

**CCHRSC Child Care Administrator Standards
Update and ECE - School-Age Care Profile
Development Project**

**INCLUSION
From the Perspective of
DIVERSITY**

**Snapshot Report
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Grifone Consulting

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INCLUSION: FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF DIVERSITY

1. INTRODUCTION

This document was prepared for the Child Care Human Resources Sector Council (CCHRSC) as part of the Child Care Administrator National Occupational Standards Update and ECE - School-Age Care Profile Development Project initiated in April 2012. The CCHRSC identified inclusion as a program policy topic to be examined for potential human resource implications that was provided in the 2010 report on Inclusion as part of the CCHRSC initiative “Examining the Human Resource Implications of Emerging Issues in ECEC/Communications Strategy Development: Inclusion” developed by Kathleen Flanagan and Jane Beach. This report examined inclusion with a focus on children with special needs and provided information on provincial and territorial inclusion policy and support for children with physical and/or cognitive/behavioural disabilities in ECE settings.

This report is an addendum to the 2010 report on inclusion, with a focus on diversity, i.e. culture, race, religion, language and gender, sexual orientation, as well as disability/special needs. This report will define inclusion beyond the parameters of the 2010 report, which focussed on the availability of and types of supports for children with special needs.

Defining Inclusion and Diversity

“All children and adults have the right to evolve and to develop in a context where there is equity and respect for diversity. Children, parents and educators have the right to good quality in early childhood education services free from any form of overt and covert, individual and structural – discrimination due to their race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status (Article 2, UN-Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989)

For the purposes of this report, inclusion and respect for diversity will be defined by the UN convention on the Rights of the child. Being inclusive does not mean that all children are treated the same, as frequently the premise of that treatment is based on the majority population and may be disrespectful of other cultures. Inclusion does mean that all children are included (equity) in anti-bias, culturally sensitive activities regardless of their race, ethnicity, language, religion, gender, sexual orientation or physical limitations.

The primary and secondary research conducted for this report indicated a wide variety of definitions for inclusion and diversity, but most ECE organizations that address inclusion and diversity have, at their essence, positive, supportive recognition, acknowledgment, acceptance and respect for the differences of each child and their family. In Canada, inclusion tends to refer to support provided to children with special needs that allows them to be “included” in the mainstream education system. Diversity, although defined in the Canadian Charter of Rights, tends to focus on the multicultural mix that has grown significantly in Canada over the past decade. Specific sections on Aboriginal child care and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual (LGBT) community have been discussed separately.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Primary research for this report consisted of 31 key informant interviews using two different questionnaires for practitioners (20 interviews) and experts (11 educators, trainers, policy analysts) working in the sector. Secondary research, website and online literature reviews were accessed to review organizations, curriculum frameworks, support documents and research papers on diversity and inclusion, nationally and internationally.

3. INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY

The concepts of inclusion and diversity are part of a larger international discussion on the importance and need to develop inclusive and respectful early childhood educational environments, not only for the impact it has on young children, but also on families, and ultimately on societies. The world has become more global with in and out migration of populations including visible minorities, and activism of families with special needs children and the LGBT community are changing social structures. This is clearly detailed in the “Diversity and Equality Guidelines for Childcare Providers” developed in 2006 by the Irish Minister for Children to address an

“...increasingly multi-faceted population in Ireland embracing: social class, gender, returned Irish, family status, people with disabilities, gay and lesbian people in families, ethnic minorities, the Traveller community, economic migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, Irish language speakers, religious minorities, Black Irish, the majority population and many others.”

The Australian “Belonging, Being and Becoming: the Early Years Learning Framework” is embracing a vision for a new Australia with:

“A future that embraces all Australians, a future based on mutual respect, resolve and mutual responsibility a future where all Australians, whatever their origins are truly equal partners, with equal opportunities and with an equal stake in shaping the next chapter in the history of Australia.”

The Massachusetts Early Learning Guidelines for Infants and Toddlers specifies as guiding principles that:

“...the family, as defined by each culture, is the primary system of support for the development of the child” and that “Learning is embedded in the child’s culture. Young children learn best through a comprehensive, whole-child approach integrated in culturally meaningful experiences”

In California, the Infant/Toddler Learning and Development Foundations document also acknowledges that “the family and its culture and language play a central role in early learning and development”, and reflects on cultural differences as it addresses the domains of development, and goes on further to discuss the diversity of children in California in terms of cultural, linguistic, ability and socioeconomic backgrounds. Diversity and inclusion are not just social issues and goals in North America, but is also a prominent concern in Europe.

A pan-European organization called Diversity in Early Childhood Education and Training (DECET) is a network of European organizations and projects with the common goals of valuing diversity in early childhood education and training aimed at promoting and studying democratic childcare. They view early childhood centres as meeting places where people can learn from

each other across cultural and other borders and as a public mechanism that can effectively address prejudices and discrimination.

As populations migrate around the globe for whatever reasons, economic, political asylum or refuge and segments of the majority population begin to speak out for equity; governments are facing mounting social pressures as majority populations are adjust to the changing face of their countries.

Research in early childhood education has established that children become aware of differences and they develop a sense of the social impact of those differences at a young age. Early childhood educators world-over have accepted the premise that children are competent learners and able to direct their learning from infancy.

Very young children are influenced by societal attitudes and behaviours. Indeed research reveals that children as young as 3 years display signs of prejudice and negative attitudes towards difference. From the earliest years of their interaction with the wider world, children will need to develop the understanding, skills and outlook necessary to ensure that Irish society becomes truly inclusive. A place where difference is valued, where diverse groups interact and where this interaction is underpinned by equality, human rights, mutual respect and understanding. (Diversity and Equality Guidelines for Childcare Providers, office of the Minister for Children, 2006)

Learning starts in infancy, long before formal education begins and continues throughout life. ...Significantly, this is a time when human ability and motivation are shaped by families and non-institutional environments. Early learning begets later learning and early success breeds later success, just as early failure breeds later failure. (James J. Heckman 2000)

It is this ability to learn and the recognition that the holistic development of children includes the need to develop a sense of belonging and self-identification with the environment and is integral to the development of a positive self-esteem and in reaching developmental milestones. It makes sense to incorporate the principles of inclusion and respect for diversity into early childhood education curriculum and practice as a means to reach societal goals of equity and respect for diversity.

As a result, for the purposes of this report, the assumption is that inclusion and respect for diversity has a positive impact on children. This is supported by the feedback collected from the expert Key Informant interviews and the secondary research. Friendly and Prabhu (2010) note there is a great potential for socially inclusive and universally accessible ECEC programs to play a key role in:

“...building a foundation of respect for diversity by capitalizing on children’s receptivity to these ideas about diversity in the early years.” Early childhood educators generally agree that programs rich in cultural diversity help children to develop broader language skills, increased cultural awareness, and instill a feeling of cultural pride in all children. Culturally diverse programs celebrate similarities as well as differences, and therefore help to build a sense of connection with the child’s community.

The long-term impacts of inclusion and respect for diversity programming “enhances the healthy development of the child, including “sense of self” and is an “opportunity to develop empathy with other children”. Inclusion is considered ideal for both able-bodied children and challenged children to see beyond the differences. The language changes to “this is what Joey can do” and the focus is not on “this is what Joey can’t do”. It was deemed that inclusion trumps everything else and that segregation of children due to their needs require ways for their needs to be addressed, so they can participate in programs with all the other children. Another response suggested that inclusion enriches the lives of special needs children and all the children around them. What is more important is that in terms of achieving societal goals, the implementation of inclusion and respect for diversity programming at a young age sets a “new normal”. Children with special needs, of different colour, culture, language, religion and sexual orientation are normalized, become accepted as part of the bigger community, where being different is socially acceptable.

Canada is one of the most diverse countries in the world, with population growth based on immigration from all parts the world; a country with a national policy on diversity (*National multiculturalism policy, 1971; Multiculturalism Act, 1988*), protection from discrimination based on race, colour, gender, language, religion ethnicity, disability and age embedded in its constitution (*Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom, 1985*)

As a society, Canadians see themselves and others view Canada as an inclusive society that embraces multiculturalism, respects diversity and provides equitable opportunities for all of our citizens. Yet, in reality, inequity, social exclusion, and perhaps not overt, but covert discrimination still exists, perhaps increasingly so in the post 9-11 world.

We live in a multicultural society, It is not something that we are striving for; it already is our reality. However our multicultural society is neither democratic nor anti-racist. We have much to do to achieve these goals. (Paul Kivel, 2002)

Provincial and territorial governments and ECE organizations across the country with early childhood learning curriculum/frameworks include inclusion and diversity concepts as part of their organizational philosophy or as one of their guiding principles.

Provincial and Territorial Diversity Policies

Newfoundland
<p><i>Developing a Provincial Early Childhood Learning Strategy What We Heard</i> Early Childhood Learning Division, Department of Education September, 2011</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/> <p>Draft Principle Statements: Comprehensive programs and services are inclusive, culturally diverse, and respectful of community and family circumstances.</p>
Nova Scotia
<p><i>Nova Scotia’s Early Childhood Development Initiative & Multilateral Framework on Early Learning & Child Care 2003 -2004 Our Children... Today’s Investment, Tomorrow’s Promise</i></p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/>

Nova Scotia's Early Childhood Development System

Together with combined federal/provincial resources and provincial programs and services, and in conjunction with families and members of the early childhood community, a system can be created that is:

- Comprehensive
- Integrated
- Accessible
- Inclusive
- High quality
- Accountable
- Community-based
- Respectful of diversity and regional variation

Partnerships for Inclusion

ECDI and ELCC funds were provided in the form of a grant for Partnerships for Inclusion, a project in partnership with the Early Intervention Association of Nova Scotia (EINS) and SpecialLink: The National Centre for Child Care Inclusion. Data was collected and compiled through SpecialLink in collaboration with the University of Guelph.

