



Transforming organisations and people

Social Justice and Equity: Curriculum and beyond

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I think that we can't go around... measuring our goodness by what we don't do. By what we deny ourselves, what we resist, and who we exclude. I think... we've got to measure goodness by what we embrace, what we create... and who we include. - Pere Henri : Chocolat the Movie



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What are the social justice issues evident within your early childhood community?

What are the social justice issues evident within your local geographic community?

Defining social justice?



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The belief in an equitable, compassionate world where difference is understood and valued, and where human dignity, the Earth, our ancestors and future generations are respected.

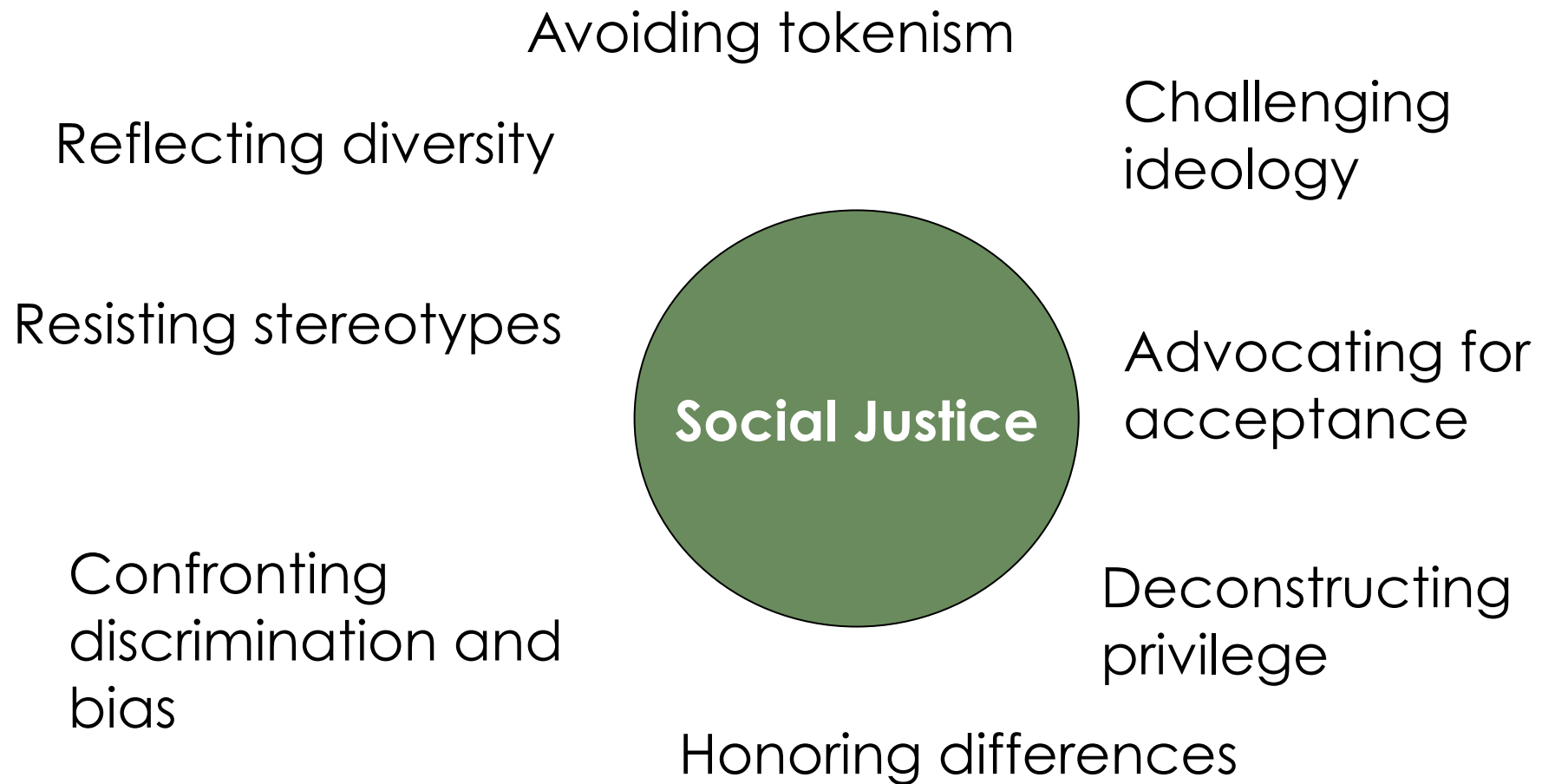


Pedagogical approaches

What pedagogical approaches are used to embrace a social justice approach into the curriculum?



