sake of their children and the future they desired for their families.
- Carving out a space for yourself despite the dominance of heteronormativity was identified as a challenge, but a challenge that participants want to take up.

Child's point of view

- Am I important? – who talks about me and my family?
 - What we say to ourselves – self talk.
 - Can be positive or negative.
- ➡ What messages are gay families and children in gay families hearing/seeing in your centre environment??

Challenging Heteronormativity

- When you look at resources that you buy ...I mean there's nothing about gay families in there. When you're talking about families they're not there so you have to sort of make a concerted effort to include rainbow families in to your teaching, whereas other families are just there.
(Emma)

All participants used an awareness-raising discourse:

- **Francis** - I would definitely step in there and really explicitly advocate for acceptance of gay/rainbow parented families.
- **Emma** - If [a child said] ‘you can’t have two mummies, or daddies’, then I would probably sit down and say, well actually...
- **Sophie** - There have been plenty of times when I have kind of joined those discussions and put those sorts of seeds out there.
- **Kate** - it is an important thing to say ‘well you could both be the mums if you want.

Conclusions and Implications

- Teachers identified that at times they were unprepared to challenge heteronormative thinking.
- This affirmed that although there are many positive changes within society to heteronormativity, there is still work to be done.
- Lesbian teachers have a desire to be visible within their workplace. To put themselves into situations where they are visible, however, makes the participants vulnerable.

So, what can we do

- ❖ Think about what you usually say – being aware is an important aspect of change.
- ❖ Practice talking about difference in safe spaces.
- ❖ Display the rainbow flag.
- ❖ Talk to children about mum-mum/dad-dad families.
- ❖ Make up stories with same-gender parents.

So, what can we do

- ❖ Make a display showing “Who lives with you?” for all children and staff. Discuss similarities and differences.
- ❖ Represent different kinds of family structures with curriculum materials such as posters, puzzles, photos, and dolls.
- ❖ Create matching games or puzzles that reflect different family structures.

❖ Create curriculum that challenges gender stereotypes, expanding what is typically considered acceptable for girls and boys.

❖ Support children's choices—in play, clothing, activities, toys, or future career plans—that break gender stereotypes.

❖ Celebrate a “Person You Love Day” or Family Day instead of celebrating Mother’s Day or Father’s Day.

❖ Check your enrolment form is inclusive.

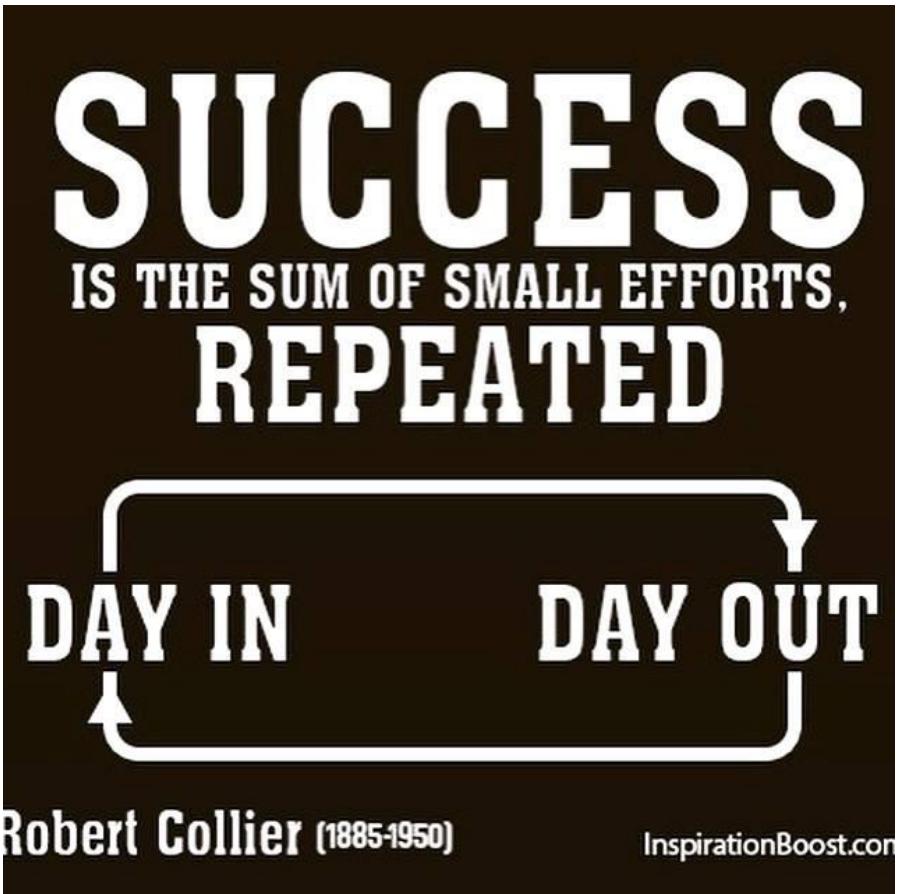
❖ Check your centre information flyer shows inclusion

❖ Brain storm ideas about practices you could change
within your centre

❖ What resources would you like to have available for
your team to use to help them come on board with
your new thinking.

I'm interested in knowing...

- What has this presentation made you think about?
- What is your biggest obstacle to overcome?



•Thank you

Literature review:

- Clay, J. (1990) Working with lesbian and gay parents and their children. Published in *Young children*, March 1990.
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- SKattebol, J. & Ferfolja, T. (2007). Voices from an enclave; Lesbian mother's experiences of childcare. In, Australian Journal of Early Childhood. Vol32 Number 1, March 2007.
- Surtees, N. (2008) Teachers following children? Heteronormative responses within a discourse of child-centredness and the emergent curriculum. In Australian Journal of Early Childhood Volume 33 Number 3.

Time + Interest +
Questions
= Understanding.

Staff to show respect to all parents. Clay. 1990

Methodology

- The semi-structured interview and the focus group model were chosen because they align with the feminist and post-structuralist theories. It also involves the participant in the research process (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). One key principle of feminist research is that research for women is conducted by women and is about women (Madriz, 2000).