The goal of the project is to promote high quality child care for all children in licensed early childhood environments, which would then provide the basis for successful inclusion for children with special needs. The premise is that high quality child care provides the foundation for high quality inclusive child care practice.

Prince Edward Island

PEI Early Learning Framework, Relationships, Environments, Experiences
The Curriculum Framework of the Preschool Excellence Initiative
PEI Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2011

Section 4 INCLUSION

For the PEI Early Learning Framework:

Inclusion in early years centres embodies the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every infant and young child and his or her family, regardless of ability, race, culture, language, religion, family structure, or social/economic circumstances to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society. The desired results of inclusive experiences for all children and their families include a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and development and learning to reach their full potential.³

³Adapted from the 2009 Joint Position Statement of the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

Glossary:

Diversity: differences and uniqueness that each child brings to the early learning setting including values and beliefs, culture and ethnicity, language, ability, education, life experiences, socio-economic status, spirituality, gender, age, and sexual orientation

Inclusion: involves taking into account all children's social, cultural and linguistic diversity (including learning styles, abilities, disabilities, gender, family circumstances and geographic

location) in curriculum decision-making processes. The intent is to ensure that all children's experiences are recognized and valued. The intent is also to ensure that all children have equitable access to resources and participation, and opportunities to demonstrate their learning and to value difference.

Inclusive practice: practice which is based on the belief that all individuals have equal worth and rights, and which actively promotes acceptance and participation of all children and families in their programs, providing differential and appropriate learning support according to individual strengths, needs and background.

New Brunswick

New Brunswick Curriculum Framework for Early Learning and Child Care
Presented to the Department of Social Development
By Early Childhood Research and Development Team, Early Childhood Centre
University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, New Brunswick, 31/03/2008

The New Brunswick Curriculum Framework for Early Learning and Child Care — English
Section 1

Inclusiveness and Equity

We value diversities, and honour all individual, social, linguistic and cultural differences. We uphold the right of every child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life regardless of language, culture, race, religion, socioeconomic status, gender, or ability — and encourage the provision of negotiated and equitable opportunities for participation. Values and promotes children's experience of:

- safe and caring environments where their emotional and physical health, positive self-identities, and sense of belonging are nurtured and protected;
- open and flexible environments where playful exploration, problem solving and creativity are encouraged and purposefully planned;
- intellectually, socially and culturally engaging environment where their communicative practices, literacies, and literate identities are valued and supported;
- socially inclusive and culturally sensitive environments in which consideration for others, inclusive, equitable, democratic and sustainable practices are enacted, and social responsibility is nurtured.

Section 4

Diversity and Social Responsibility

Children experience socially inclusive and culturally sensitive environments in which consideration for others, inclusive, equitable, democratic and sustainable practices are enacted, and social responsibility is nurtured.

Inclusiveness and Equity

Children appreciate their own distinctiveness and that of others.

Children engage in practices that respect diversity.

Children raise questions and act to change inequitable practices that exclude or discriminate.

Diversity and Social Responsibility Professional Support Document

By Emily Ashton, Anne Hunt, Pam Nason, and Pam Whitty

Published 2010 for Social Development, Government of New Brunswick by the Early Childhood Centre.

Introduction

Regardless of whether childcare services are offered in childcare centres, day care centres or home childcare operations, all childcare services must notably: apply an educational program comprising activities which seek to:

1. foster children's overall development, particularly their emotional, social, moral, cognitive, language, physical and motor development;
2. help children to gradually adapt to life in society and to integrate harmoniously.

1.1 OBJECTIVES OF EDUCATIONAL CHILDCARE SERVICES

1.1.3 Promoting the equality of chances

Childcare establishments also aim to promote the equality of chances between children, regardless of their social, economic, cultural or religious background so that everyone can achieve personal growth and develop harmoniously, be successful at school and one day actively participate in society.

They notably seek to promote equality between girls and boys, in particular by combating sexual and sexist stereotypes. Childcare establishments also welcome children having special needs, such as children with a disability or those who are developmentally delayed.⁸ They work at promoting respect for differences and at giving all children access to a healthy and stimulating childhood.

They can even play a detection role by drawing, for example, the attention of parents and inviting them to consult their health and social services centre (CSSS, CLSC component), if necessary, in those cases where the child shows one or more symptoms, as well as a preventive role in those cases where, for various reasons, a child's development is not taking place under optimal conditions: children living in a context of vulnerability or who may be victims of neglect or abuse.

1.1.4 Contributing to the socialization of children

In this text, socialization refers to adaptation to life in society and the ability to integrate harmoniously. This term also designates the process whereby children gradually adopt the rules, norms and values of the society in which they live. Socialization begins in the child's family (primary socialization) and continues in the childcare establishment and then at school (secondary socialization).

In a childcare establishment, educators and home childcare providers seek to harmonize relations between children and adults as well as those among children in order that everyone can find his or her place in the group and play a fulfilling role. Childcare establishments make a major contribution to the socialization of children by supporting their progressive adaptation to life in the community and their gradual and harmonious adoption of the culture, values, norms and rules of Québec society.

Development of the Whole Child

4.1 EMOTIONAL DIMENSION

This person also has a role to play in the development of the child's personal and gender identity. He or she helps children to know that they are boys or girls and to be proud of it. The educator or home childcare provider places equal value on both genders and takes advantage of a sexist action or remark made by children to have them reflect on the question and to adhere to

the values of equality embraced by Québec society.

Structuring of the Premises

7.1.1 Physical environment in general

The presence of materials that call to mind customs of various countries or cultures or representing various impairments (dolls, figures, clothes, musical instruments, books and photos showing children having diversified characteristics and playing together, etc.) fosters the child's **feeling of belonging** as well as the **acceptance of his or her differences**.

Ontario

Early Learning for Every Child Today

A framework for Ontario early childhood settings

Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning, January 2007

Ministry of Children and Youth Services Government of Ontario

Statement of Principles

Demonstration of respect for diversity, equity and inclusion are prerequisites for optimal development and learning.

All children have a right to live and learn in an equitable society. Early childhood settings can plan for meaningful engagement and equitable outcomes for all children.

They can take into account the differences each child and family brings to an early childhood setting including appearance, age, culture, ethnicity, race, language, gender, sexual orientation, religion, family environment and developmental abilities.

Young children with different abilities, challenges, resources and cultural backgrounds, and their families, come together in early childhood settings. They bring unique life experiences and orientations.

They and their families benefit most when they are fully included and when they feel that they belong. Children grow up with a strong sense of self in environments that promote attitudes, beliefs and values of equity and democracy and support their full participation (Bennett, 2004).

To include everyone, early childhood settings must encourage healthy dialogue about the principles and shared beliefs that relate to inclusion, diversity and equity. They must recognize every child as a citizen with equal rights and unique views about how to participate in the world.

To turn belief statements and principles into practice at the community level requires an infrastructure that actively promotes engagement of all children and their families (Bernhard, Lero & Greenberg, 2006).

Ontario is a province of many cultures, religions and languages, particularly in its urban centres. English or French language may be unfamiliar to many children and they need support to maintain and expand their home language as well as learn a new one.

For many children, mainstream Canadian culture is different from their home environments. All children gain when they learn early to live together comfortably with others who look and talk differently than themselves (McCain & Mustard, 1999; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

Early childhood settings can be pro-active in identifying strategies that will respect families' diverse linguistic, cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds and value this diversity as an asset that enriches the environment for everyone.

- Effective strategies begin by identifying the early learning and child care needs of families in their communities, and taking this information into account when planning the curriculum and pedagogy of the program (Ali, 2005; Bernhard, 2003). Because many

children live in newcomer, immigrant and refugee families, information that is collected should include migration history.

- Meaningful participation for all requires strategies for second language acquisition (Chumak- Horbatsch, 2004; Tabors & Snow, 2001). Children who are learning English or French as an additional language benefit when their first language is valued. It is a challenge to know what children are capable of learning when early childhood practitioners and children and their families do not share the same language. In order to be able to determine a child's capacity to learn, the child needs adequate opportunities to learn in a language that she or he can understand. Interpreters can increase the level of effective communication with parents.
- Preconceived notions about children's ethno-cultural backgrounds, gender, abilities or socioeconomic circumstances create barriers that reduce engagement and equitable outcomes (Bernhard, Freire & Mulligan, 2004). Addressing prejudices increases the involvement of all children. Early childhood practitioners can take actions to avoid prejudice and to counteract bias when it occurs in early childhood settings.
- Early childhood settings in Francophone communities can contribute to the protection, enhancement and transmission of the French language and culture in Ontario (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006). *Aménagement Linguistique* refers to language planning and is a policy for Ontario's French language schools and Francophone community. Early childhood settings should adopt the same guidelines and ensure that young Francophone children and their families are exposed to as much French as possible before entry to Grade 1.
- Aboriginal early childhood settings require programming that values Aboriginal languages and culture and is generated from the community rather than imposed on the community (Ball, 2005).
- Rural and remote communities require flexible early childhood settings that can adapt to the challenges of geographic distances and isolation (Gott & Wilson, 2004). *Early Learning for Every Child Today* can be used as a structure to programming so that children and families in rural and remote areas have the same opportunities as those living in more urban regions.
- Early childhood settings can organize programming to use the diversity of the participants as an asset that enriches the environment for everyone.

Children with developmental difficulties, particularly those who have special needs, can benefit from participation in quality early childhood settings with other children. But despite the good intentions of inclusion, mere exposure to age-appropriate activities and peers is no guarantee that children with special needs will experience positive interactions with their peers or acquire new skills (Frankel, 2004; Irwin, Lero & Brophy, 2004).

Some children need different balances of child- and adult-directed activity. For some children, special programming strategies are necessary to support more positive interactions with peers, greater involvement in play opportunities and social skill development.