How do we practice social justice?





Social construction of childhood

Cultural binary adult/child

Children constructed and defined as being oppositionally different from adults

Children considered to be the dependent, immature and the powerless 'other' in relation to the independent, mature, powerful, critically thinking adult



Social construction of childhood

Culturally constructed adult/child binary relationship, perpetuated 'logical' and 'natural' differences between adults and children

Children's dependence and powerlessness is assumed and regulated

Common-sense knowledge prevails that regulates this difference e.g. adult's being told 'don't act like a child'; children being chastised for 'acting like adults'



Social construction of childhood

Construction of 'adult's world' /child's world

“Images of children are invariably constructed *by adults* to convey messages and meanings *to adults*” (Gittins, 1998, p.111)

Adult/child binary constituted in rigid power relations



Social construction of childhood

“Children’s lives are lived through childhoods constructed for them by adult understandings of childhood and what children are and should be”. Mayall (1996, p.1)



Reflecting on our values

1. What are the social problems we are addressing?
2. What are the characteristics of each problem?
3. What do we already know about it and how do we think about it?
4. What have been the dominant frames around the issues?
5. What do we think should be done to improve or solve the problems?
6. What is our policy agenda in our settings and our objectives in tackling these problems?
7. What objective indicators would suggest to us that opinion /policy /behaviour and practice is moving in the right direction?
8. How are we addressing social justice within our curriculum
9. What forms of communication practice seem best orientated to this problem (Bales & Gilliam 2004)

Critical questions

- In documentation and in our curriculum who is represented?
- What isn't said?
- Is that an issue?
- How does pedagogical documentation and its silences represent '*pasteurised*' and '*homogenised*' images of children?

‘When I speak, someone else doesn’t. Silence opens space for others to announce themselves’ Silin (1999)



Diversity

- Gender
- Sexuality
- 'Race'
- Socio economic status
- disAbility
- Family structures
- Gifted and talented
- Inter-familial relationships



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Aboriginal Racism

Teacher is painting the face of Jessica (4 yrs), who is an Indigenous Australian, with Indigenous like dots in preparation for a dance performance. Natasha (4 yrs) who is also Indigenous is watching.

Natasha: (looking at Jessica) Jessica you looking like a Koori kid.
(Looking at Teacher).Uncle you're making Jessica look Koori.

Teacher: Yes I am painting Jessica's face, but I think Jessica is still a Koori Kid even without her face painted.

Natasha: No, you making her look like one.

Teacher: Like what?

Natasha: Koori.

Teacher: You are a Koori kid and you don't have paint on your face.

Natasha: No I'm not, you haven't painted dots yet.

Teacher: What difference will the dots make?

Natasha: Then I'll be a real Koori, so hurry up.



Understanding Gender - 11 Year Old Boy

What does it mean to be a boy?

'It means you're a male'

What do boys do?

'They play sport, they like to watch football and sport and that's all they do'

What do girls do?

'Girls do... they play with dolls, they like to make themselves (pause) and buy dresses, they like to put on make-up and they make themselves pretty and that's all, oh and they like to go shopping'

What do you like to do?

'Play sport, like to go onto the computer, and I like to stay outside and play'

What happens to boys who like to do things that other boys don't usually like to do?

'They are girls'



Understanding Gender - 14 Year Old Girls

What does it mean to be a girl?

'Like opposite sex of a boy, different features, different perspectives in the way you look and things and stuff'

What do girls do?