Children who are vulnerable (that is, are experiencing developmental difficulties) may have more difficulties with the social and emotional demands of early childhood settings (Lero, Irwin & Darisi, 2006). They may need additional attention in supporting their abilities to build relationships, use language and develop trust.

Early childhood settings should check their curriculum and pedagogy against program standards that reflect inclusion (for example, see Irwin, 2005). Additional early childhood practitioners with specific expertise who can build and support capacity may be needed to support inclusion

Programs may require technical support and special consultancy or special equipment and materials.

Manitoba

Early Returns: Manitoba's Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum Framework for Preschool Centres and Nursery Schools

Manitoba Child Care Program in consultation with Healthy Child Manitoba, Manitoba Education, the Manitoba Child Care Association, Red River College, Assiniboine Community College and Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface.

The Foundation of Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum Diversity

Diversity refers to the range of similarities and differences among children, staff and families in your program and community. It includes race, culture, abilities, gender and age. Recognizing and respecting diversity is very important to early learning and child care experiences. It enhances each child's social and emotional well-being and promotes caring, co-operative and equitable interactions with others (Derman-Sparks, Ramsey and Edwards, 2006). Each child must feel a sense of belonging and feel positive about his or her own self identity. To acknowledge and learn more about diversity, you show respect towards the uniqueness of each child, his or her family, the staff and community. Self-esteem, confidence and emotional development are strengthened when children and families feel accepted and supported. It is also important that children understand that everyone in their program and community is unique. Providing opportunities for children to explore similarities and differences in a positive atmosphere supports respect for diversity. For children to respect one another and appreciate individuality, you must actively encourage participation of all children in a setting that reflects their family and culture.

Inclusion

Inclusion means children of all abilities have equal access to participate in early learning and child care programs. When children are together as part of the group, each child's development is enhanced and positive social attitudes are created. Through inclusive practices, you help children with additional support needs to be active participants in the curriculum you offer. This will mean creating or adapting certain activities or using new strategies to meet each child's needs. (Irwin, Lero and Brophy, 2000). Children with additional support needs have goals developed in an individual program plan (IPP). All staff should be aware of these goals and actively incorporate them into your curriculum. High quality programs respond to the individual interests, abilities and needs of each child. Inclusion is more than the presence of a child with additional support needs. Genuine inclusion ensures active and meaningful participation by every child in the daily program and with one another. How this occurs will be different for each child based on his or her individual abilities and needs. All children should be valued, have friends and feel that they belong.

Incorporating Inclusion and Diversity into the Curriculum

Providing opportunities for children to recognize themselves and respect others is essential in ELCC curriculum. When children are exposed to diversity and inclusion at an early age, they accept others more easily. You can do this by providing children with a variety of materials, such as play food, toy people, dress up clothes, photos and books that represent Manitoba's diverse population. Have staff work with all children in the group and try to avoid one-on-one child to staff assignment whenever possible. Use American Sign Language to greet a family with a child who is deaf; ensure all children have an opportunity to share during group time; or serve foods that reflect the cultural diversity of the families in your program and community. Incorporating diversity and inclusion benefits children, families and staff because it helps develop a sense of belonging and strengthens understanding and acceptance of differences so everyone can learn

from each other.

Saskatchewan

Play and Exploration: Early Learning Program Guide

Early Learning and Child Care Branch

Saskatchewan Ministry of Education April 2008

VISION

Early learning programs are holistic, responsive, and developmentally appropriate. They focus on the healthy development of the whole child – social, emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual development. Children, family members and early childhood educators collaborate in enriching children’s learning and growth.

Children and Their Relationships

Children relate positively and responsibly with their peers, adults, families and community members. They acquire a sense of acceptance, self-worth, belonging, generosity and trust through the caring, consistent relationships that emerge in culturally sensitive learning contexts and communities.

Children and Their Environments

Children experience healthy, inclusive and safe settings that enhance their learning and well-being. Children see themselves reflected in flexible environments that stimulate communication, invite questions, encourage investigation and promote exploration. Children sense that they and their families belong in the setting.

PART III: THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE EDUCATOR

Expanded Roles

Supporter of diversity

As more children from different cultural backgrounds and with varying abilities participate in early learning and child care programs, educators are highlighting this rich array of perspectives. Educators include all children in activities, stories, discussions and experiences that expose new ways of cooperating, new information about cultural understandings, practices or languages and additional ways of supporting each other. Children are encouraged to value diverse viewpoints, cultures and abilities. Educators ensure all children can participate to their full potential.

PART IV: HOW YOUNG CHILDREN LEARN

EMBRACING INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY THROUGH PLAY

Early childhood settings serve all children. Children bring diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds as well as differing abilities to the learning environment. Each early learning program must demonstrate an understanding and responsiveness to children’s wide range of strengths, cultures and linguistic capabilities. Play offers multiple opportunities for children to come together as learners in a stimulating and inclusive setting. In their play and interactions, children learn about and practice their roles and responsibilities as members of an early childhood learning community. When educators offer appropriate support to children’s play, they establish an environment that nurtures holistic learning. Adult roles and responsibilities are essential in encouraging children’s confidence to learn through play, in maintaining an environment that invites a positive self-identity in play and in enhancing the opportunities to expand positive relationships among the players.

Play and Exploration for Infants and Toddlers

A COMPANION BOOKLET TO PLAY AND EXPLORATION: EARLY LEARNING

PROGRAM GUIDE

**Reflecting on Holistic Learning and Development
English as an Additional Language**

Educators should encourage parents to continue to speak their home language with the child. Pride in culture as well as the sense of belonging through being able to communicate with family members and others within their cultural community is important (Prieto, 2009). ...

How can you encourage children learning more than one language?

- Respect cultural diversity of families including their home language
- Reassure parents that continuing to speak their home language with the child is beneficial and won't harm the child's learning of English
- Use interpreters if needed to communicate with parents to establish a positive relationship
- Ask family members to teach you a simple song, rhyme, or words of comfort in the home language that you can share with the children
- Record family members reading/telling a story and play it for the children
- Greet children using their home language
- Provide a language rich environment. Introduce vocabulary by verbally labeling (naming) items in the environment that the child is interested in or interacting with
- Be responsive to the children's needs and interests

Alberta

In the Best Interests of Children and Families: A Discussion of Early Childhood Education and Care in Alberta
Muttart Foundation, 2010

**High Quality Early Childhood Education and Care
The Characteristics of High Quality Early Childhood Education and Care**

Five characteristics of effective early childhood education and care programs stand out: knowledgeable and responsive educators; a coherent curriculum and pedagogical approach; physical environments designed for early learning; respect for equity, inclusion and diversity; and parental involvement. ...

A respect for equity, inclusion and diversity are prerequisites for high quality early childhood education and care. The programs are inclusive of all children, regardless of ethnicity, ability or socio-economic status. They incorporate diversity and expose children to their own customs and traditions as well as the ideas and experiences of others. Children who are confident in their abilities and comfortable in diverse environments when they are young are more likely to become engaged citizens who value a democratic, pluralistic society. Early childhood education and care programs can be powerful interventions for children who experience developmental difficulties or who live in challenging homes and communities.

British Columbia

British Columbia Early Learning Framework

Co-published by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Children and Family Development.
Issued by the Early Learning Advisory Group, 2008

Purpose

This framework is also designed to help adults support and strengthen children's individual, social, cultural, and linguistic identities, and their respect and appreciation for other people's identities. In a province like B.C., with its rich diversity, this is seen as an essential element in early learning and development.

The Context of Early Learning In British Columbia Growing Up in British Columbia

B.C. is also culturally diverse, reflecting the history of its Aboriginal peoples as well as generations of immigrants.

The province is home to almost 200 First Nations, speaking more than 30 ancestral languages and dialects, along with First Nations, Inuit, Metis and Aboriginal peoples from other parts of Canada and the world. Many First Nations are in a process of social, economic and political transformation, as well as cultural and linguistic revitalization, in which early learning is recognized as critically important. Aboriginal children also represent a fast growing child demographic in the province. ...

B.C. is also home to people from many different parts of the world—some are new to B.C., while others have lived here for generations. These diverse peoples with their distinct histories and contexts contribute to the rich social fabric of this province, offering young children the chance to experience the cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity that is a part of today's world, and to develop the skills, attitudes, and dispositions that promote social equity and justice.

Social and cultural diversity also characterize the nature of family life and the context for early learning in B.C. In many families, parents are the primary caregivers while in others, grandparents and other relatives may play an equally significant role. Many children grow up in blended families, families headed by single parents, and foster families. And many receive additional early education and care outside the home in group child care centres, family child care homes, preschool programs, and other community-based early learning settings. Whether children receive early education and care in the home or the community, it is important that their early learning experiences draw on the unique strengths of their relationships with their families.

While all families have strengths, many face distinct challenges. For example, children cannot fully engage in early learning unless their basic needs for food, shelter, physical safety, and adequate health care are met. The families of children with special needs face significant challenges and may require support to function optimally, while other families face stresses that can compromise their ability to support their children's early learning. Regardless of income, social status, geographic isolation, and other potential barriers, all children should have opportunities to build on their unique strengths.

Section three: The B.C. Early Learning Framework Vision

The vision of families, communities, and governments is that they will work in partnership to support children in building the foundations for early development and lifelong learning. All adults who care for children in their homes and communities will play an active role in supporting children's learning and development. Adults will see young children holistically, provide rich

learning environments, listen to and value children's thoughts, feelings, and contributions, nurture their individuality and uniqueness, and promote and practice respect for linguistic and cultural diversity. As part of their efforts to understand, value, and accept responsibility for promoting early learning, all levels of government and communities will work together to nurture and support children and families, and to support parents, grandparents, and other family members in their efforts to promote children's learning and overall wellbeing. Relationships and dialogue among families, early childhood educators, and other early years professionals will contribute to the creation of a common language and understandings about early learning.

Principles

Families are the primary caregivers of children and have the most important role in promoting their children's well-being, learning, and development in the context of supportive communities. Early learning programs and activities should value and support the important contributions of families in all their diversity. Regardless of their circumstances, every family has unique social and cultural resources and strengths that can contribute to early learning. Open, honest, and respectful partnerships with families are essential to promote the best interests of children. To build on families' intimate knowledge of their children, strong relationships between families, early childhood educators, and other early years professionals are vital.

The individual, cultural, and linguistic identities of children and families are respected and integrated into early learning settings, programs, and activities. Early learning environments should promote a sense of belonging for all children and demonstrate respect for diversity. Rich and varied experiences support children's ability to value individual, social, and cultural diversity, including differences in gender, age, language, ethnicity, family structure, and economic circumstances.

The Areas of Early Learning Social Responsibility and Diversity

Children's learning experiences in the early years have long-term implications for their whole lives, and also for the future of their local, provincial, national and international communities, and the planet as a whole. Children benefit from opportunities to build relationships, to learn about their own heritage and culture and that of others, and to recognize the connection between their own actions and the wider world. These activities help build the ethical foundation for social and environmental health and well-being, now and in the future.

Learning Goals

To promote social responsibility and respect for diversity, adults provide an environment where young children can:

- explore and learn about family, community and the wider world
- express a positive regard for others and respect for self, others, and property
- participate in the making, following, and re-working of rules, rituals, and procedures in their everyday world
- understand fairness both for themselves and others
- begin to recognize discrimination and inequity and to respond appropriately
- learn to appreciate and celebrate diversity
- understand that all persons have value; accept and welcome individual differences
- understand how their own actions may affect nature and the planet
- show responsibility for themselves and begin to show responsibility for others

Yukon Territory

REGULATORY GUIDELINES FOR CHILD CARE AND FAMILY DAYHOME PROGRAMS Yukon Health and Social Services

GUIDELINES FOR BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT

INTRODUCTION:

There must be written discipline policies developed by each child care centre (C.C.C. Reg. 18(1 through 4)) and family day home (F.D.H. Reg. 16(1 through 4)) that reflect the use of positive discipline and child guidance. Following are guidelines to be considered.

PRACTICES:

- Respect and value each child's unique feelings, developmental stage and background.

Northwest Territory

Framework for Action, Early Childhood Development GNWT Departments of Education, Culture and Employment, and Health and Social Services, May 2001

Framework for Action

Principles for Early Childhood Development

- Programs and services must be relevant to the culture(s) of the community

Roles and Responsibilities

- Community
 - provide programs/services which reflect language, culture and traditions and are developmentally appropriate
 - provide leadership and role models for healthy lifestyles
 - provide multiple recreation choices and cultural activities
- Aboriginal Organizations
 - provide guidance for culturally relevant and appropriate programs, services and activities

Health and Wellness Awareness and Risk Prevention

Areas for Action

Develop

- Culturally appropriate screening tools

Child Development – Care and Learning

- Early Childhood Programs
 - culture-based
 - inclusive
- programs for aboriginal language learning

Community Supports and Community Building

Child and Family Cultural Programs

Nunavut

Nunavut Early Childhood Development Update Report 2004-2007
And Early Learning and Child Care Update Report 2004-2007
Nunavut Department of Education

Our Vision and Values for a Comprehensive Early Childhood Development System in Nunavut

Our Vision : To value and encourage the development of unique cultural, linguistic, physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual and creative potential of the children of Nunavut.

Our Values : Working toward this vision, we promote the adoption of the following principles:

- The uniqueness of individual children is valued: who they are today, not only for what they may accomplish in the future.
- The strengths of children and their capacity to play an active part in the society in which they live.
- The right to grow up free of abuse, discrimination, violence, and inequity.
- The opportunity for infants and children to develop to their full potential. This means access to early childhood development programs for all children and their families regardless of ability, culture, or geographic location.
- Culturally appropriate programs and services that are easy to access, and encourage public participation.
- The central role parents, elders, and extended family

Strategic Priorities

The following strategic priorities were identified as integral to the development of a system-wide approach to early childhood development in Nunavut:

4. Develop a coordinated system of early childhood development programs that focuses on Inuit cultural and language development, such as language nests and Head Start programs.
5. Establish early screening procedures for developmental issues to ensure early identification and intervention.

4. INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY PRACTICE: RESEARCH

Internationally and nationally, early childhood education organizations have acknowledged the concepts of inclusion and acceptance and respect of diversity through incorporation into philosophy statements, vision statements; or as guiding principles or foundations of learning frameworks and curriculums. Consequently inclusion and diversity have been integrated into ECE centers and their practices.

The majority of organizations include inclusion and diversity in their reflective processes on how to improve their practice. Some of the research suggested that in order to improve inclusion and find ways to acknowledge, accept and respect diversity, it is necessary for educators to first reflect on their own values, feelings and biases. Educators need to examine their own perceptions, reactions, behaviours, cultural assumptions, and knowledge or lack of knowledge about the children and families that they interact with, especially the children and families that are not part of the majority population. Educators need to ask themselves how they feel about working with a LGTB staff person, or a male infant care provider; do they agree with interracial marriages; do they laugh at jokes that make fun of other identifiable groups; what their perceptions of different cultures are, and if they believe common cultural stereotypes. These

types of questions help them identify where their knowledge gaps are, what their personal biases are and lead them to examine their personal values in comparison to the goals of inclusion and diversity. This is necessary in order to be able to critically examine and identify the gaps and biases in their current ECE practices.

It is important to examine the type of approach that is taken when addressing inclusion and diversity. How diversity is acknowledged can further a sense of difference and isolation or seamlessly present diversity as a reflection of society and the greater community of which we are all a part. The “multicultural day” or “themed “ approach also referred to as the “tourist approach” runs the risk of reinforcing stereotypes “all Mexicans wear sombreros and eat tacos”. It does not typically present a realistic view of what people of these ethnic backgrounds are contributing to Canadian society. It does take an educative approach by providing, exploring and discussing information about where children’s families are from and their culture. Alternatively, at the other end of the spectrum there are curriculums that are completely integrated with another culture. The national Te Whāriki curriculum of New Zealand exemplifies this approach, where the cultural values of the Maori are incorporated into the philosophy and framework of the national curriculum.

Early Childhood Education Programming

The research indicates a wide variety of approaches, but there are some fundamental similarities throughout all the different curriculums/frameworks and research papers that were examined.

There are several interrelated aspects to consider that impact programming and activities, especially if immigrant families are part of population being served by ECE centres. Recognizing the family and parents as the primary caregiver, is extremely important when ECEs acknowledge diversity. It becomes important to discuss with families what their goals are for their children, their attitudes and beliefs when examining issues of language preservation, religious observations (e.g. dietary restrictions) and celebrations. Parents and families need to be approached to determine if they are comfortable sharing their culture with other children and families. Families that agree to share their culture can become a great resource for books, games, music and songs in different languages. These parents may make presentations to children and staff about their culture, religions, etc. and address stereotypical perceptions.

Language is essential to the preservation of a culture as well as key to being able to assimilate into another. It is important to determine what the families’ goals are for their children regarding the acquisition of English/French and instruction and maintenance of their home language. Centres will often hire staff with other languages that reflect the community they serve. Parents are asked to provide phrases and words in their home languages for staff to use during their interactions with children, if they wish the centre to provide home language support.

Programming needs to be reviewed to determine if there are cultural assumptions being made, that would not be familiar to children and families from other cultures, although this maybe diminishing as western culture becomes more pervasive through global media. It is important to look at the games and activities through the lens of different cultures. Finger painting might not be an “easy or fun” activity for children from cultures where creative expression or being messy is not encouraged or not familiar. It may be necessary to describe and discuss activities in great detail to parents who may not be familiar with certain activities and who may or may not want their children participating. Alternatives need be developed for meal and snack menus to ensure that not only health-based, but also cultural or religious dietary restrictions are observed.

How children with special needs are treated also needs to be reviewed. There is no doubt based on the 2010 CCHRSC inclusion report that families with special needs children are, to some extent, getting support from government to ensure that their children can be included in early childhood education programs. However, support can be provided in ways that can still isolate special needs children. In some jurisdictions, funding is provided for 1:1 staffing for the special needs child. This arrangement can be exclusionary; the staff person becomes a buffer between the special needs child and the other children. Although very helpful for the special needs child, it highlights the child's special needs to the other children. The alternative funding arrangement provided extra staff for the program that has a special needs child. The extra person is not assigned to only work with the special needs child. All the staff provide support as needed to the special needs child and all the other children participate as well. It is easier for other children to approach and interact with the special needs child and include them in program activities with this type of funding arrangement (Sharon Hope Irwin and Donna Lero). This can lead to parental conflict. Parents want their child to be included, but at the same time want their child to receive special attention and support. Working closely with parents to discuss the benefits of programming support versus 1:1 support is extremely important.

The centre environment is another programming aspect that needs to be reviewed from the perspective of diversity. It is important to review the environment with a critical eye. Educators need to ask, "Can the children identify with the people and families depicted in posters or pictures? Do the books reflect other cultures, languages, genders and lifestyles? Are the stories of other cultures and countries part of programming? Does the music played, the songs the children learn to sing and the games they play reflect other cultures? Are the dolls of different colour? Are there dress up clothes from different cultures in the play area?" Does the play kitchen have containers of foods familiar to different cultures? etc. It is important for children to see themselves reflected in their environment in order to develop a sense of belonging.