'Gossip a lot, hold grudges, spread rumors, talk about guys'

What do boys do?

'Hmm, play sports, talk about girls'

What do you like to do?

'Go out with my friends and go to parties'

What happens to girls who like to do things that other girls don't usually like to do?

'They can get in trouble from their parents and from other people who care for them, and they feel about themselves in different ways, they see themselves as not being honest to themselves'



Understanding Gender - 17 Year Old Girl

What does it mean to be a girl?

'It means to be feminine'

What do girls do?

'Shop, gossip, they are just like me, they always like to be out and doing something'

What do boys like to do?

'Hang out with their friends, pick up girls, go out with girls, get drunk'

What do you like to do?

'Shopping, partying, hanging out with my friends'

What happens to girls who like to do things that other girls don't usually like to do?

'They are a Tomboy, it's a word to define girls who do things differently, they are seriously tom boys'



Media, Popular Culture and Discourses - Masculinity

'Burn Fat Faster - pg 48'

'More Sex, Better Sex - pg 62'

'Sexual Coventry - pg 109'

'Save Yourself From Style Disaster -pg 89'



Media, Popular Culture and Discourses - Femininity

'Fashion Forecast' - pg 26

'Growing up Hollywood Style' - pg 54

'Gucci Koochie Koo' - pg 178

'Party Starters' - pg 364



Media, Popular Culture and Discourses - Femininity

'Chic , Romanic Dresses' - pg 158

'Fashion Crisis' - pg 118

'Big Spenders- are you a shopaholic?' - pg
150



Media, Popular Culture and Discourses - Femininity

'Slow Fade - What Happens to Beautiful Girls?'

'The New Classics - Ultimate Choices for Your Wardrobe'

'Couture Report - Fashions Most Beautiful Moments'



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Hierarchies of difference

(Robinson, 2002; Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006)

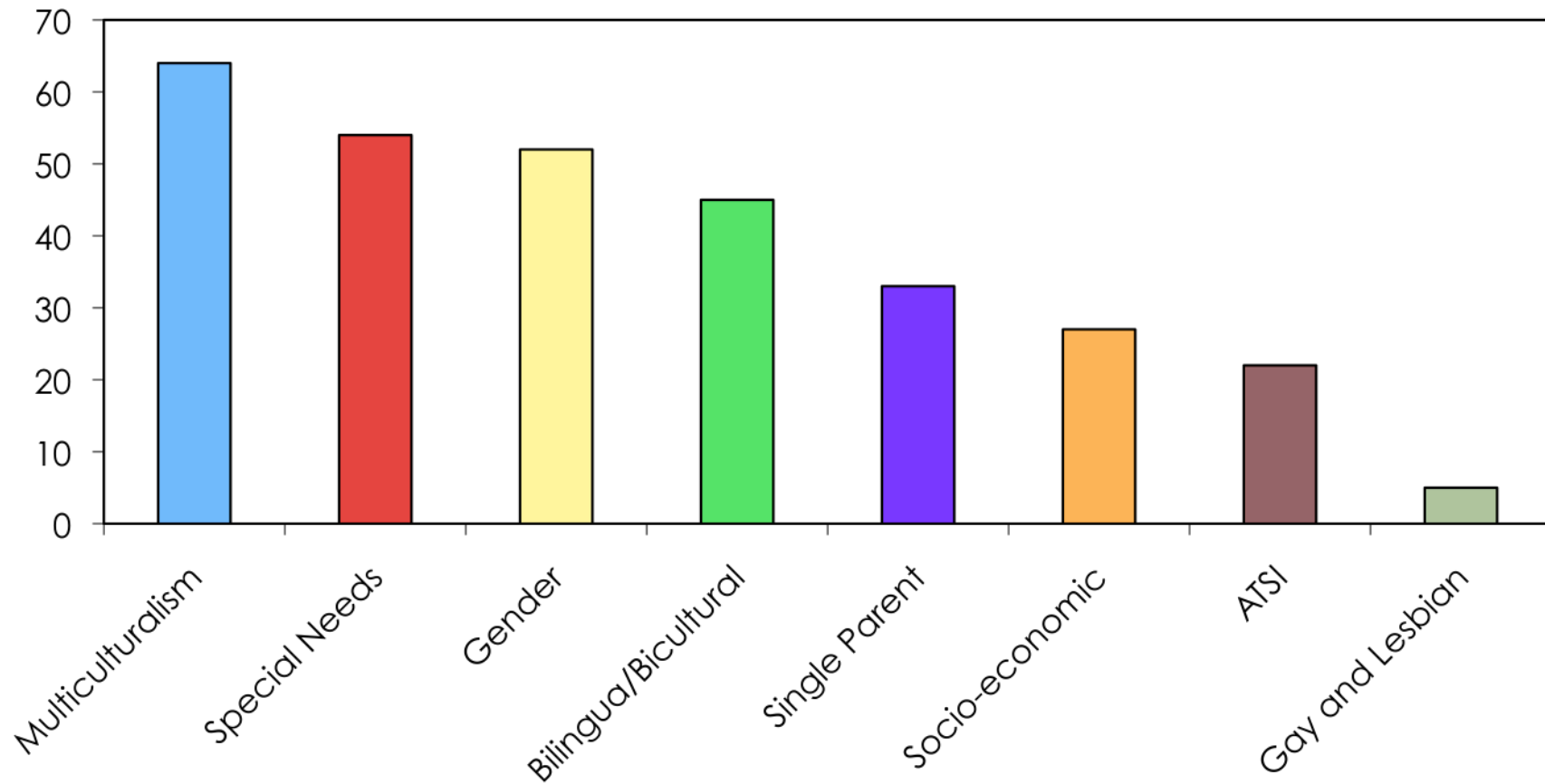
A reflection of the different degrees of commitment given by individuals and institutions to the provision of equity across the spectrum of civil risks or social justice issues that exist