Early Childhood Education Operations

The processes that are used by centres also need to be examined. Intake forms, parent handbooks, policies and procedures need to be reviewed for unintentional bias and inappropriate wording. For example, instead of "mother and father" on intake forms, use more neutral terms, such as parents, or legal guardians. Neutral wording is a proactive way to make families more comfortable and not make single-parent families, grandparent guardians, or same sex parents feel uncomfortable. Attention to these kinds of details can make the centre appear more sensitive, accepting and less "culturally traditional". Policies and procedures need to be reviewed to ensure that they are not exclusive or unintentionally discriminatory. Staff hiring practices, orientation, training and evaluation need to be reviewed. Hiring practices need to be looked at to determine if personal bias influences hiring. Are women preferred over men because they are assumed to be "better" nurturers? Are persons whom "appear" homosexual passed over despite having the same or better qualifications? Are visible minorities hired, not for their qualifications but because of stereotypical assumptions that they will take on more work, or work for lower wages? How accepting and receptive are staff to sharing, considering and implementing other points of view or methods, not rooted in western culture and education? What is the process for dealing with conflicts between parents and center programs and activities?

In taking the time to reflect, creating an environment where staff can reflect and discuss their personal values, biases and stereotypes without fear of repercussions; critically examining the centres programs, operations, environment and community; and taking the time to clearly communicate intentions, ask questions, and ensure parents are equal partners in their children's

early education experience, will ensure that all children are included and further the acceptance and respect for diversity.

Staff Gender Bias

To provide high quality early childhood education there needs to be qualified staff, but staff demographics should also reflect diversity. This does not mean a type of “affirmative action”, but it does mean that an ECE centre in a very multicultural community should strive to reflect the community in their staffing complement. It increases the self-identification of children and families with the centre. It can help ease intakes and transitions, and multicultural staff can be a resource for other staff to better understand other cultural values.

The children at ECE centres are both male and female, and yet the educators are, according to the 2006 Canadian census data, almost all female. Four percent of ECEs and ECE assistants are male. The population of children from birth to 4 years of age and 5 to 10 years of age are almost 50% male and female, but this is not reflected in staffing. The gender bias in early childhood education has been noticed and is becoming a global issue:

...The absence of men in early childhood centres also means young children may be missing out on any substantial contact with male role models. For children in single parent families, that could mean they have virtually no contact with men at all.

...while the early childhood sector, like other sectors of society, stresses non-sexist behaviours, attitudes and choices of play, the composition of the workforce is failing to “practice what it teaches”.

<http://www.neon.org.nz/newsarchive/meninearlychildhoodeducation/>

Organizations that are for men in ECE such as Men in Child Care (MIC) in UK, which now has a global membership and its Canadian counterpart Men in Early Childhood Education (MECE), part of the World Forum Working Group of Men in Early Childhood Education, are researching the causes for the low number of men in the profession and how to address those issues. Policy makers are looking at the ways to encourage and recruit men into the occupation; for example the Government of Manitoba has made it one of their five-year agenda items.

Family Choices: Manitoba’s Five-Year Agenda for Early Learning and Child Care. Further efforts will be made to recruit more Manitobans to consider the rewards of a career in early childhood education. Recruitment campaigns will be launched and will include:

- efforts will be made to recruit more men into the field

Training in Inclusion and Diversity

As mentioned in the 2010 Inclusion report, working with special needs children can sometimes require very specific training to operate special equipment or provide specific care routines. Generally supports are in place to assist ECEs to acquire the skills to carry out these specialized tasks. Other agencies that provide support for special needs children or parents can provide training to help ECE staff to work with a specific special needs child. This type of training is post-graduation from an ECE certificate or diploma program and tends to be acquired on the job and can be child specific.

Internationally, DECET has started the momentum in diversity and equity training by the development and publication of *Diversity and Social Inclusion - Exploring Competencies for Professional Practice in Early Childhood Education and Care* looking at the skills required to be competent as an ECE with diversity and social inclusion values. The DECET manual *Diversity and Equity in Early Childhood Training in Europe* ([decet_manual.pdf](#)) provides an overview of all different types of diversity training programs that are being provided across Europe.

Across Canada, post-secondary institutions provide training in the concepts of inclusion and diversity and how they apply in the ECE context. Post-secondary institutions such as Holland College's ECCE-1036 Principles of Inclusion will:

“...explore the social attitudes, historical practices, and the emergence of inclusion. They will deepen their personal philosophy of early childhood care and education and be introduced to diversity and trends in inclusive education.”

If the practicum requirements provide for working with a special needs child, then students will obtain hands-on experience as part of their education.

Diversity is also taught as a course at post secondary institutions. For example, Red River College and the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIASST) both offer courses specific to diversity

ECED-3054 Respect Children within Diverse Cultures:

This competency focuses on the importance of recognizing, respecting, and reinforcing the culture of each child within the centre. In order to do so, Early Childhood Educators must be aware of cultural dimensions of Canadian families in general. In interacting with each child and his/her family, Early Childhood Educators should think of that family within a cultural context. (Red River College)

ECE 220 Programming for Diversity

Your studies will focus on the beliefs and issues related to providing respectful child care and education for various cultural and diversity groups. An emphasis will be placed on understanding cultural practices of First Nations and Metis people. (SIASST)

There are also Canadian organizations that are advocating for inclusive and respect for diversity in childcare, such as the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada; or are conducting research, such as the Child Care Canada, Childcare Resource and Research Unit; or are providing support, suggestions and resources for educators, such as CMAS: Supporting Childcare in the Settlement Community (<http://cmascanada.ca/>).

In addition there are more resources available for centres and ECEs to draw upon, such as:

- For books: <http://www.goodreads.com/list/tag/diversity>
- For toys, posters and other items: <http://www.welcomehere.ca/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.ViewPage&pageId=1112>
- Anti Bias Resource Booklet.pdf

5. INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY PRACTICE: IN THE FIELD

We teach our children about equality, freedom, and fairness, but every day they are witnesses to inequities and discrimination. Often their ideas about diversity reflect these inconsistencies and confusions.” (Derman-Sparks & Ramsay, 2005, p. 126)

The key informant interviews provided a snapshot of what is happening in the field. The 31 interviews consisted of 20 practitioners and 11 experts. The practitioners were a mixed group of administrators and ECE practitioners and the experts were educators/researchers, representatives of childcare organizations, and policy analysts. The following findings are based on those interviews.

In Early Childhood Education Centres

The majority of the centres have some sort of inclusion and diversity statement as part of their organization's philosophy and/or in their policies. For some jurisdictions having a statement regarding inclusion and diversity is a requirement for licencing. The need or application of inclusion and diversity policies is dependent on the make-up of the community. Some communities are more diverse than others. This is very apparent in centres that provide services to urban or on university campuses, which tend to be more diverse communities compared to smaller more rural communities where there is very little ethnic diversity. Generally, the number of children from different ethnic/racial/cultural diversity exceeds the numbers of special needs children in a centre or program.

Programming Activities Related to Diversity

Many of the centres have a spectrum of diversity activities, some "tourist" in nature, e.g. themed, but with an educative purpose. Most have integrated consideration of diversity into their environments, daily activities and routines, and menu options based on need, i.e. the diversity of the children and families being served. The majority of the centres mentioned holding "themed activities" such as celebration of holidays, multicultural potluck meals and presentations involving families, as well as integrated diversity programming activities such as in music, pictures, books, story telling, signage, dress up clothes, toys and crafts. In Quebec, religion is taught as part of the school system curriculum and is therefore not formally dealt with at the early education level.

Barriers to Inclusion and Diversity

Services cannot be provided to all children usually due to lack of funding, accessibility restrictions and lack of staff training. Most of the comments were related to working with children with special needs. In terms of diversity, one comment was made regarding the lack of cultural materials and costs of translation, especially in areas where there is a high percentage of children that are ESL. The most difficult situation is when staff have to deal with a child that is aggressive/abusive to other children and who has not been diagnosed with a special need, in which case there are no additional supports in place. Usually, special needs children who have been diagnosed come with supports and can be included into programs providing there are no accessibility issues. The majority of the centers especially those with infant/toddler care programs do not have any requirements for minimum self-care levels.

Support funding has either stayed static or slowly decreased and the costs of supports both in terms of staffing and equipment have increased over time or there are more limitations and restrictions to qualify for funding not only for special needs support, but also for government subsidies.

Accessibility is an issue in jurisdictions where it is not a requirement for licensing, due to locations in older buildings that do not meet accessibility requirements such a door width, availability of elevators/lifts, or bathroom facility adaptations, some organizations cannot provide care to children with special needs in wheelchairs. Accessibility is also a consideration for outdoor spaces as well as indoor spaces.

The lack of staff training in the area of special needs was also identified as a barrier to inclusion. Jurisdictions vary in terms of the support available to staff. Organizations will pursue support and information from external agencies and other government support services depending on the needs of the child. When a child comes with supports in place, it makes it easier for staff to get training through the family. Children who have undiagnosed special needs, such as ADD, or

FAS, are a strain on the staff and sometimes the other children until the family completes the process to access supports.

Activities that support the acknowledgement, acceptance and respect of diversity are not typically funded or supported by government. As noted by one of the respondents, cultural resource materials are difficult to find, and they often make their own materials.

Diversity in ECE Centres

In half of the centres, 20% or more of the staff are a visible minority. In eight of the 20 centres, 50% or more of their children are visible minorities. The table below gives an overview of how reflective the staffing is of diversity in comparison to the children. Twenty-five percent of the centres have the similar ratios of visible minority staff and children; 50% of the centres have more visible minority children than visible minority staff and the remaining 25% have less visible minority children than staff.

Comparison of visible minority employees to visible minority children:

Respondent	Children	Employees	Comp.
1	15%	3% (1/30 currently)	>
2	30% to 50%	45% of regular staff (80 staff)	=
3	80%	25% (5/20)	>
4	50%	50%	=
5	10%(only school age, 6 facilities)	2% (very few)	>
6	9%	26%	<
7	20%	50%	<
8	10% (3/30 same across all centers)	5-6% (3-4/60-65)	=
9	10%	0%	>
10	71%	76%	=
11	61%	81%, multi location, traditional, 3 locations/26; 5 infant/toddler programs	<
12	11% (8-9/80)	33% (5/15)	<
13	50% (6-7/15)	0%	>
14	15% aboriginal, 15% Asian	7% (1/14)	>
15	50%+	33% (2/3 staff are now white)	>
16	65%	90% (10% Caucasian)	<
17	≈ 35%	7% (2/28)	>
18	19%	1%	>
19	10% (5/49)	7% (1/15)	=
20	less than 10%	5% (1/22) (Spanish 5%)	>
> more visible minority children than staff < less visible minority children than staff = relatively similar number of visible minority children and staff			

Eight of 20 of the centers have a staff person with a disability, usually an auditory disability. One center has a person with Down's Syndrome that works at the center; the type of work was not specified, but was not as an ECE. Seven of the 20 centres have 5% or more children with special needs. Anecdotally, in terms of the challenges faced by children, it was suggested that the number of children with physical challenges is not as high as the children with cognitive/developmental challenges, e.g. autism spectrum disorders, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) or Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Often these children will enter an ECE centre without a diagnosis and will either obtain a diagnosis and support while at the ECE centre with staff assistance, or go through the program without a diagnosis (due to lack of parental response) or will not continue due to staff inability to provide support without more assistance. Often ECE centres find that placements are transitional with children moving to different centres with greater capacity to provide support.

Although English/French is the language of instruction and operation, many of the staff can speak different languages, which can be useful when serving ethnically diverse communities. These staff persons are real assets when interacting with English-as-a-second-anguage families. They can assist with intake and interview processes, e.g. explaining services, policies and procedures, obtaining information. They are also able to ease transitions and help children feel they belong by being able to speak to the children in their home languages.

Religious practices do not appear to be significant issue. The data suggests that the number of employees and the number of children of the same religions is fairly close. Many of the respondents were unsure of percentages and quantitative calculations were not possible. Religious-specific centres will accept children from other denominations. Programming tends to celebrate other religious holidays and takes an educative approach.

Observations about Families

Families that are being served by ECE centres are mostly middle and lower income families. Lower income families can take advantage of government subsidies, or have relatives care for younger children and higher income families can afford other options such as nannies in the home. Middle-income families are the largest users of ECE centers. The variables that would affect these findings the most is location. Families may select locations based on different variables, such as proximity to work or to home or to other siblings' school(s).

Bullying

The consensus in the research findings was that bullying was primarily a phenomenon among older children. The parent handbooks clearly stipulate expectations either through policies and procedures or codes of conduct or social contracts that are explained to parents and older children. Policies and procedures to deal with incidents are usually implemented when older children are involved. Most practitioners felt younger children's inappropriate comments or behaviour is driven more by curiosity and does not have malicious intent. Staff deal with incidents of bullying, especially with younger children, on a more informal basis, assessing each situation individually and taking advantage of incidents to encourage discussion, participation in empathy activities, reflection and education of the children. Depending on the seriousness of incidents and the context, incidents are followed up with the children exhibiting bullying behaviour, the victims of the bullying incident, and their families, followed by staff discussion and reflection on how to prevent further incidents.

There is current Canadian research on bullying that has been or is being conducted at various post-secondary institutions across the country, for example:

- Judith K Bernhard at Ryerson regarding diversity and immigrant experiences
- Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw at University of Victoria regarding quality childcare
- Larry Prochner at University of Alberta regarding diversity and international childcare
- Debra Pepler at York University regarding Bullying in the Classroom

Although ECEs work with families and help develop the emotional, social, cognitive, creative and physical domains of children, there seems to be social variables of power and control mixed with group dynamics and aggression, that still need exploration and research. Also, not all children go to high quality childcare and/or are in family situations where the values of inclusion and respect for diversity are not a priority or supported. In addition, the use of computer technology that has led to an increase in anonymous cyber-bullying makes it more difficult to monitor bullying behaviour.

Trends

Practitioners have noticed the following trends in the children attending their ECE centres:

- increase in children with developmental delays or cognitive disorders, e.g. autism spectrum
- decrease in stigma regarding children with special needs or disabilities
- increase in children from African nations, especially French-speaking African nations; south-east Asian countries, and Chinese; the eastern European nations, Poland and Russian states,
- increase in disrespectful behaviour from children
- decrease in racism incidents between children
- increase in families with multiple births
- decrease in parenting skills, parenting by being friends children and not setting boundaries or behavioural guidance
- increase in young parents keeping their children and not putting children up for adoption
- increase in single parent families
- increase in blended families

ECE Training Programs and Inclusion and Diversity

ECE programs have used the approach of integrating concepts of inclusion and diversity throughout all their ECE courses and many programs are currently providing separate courses on inclusion and diversity. With each provincial and territorial jurisdiction responsible for regulation and licensing and for post-secondary education, there are various approaches being taken to providing instruction on inclusion and diversity across the country. Respondents indicated that practicums with special needs and diverse populations provide “hands-on” experience and an opportunity for reflection on personal values and identification of assumptions and biases. The research indicated that it is of value to have inclusion and diversity embedded throughout all program courses so it is always raised as a consideration regardless of the course focus, but to also have a separate course so that time can be spent examining the actual concepts of inclusion and diversity, the issues and context surrounding these concepts and how these concepts are being supported and addressed by research, policy and practice. Some institutions are also incorporating concepts of social justice and anti-bias programming into their course materials.

6. ABORIGINAL ECE

Aboriginals in mainstream early childcare settings are similar to other ethnic/racial/cultural groups. They are a minority for whom programming is developed to ensure the acknowledgment, acceptance and respect for Aboriginal/First Nations culture and traditions along with other minority groups. However, due to the growing Aboriginal population, Aboriginal/First Nations children are increasingly able to access another alternative. There are an increasing number of Aboriginal early childhood education centres whose mandate is to provide Aboriginal/First Nations-based early childhood education to children. This means that the language, culture, values and traditions of the Aboriginal community are the context for early childhood education. In this setting, Aboriginal children are generally the majority population and Caucasian and non-aboriginal children are part of the diverse ethnic minorities of other mainstream ECE settings. The language of instruction may be in the Aboriginal/First Nations language of the local community or may be in English. Much like the totally integrated early childhood education program Te Whāriki, of New Zealand that incorporates the culture, including the values, of the Maori people, Aboriginal/First Nations communities are moving towards a similar goal.

This has been an issue that was recognized since the mid-nineties when the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples recommended that:

...federal, provincial, and territorial governments co-operate to support an integrated early childhood funding strategy that a) extends early childhood education to all Aboriginal children regardless of residence; b) encourages programs that foster the physical, social, intellectual and spiritual development of children, reducing distinctions between child care, prevention and education; c) maximizes Aboriginal control over service design and administration; d) offers one-stop accessible funding; and e) promotes parental involvement and choice in early childhood education options.
(Aboriginal early learning and childcare: Policy issues, Child Care Canada, Childcare Resource and Research Unit)

According to the 2006 Stats Canada data, Aboriginal children are a growing proportion of all Canadian children (131,000 children under the age of 6 years). The statistics for educational outcomes for Aboriginal children have been below national averages, but supports are being developed across the country, which has resulted in some significant gains. Although the following data is only for off-reserve Aboriginal/First Nations populations, it does provide some insight in what is occurring in terms of early education in Aboriginal populations.

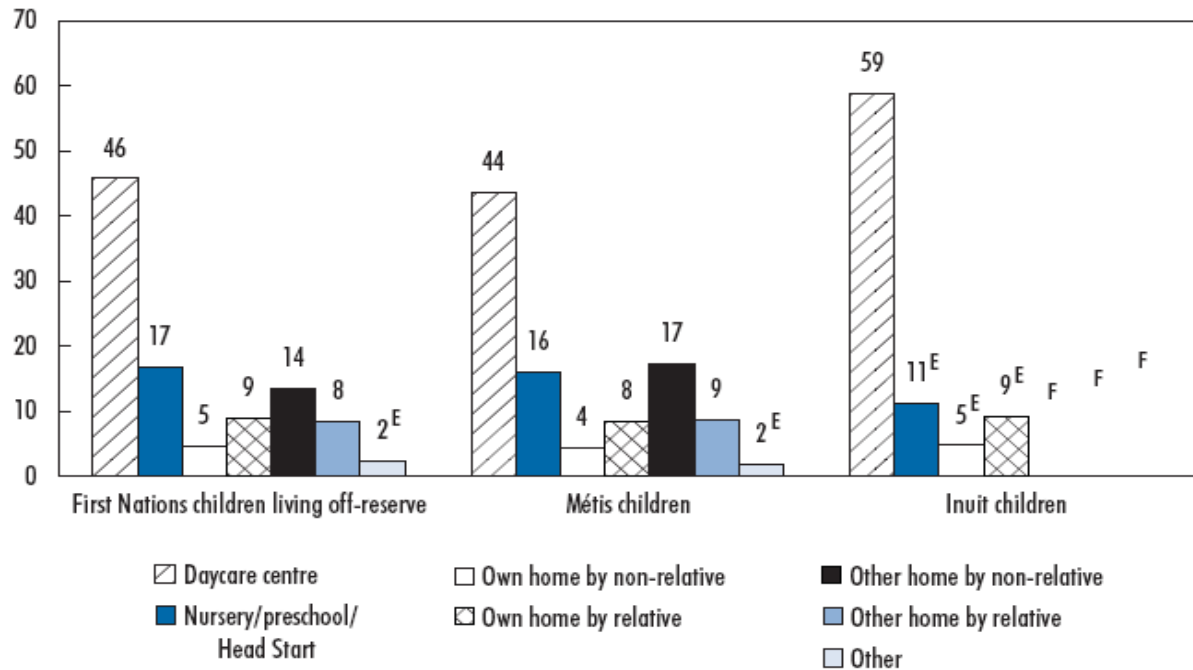
According to Stats Canada factsheets based on 2006 census data,

- about 45% of First Nations children living off reserve and 31% of Métis children had someone to help them understand their Aboriginal culture.
- in 2006, 24% of First Nations children and 14% of Métis children currently receiving child care were in an arrangement *that promotes traditional and cultural values and customs.* *(Aboriginal Children's Survey, 2006: Family, Community and Child Care, Stats Canada, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-634-x/89-634-x2008001-eng.htm>)*

Day care centres are the most common type of child care for 46% of off-reserve First Nations, 44% of Metis, and 59% of Inuit Children, with the majority of the children in a licensed daycare centre, a nursery school, a preschool, or a Head Start program.