A reflection of the varying levels of comfort experienced by individuals and institutions, associated with different equity issues in society



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Significance of Diversity



Robinson & Jones Diaz (2000)



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Okay you poof

Mace- oh you're a poof Adrian

Adrian looks around to make eye contact with Mace

Teacher- Mace what did you call Adrian

Mace - poof' and turns head away from teacher

Teacher- why did you call him that?

Mace- coz he fell

Teacher- what does poof mean

Mace- a sissy, like a girl thang

Teacher- I don't feel comfortable when you call Adrian or other people a poof. I don't like to hear people use that word

Mace looks blankly at teacher

Teacher- why do you think Adrian fell off?

Mace continues to look at teacher and makes no response to the question asked

Teacher- can we agree not to use that word

Mace turns body away from teacher and begins to walk away. As she does she makes the following comment

Mace- okay you poof



Key research findings

The higher the level of formal qualifications the more inclusive educators ideologies and pedagogies become

There is a distinction between the ideologies and pedagogies operating across a range of variables including service structure e.g. private and community operated

There is much work to be done in relation to addressing gay and lesbian issues at a policy level across a range of service types



The survey demographics

Total response rate was 13.8%

The survey included a total of 51 questions

The survey included quantitative and qualitative responses

Questions specific to individual respondents included:

- Qualifications
- Age group they work with
- Years of experience
- Current position
- Employment status (part time, full time, casual)
- Service type (preschool, long day care, MAC, OSHC, mobile etc)
- Management structure
- Postcode of the service
- Gender
- Ethnic background
- Languages spoken other than English



Research methodology

Survey

The survey contains a combination of multiple choice and short answer questions. The survey was sent to over 1000 NSW based children's services providers

138 surveys were returned

The survey targeted early childhood educators from varying socio-cultural and economic backgrounds and across varying levels of responsibilities within services, that is, directors, teachers, untrained carers, and resource workers

Survey questions included open ended and close ended responses e.g.