Chart 2 Daycare is the most common type of child care for Aboriginal children

percentage of children in childcare



Source: Statistics Canada, Aboriginal Children's Survey 2006.

Additionally, a 26% of the off-reserve First nations, 17% of Metis and 66% of the Inuit children were in childcare arrangements that promoted traditional and cultural values and customs. For the Inuit children in child care, 88% were in a setting where an Inuit language was used and 27% were in settings where language was not used, but still included traditional and cultural values and customs.

Table 2: Proportion of Aboriginal children in child care that includes traditional activities and Aboriginal languages, by type of care, 2006

Type of care	First Nations children living off reserve	Métis children	Inuit children
	percentage		
Daycare centre			
Traditional activities	22.5	15.4	72.5
Aboriginal languages ¹	10.1	3.1 ^E	72.0
Nursery school/preschool/Head Start			
Traditional activities	44.5	34.7	64.8 ^E
Aboriginal languages ¹	32.6	16.9 ^E	65.8 ^E
Own home by non-relative			
Traditional activities	F	0.0	66.2 ^E
Aboriginal languages ¹	F	0.0	73.4 ^E
Own home by relative			
Traditional activities	34.3	25.5 ^E	76.1
Aboriginal languages ¹	36.6	12.3 ^E	71.1
Other home by non-relative			
Traditional activities	12.9 ^E	F	F
Aboriginal languages ¹	F	F	F
Other home by relative			
Traditional activities	34.4	19.2 ^E	80.8
Aboriginal languages ¹	16.4 ^E	F	69.6
1. Includes cases where Aboriginal languages are spoken exclusively as well as in combination with non-Aboriginal languages.			
Source: Statistics Canada, Aboriginal Children's Survey, 2006.			

.	not available for any reference period	p	preliminary
..	not available for a specific reference period	r	revised
...	not applicable	x	suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the <i>Statistics Act</i>
0	true zero or a value rounded to zero	E	use with caution
0 ^s	value rounded to 0 (zero) where there is a meaningful distinction between true zero and the value that was rounded	F	too unreliable to be published
		*	significantly different from reference category

Of Inuit children in child care, 56% were in arrangements that promoted traditional and cultural values and customs – this was significantly higher than First Nations children living off reserve (24%) and Métis children (14%). In Inuit Nunaat, 70% of children in child care were in arrangements that promoted traditional and cultural values and customs.

Research on the impact of Aboriginal children learning about or taking part in aboriginal cultural activities has been for the most part positive. Reports indicate that the children demonstrate more pro-social behaviours, however there are other variables such as the family structure, parental work status and education that can influence these findings. (*Child Care for First Nations Children Living Off Reserve, Métis Children, and Inuit Children* by Leanne C. Findlay and Dafna E. Kohen, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-008-x/2010002/article/11344-eng.htm>)

It must be noted that this report does not include discussion about Aboriginal/First Nations early childhood education on reserve. The development of infrastructure on reserves is varied, and no research was conducted to pursue early childhood education inclusion and diversity on reserve, as it would be a homogeneous population.

Aboriginal/First Nations Early Childhood Education Resources and Centres

Aboriginal ECECs have been established across the country. The Canadian Paediatric Society, Early childhood development Provincial/territorial and community resources (<http://www.cps.ca/en/issues-questions/early-childhood-development-resources>), contains information on organizations that provide Aboriginal Early Childhood Education support and/or ECE oversight.

Aboriginal specific programs such as Aboriginal Head Start Programs in Urban and Northern Communities:

[Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities](#)
[Aboriginal Head Start on Reserve](#)

Provincial and territorial aboriginal resources, including:

Alberta:

[Delegated First Nation Agencies](#)

British Columbia:

[Aboriginal Infant Development Programs B.C.](#)
[Community Action Program for Children](#)

Manitoba:

[Community Action Program for Children](#)

Newfoundland and Labrador:

[Labrador Friendship Centre's](#)

Northwest Territories

[Early Childhood Services](#) for First Nations, Inuit and all other children
[Northwest Territories Aboriginal Head Start Program](#)

Nova Scotia:

[Mi'kmaq Child, Family and Community Services](#)

Nunavut:

[Aboriginal Head Start Programs and licensed child care facilities](#)

Ontario:

[Odawa Native Friendship Centre](#) is a non-profit organization serving Aboriginal communities in Eastern Ontario
[Aboriginal Healthy Babies Healthy Children programs](#) focused on the long-term health prospects of children aged 0 to 6 (Ontario)

Prince Edward Island:

[Mi'Kmaq Family Resource Centre](#)

Saskatchewan:

[Community Action Program for Children](#)

[Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations](#)

[Saskatchewan Aboriginal Head Start](#)

Yukon Territory:

[Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities](#)

There are also many support organizations for Aboriginal Early Childhood Education, such as

- First Nations Early Childhood Development Council, BC, <http://fnecdc.ca/> at the provincial level as well as organizations at the local level, Aboriginal Infant and Early Childhood Development program, part of the First Nations Friendship Centre Vernon, <http://fnfcvernon.com/children/aboriginal-infant-and-early-childhood-development-program/>
- Indigenous Education Network, Ontario, <http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/research/ien/organizations.html>
- Aboriginal Education Research Network (AERN) <http://www.education.gov.sk.ca/AERN>

Training of Early Childhood Educators

The identified need for Aboriginal/First Nations-based childcare also means that there has been growth in specific Aboriginal/First Nations Early Childhood Education training programs. There are now early childhood education training programs with a focus on working with

Aboriginal/First Nations children that exist across the country, including:

- Aboriginal ECE certificate program, College of New Caledonia, Nicola Valley Institute of Technology, Northern Lights College and Yukon College, British Columbia and Yukon Territory
- Aboriginal Child Care and Youth Stream at Douglas College, British Columbia
- First Nations Childcare Certificate and Diploma at Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (SIIT)
- Early Learning and Childcare Program, Yellowhead Tribal College (in partnership with Grant McEwan University), Alberta
- Native Early Education Diploma, St Clair College, Ontario
- Native Early Childhood Education Diploma, Cambria College Ontario in partnership with Oshki-Pimache-O-Win Education and Training Institute in Thunder Bay)
- Early Childhood Education with Aboriginal Learners Diploma, Six Nations Polytechnic (in partnership with Niagara College), Ontario
- Early Childhood Education Program, Arctic College, Nunavut
- Early Childhood Development Program, Aurora College, Northwest Territories

7. RECOGNITION OF LGBT CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

The LGBT community is being discussed separately in this report because this community is a population segment that is part of majority and minority populations that crosses all ethnic, cultural and racial groups. In terms of childcare there are three aspects where the recognition of diversity needs to occur, families with same sex parents, children who identify as LGBT and staff who are LGBT.

One of the fundamental values/principles that pervades early childhood curriculum is the recognition and importance of the family as the principle caregiver, and the recognition that children do better when their families are positively involved in their schools. In 2005, the Canadian government recognized legal marriage between same-sex partners, thereby recognizing another family unit structure, whom ECEs interact with.

Unfortunately, for this segment of the population, there still exist many negative, stereotypical perceptions. Homophobia still exists globally, fuelled by conservative religions (not exclusive of Christianity). There are still countries where homosexuality is illegal. Social attitudes are still negative, however there are inroads being made as, more high profile people “come out”; there are depictions of LGBT persons in mainstream social media, and LGBT is recognized as an economic target market. However, just as high profile are the disturbing incidents of bullying and suicides of gay/lesbian teens (<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/story/2011/10/18/ottawa-teen-suicide-father.html>) and brutal and sometimes fatal beatings of LGBT individuals. These sad statistics indicate that Canadian society still has a way to go in accepting and being respectful of LGBT people. (<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/british-columbia/gay-bashing-on-the-rise-in-vancouver-councillor/article563507/>)

Fear, and perhaps, a choice for privacy, means that a portion of this population remains “invisible”. Consequently, LGBT families often exist, but are not identified as such by childcare providers. Some same-sex parent families will identify themselves as a single parent family and may identify their partner as a supportive “friend”. As mentioned before, children quickly learn the power dynamics of differences and depending on their experiences, suppress or openly express their sexual identity. Staff who are LGBT and have not declared their identity may wait and assess the ECE centre environment before coming out to co-workers or may choose not to because the environment is not comfortable, or make a personal choice not to, for personal privacy reasons.

Assumptions are deeply ingrained.