- Do you believe that children have the ability to understand the concept of being lesbian or gay or having lesbian and gay parents?
 - Yes or No
- It bothers me to see two homosexuals showing affection towards each other in public
 - Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree



The survey questions

Survey questions were written in a way so that clusters/themes could be identified. These included:

- Homosexuality and the law
- Personal experience and beliefs
- Homosexuality and discrimination
- Homosexuality and pedagogy
- Homosexuality and children/parenting



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Sample of questions

- I fear homosexuals will make advances towards me
- Organisations which promote gay rights are not necessary
- Homosexual behaviour should be against the law
- When I see a gay person I think “what a waste”
- Violence against lesbian and gays is an issue requiring consideration by early childhood staff
- Do you believe that lesbian and gay issues are relevant to early childhood services?
- Does the service currently have an anti-bias policy?
- I would feel comfortable dealing with lesbian and gay issues with children
- Gay and lesbian people should have the same rights as heterosexuals in all areas
- Discrimination against lesbian and gay parents is an issue requiring consideration by early childhood staff



Discourses around G & L

Homosexuality IS ACCEPTABLE was the dominant discourse amongst participants

However, homosexuality IS IMMORAL was a discourse that was taken up by approximately 20% of participants

“People are entitled to their own opinions however a child care centre is not the place to voice them”

Gays and lesbians SHOULD NOT work with children was a discourse that was mobilised by around 20% of the participants

Gay and lesbian headed families and gay marriages ARE LEGITIMATE were dominant discourses – approximately 20% did not agree with these perspectives



Relevance to early childhood

Dealing with gay and lesbian issues with children was often seen as developmentally inappropriate, especially under the age of 8 or 9

Discourse of child centred pedagogy was mobilised by some to support dealing with these issues with children

“Children should be given the chance to decide their own values and opinions. It is our job to help them make an educated choice”

Most believed that gay and lesbian issues were relevant to early childhood services, but largely only when gay and lesbian families are identified in the centre. (Approx 24% did not see it as important or relevant in any way)

Most believed that discrimination towards gay and lesbian STAFF was an important issue to be addressed in early childhood centres, especially if there were out staff members in centres



Relevance to current settings

Approx. 51% considered gay and lesbian issues were relevant to their current setting

This was largely determined by the fact that participants were aware of gay and lesbian parents or workers in their settings

“We have a lesbian family (in my room) and I want to know how I can help a child to feel confident about their family structure. Luckily these parents are open to talking about any issues and are fairly comfortable with it”

“This year we have two families with same gender partners using the centre. It is obviously therefore important that we use resources and books etc. that portray a range of families. It also reinforces the need for very individual discussion about families and care taken by staff referring to parents in role plays etc.”



Irrelevance to current setting

Those who said there was no relevance to their current settings provided comments such as:

“Children are not able to sit and listen”

“No gay parents at kindy”

“Although I am open-minded person I don't think it would be widely accepted by parents and staff in my centre”

“No interest - no problem” – “teach respect to all without discrimination”



Don't consider it important for children to be aware of gay & lesbian issues similarly to other areas of diversity

- Approximately 20% didn't see it as important
- Let children play - that is our focus
- Because these are adult issues thankfully young children are innocently and blissfully unaware of
- Not this age group except for racism. They accept children from other cultures without problems. I have had one instance of a child repeating an adults view against a child from ethnic background
- I personally think it is parent's choice and responsibility to discuss these issues with their children
- Unless we tell children what racism and sexism are, they don't know. Only grown ups are racists or sexists
- We don't deal with sexual preferences at that age. I don't consider racism or sexism the same as gay or lesbian equity



Pedagogical issues

- 56% of people indicated that they would feel comfortable about dealing with gay and lesbian issues
- Many indicated that they needed greater access to resources and training in the area
- Fear of risks involved - parental resistance (Robinson, 2005a)
- Issues of perceived cultural inappropriateness
- Dealing with issues with children and parents



Critical Questions

- Is the 'Reggio Emilia' image of the child the only image of the child?
- What happens when we don't speak up about diversity and discrimination?
- What do we document and what don't we document?
- What are the risks involved if we do?
- What are the risks involved if we don't?



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Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter – Martin Luther King Jr.



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