Without thinking about it, many teachers act on the assumption that all children in their class are or will be heterosexual. And yet we do not know the sexual orientation or gender identity of the children for whom we care so deeply. We do not want any child to grow up in a world that says, “You are not welcome here.” All too often this is exactly the message we are conveying to child who will grow up to identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, or to children who have LGBT (*Do No Harm Creating Welcoming and Inclusive Environments for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Families in Early Childhood Settings*, Tracy Burt, Aimee Gelnow, and Lee Klinger Lesser)

Zeenat Janmohamed and Ryan Campbell describe this construct of Early Childhood Education as “heteronormative”. This refers to the accepted “normal” or “natural” status of heterosexuality in western society that underlies the way the majority of society operates. (*Building Bridges: Queer families in Early Childhood Education* (Zeenat Janmohamed, Ryan Campbell, 2009)

As a result the main reasons for the continued silence by the majority population has been identified as:

- 1) lack of comfort with their own knowledge of and facility with language regarding issues affecting the LGBT community
- 2) personal dissonance regarding their own personal , cultural, or religious beliefs about homosexuality
- 3) discomfort resulting from their assumption that if they advocate for engaging LGBT families, people will think they are LGBT

- 4) fear of reprisal from their supervisors, peers, other parents, board members or others associated with the setting in which they work. (*Do No Harm Creating Welcoming and Inclusive Environments for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Families in Early Childhood Settings, Tracy Burt, Aimee Gelnaw, and Lee Klinger Lesser*)

Additionally, many of the issues around being LGBT are entangled with sex, religion and politics.

Many educators are hesitant to offend the religious beliefs of parents or other staff, and fear they may do so by supporting acceptance and visibility for LGBT families in the program. Some may struggle with the tension between their own religious beliefs and their commitment to treating all children and their families with respect. (*Do No Harm Creating Welcoming and Inclusive Environments for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Families in Early Childhood Settings, Tracy Burt, Aimee Gelnaw, and Lee Klinger Lesser*)

LGBT Resources:

These issues are slowly being addressed. A curriculum *Making Room in the Circle: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Families in Early Childhood Settings*, (Parent Services Project) has been developed for educators. There are also more age-appropriate resources available for ECE settings:

- Tip Sheets to Welcome and Include Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Families in Early Childhood Settings, http://www.lgbt-education.info/en/articles/materials_media
- Suggestions for Children's Books that include Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Families (www.naeyc.org/files/yc/file/201001/LesserHandout310_2.pdf)
- Practical considerations and suggestions available for ECEs, *Building Bridges: Queer families in Early Childhood Education* (Zeenat Janmohamed, Ryan Campbell, 2009)

Programming Strategies:

In the ECE classroom, ECE educators who address these issues strive to achieve the four core goals of Anti-Bias Education, which is applicable to all populations:

- Each child will demonstrate self-awareness, confidence, family pride, and positive social identities.
- Each child will express comfort and joy with human diversity: accurate language for human differences; and deep, caring human connections.
- Each child will increasingly recognize unfairness, have language to describe unfairness, and understand that unfairness hurts.
- Each child will demonstrate empowerment and the skills to act, with others or alone, against prejudice and/or discriminatory actions. (*Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves*, L. Derman-Sparks & J.O. Edwards)

Derman-Sparks and Olsen also stress the importance of supporting all families.

Some adults mistakenly assume that teaching children about diversity in family structure devalues "traditional" families or promotes certain other family configurations. The purpose of anti-bias education is to enable teachers to support all children's families and to foster in each child fair and respectful treatment of others whose families are different from the child's own. Anti-bias education does not disparage or advocate any particular family structure – but it does adhere to early childhood education's fundamental ethic of positively representing and supporting every child's unique kind of family. (*Do No Harm Creating Welcoming and Inclusive Environments for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and*

Transgender (LGBT) Families in Early Childhood Settings, Tracy Burt, Aimee Gelnow, and Lee Klinger Lesser)

Another measure for LGBT acceptance and respect is from the viewpoint of staff. ECE centres, may or may not know if they are hiring LGBT staff. An assessment of how open and respectful of diversity a centre is, may be reflected in the willingness of a staff person to “come out” to co-workers.

The same process for acknowledging, accepting and respecting other cultures, applies to acknowledging, accepting and respecting LGBT families, children and staff.

1. personal growth and reflection;
2. analysis of the issues; and
3. practical applications to create change.

(Parent Services Project, <http://www.parentservices.org/lgbt.php>)

Many of the same types of strategies used to acknowledge diversity are applicable to acknowledging LGTB families, children and staff, for example:

- Take advantage of teachable moments. This includes (but is not limited to) addressing children’s spontaneous inquires related to queer issues and challenging observed instances of teasing/bullying related to diversity in sexual or gender identity.
- Examine materials available to children for stereotypes/biases. Disney fairy tales, for example popular with young children but are laden with gender stereotypes.
- Where possible, create materials that ensure non-stereotypical queer representation in the early childhood classroom.
- Maintain open communication with staff, parents and children to ensure the sharing of multiple perspectives as they pertain to queer issues. This helps to promote mutual understanding and encourages the resolution of differences in opinion.
- Recognize and address personal prejudices and fears. This may include engagement in routine reflective practice, aided by tools like those included in Building Bridges.
- Use children’s literature in the early childhood classroom as a vehicle for discussion. Building Bridges offers suggestion of queer-positive stories that may incite discussion with children of all ages.
- Avoid tokenism or the tourist approach in exploring queer issues with young children. For example don’t limit your exploration of queer issues exclusively in recognition of Gay Pride month in June. Instead, educators should plan ongoing opportunities for queer representation in all faucets of their program (*Building Bridges: Queer families in Early Childhood Education*, Zeenat Janmohamed, Ryan Campbell, 2009)

There are many ways to communicate a centre’s attitudes about diversity. Like the centres that have “Welcome” in a multitude of languages at the entrance of the centre, the use of a rainbow sticker can be a visual cue that also “welcomes”.

ECE Training

We need to ensure that the ECE programs, especially the courses on diversity address children’s sexuality and LGBT families as we move forward to provide high quality early childhood education. ECEs must be willing to discuss and confront their own biases, assumptions and address the lack of knowledge regarding the LGBT community. As the LGBT community continues to make head way on issues of recognition and rights, the ECE community needs to be able to address the needs of LGBT families, the needs of children as they develop their sexual identities and recognize the diversity of their staff.

8. CONCLUSIONS

It is evident that across the country that for inclusion, equity and diversity has been embraced by almost every jurisdiction and local organization. The model of “day care” has transitioned to one of “early childhood education”. The implementation of emergent curriculum, the recognition of the importance of parents and play, the move towards responsive, respectful, and relationship-based programming, are indicators of high quality early childhood education. It is within this context that early child educators are able to address inclusion, equity and diversity.

ECE centres need to have qualified staff, who can develop relationships with children and families; who have the knowledge and skills to reflect on their own values and biases; to critically review the programs, operations and environment to ensure integrated approaches to inclusion and diversity. They need staff who can look beyond personal values and accept, respect and respond to the needs of all children and their families, including the LGBT community, without prejudice and bias. ECE centres need to provide quality environments that are literacy-rich to support English/French and home languages; visual displays where children can see accurate depictions of themselves and their families; books, music, and toys that reflect the many races, cultures and family structures in their communities. ECE centres need to provide supportive, responsive, respectful programming that is anti-bias, that recognizes children as competent learners and that supports their learning.

Aboriginal/First Nations ECE centres were developed from a need to address inclusiveness and respect for diversity. These centres are already sensitized to inclusion and diversity as they work to pass down traditions and culture to young Aboriginal/First Nations children and preserve their languages. Due to the numerous bands and tribes, these centres are closely tied to their communities, with community members playing an active role in programming. Many of these centres also accept non-aboriginal children, and will employ many of the same strategies that mainstream ECE centres use to accept and respect the diversity of all the children in their centres. This is not to downplay the challenges faced by Aboriginal/First Nations communities in providing quality early childhood education. It has been a long journey, from establishing Aboriginal/First Nations-based ECE training programs; developing Aboriginal/First Nations resources and establishing high quality Aboriginal/First Nations-based ECE centres given all the other social and economic issues that Aboriginal/First Nations communities face.

In order for high quality ECE centres to operate they need to be able to hire qualified staff. They rely on post-secondary institutions to provide quality programs to train potential staff. Post-secondary institutions put together programs that provide the knowledge and skills to meet the needs of high quality ECE centres. They incorporate current, valid research findings into their program content, they participate in research and they hire experienced, knowledgeable instructors and leaders in the field. They collaborate with ECE organizations on special projects such as specialized curriculums on working with special needs children, Aboriginal/First Nations children, for LGBT awareness and sensitivity and sexual identity in young children. There are even projects underway to address the gender imbalance in sector by encouraging male recruitment into ECE training programs. Post-secondary institutions are a resource for the sector and the government.

The development of appropriate educational resources has also improved. There are now more books, toys, posters and other resources that are available to promote the discussion of multicultural, LGBT, social justice, anti-bias concepts. These resources are essential tools in high quality early childhood education settings.

ECE centres that provide high quality care have established supportive relationships within the community. They work closely with agencies that provide support services for special needs children; they plan outings to participate in community events; they model the respectful behaviour they want the children to emulate; and they strive to positively reflect the diversity of the community that they serve.

Aside from the children, one way the ECE centre reflects their community diversity is through their staff. Staff that reflect the diversity of the real world enrich the lives of the children and families they interact with. Having men on staff provide role models for young boys, staff that reflect and understand the cultures and ethnicity of the children and maybe their language help create a sense of belonging for children, and LGBT staff can be role models, a resource and by personalizing the unknown, cause others to review their assumptions and overcome their biases and fears.

In order to ensure a minimum standard of childcare, there needs to be oversight and regulation. This is typically the responsibility of various levels of government. Across the country, provincial/territorial and municipal governments regulate ECE centres that operate in their jurisdictions. Regulation ensures the basic needs and rights of children are protected, that they are in safe environments with staff that meet minimum requirements. However, these minimum standards are not synonymous with high quality. Regulations requiring trained, qualified staff, or certified staff and accreditation of operations that meet specific criteria such as inclusion and diversity policies and procedures are requirements that positively impact quality.

There is no denying the positive impact of early childhood education that promotes inclusion and respect for the diversity of others, but there is a cost. Governments assist low-income families by subsidizing child care and offsetting costs for special needs children. Otherwise, parents pay fees and the cost of high quality ECE is not cheap. In addition, there is a shortage of high quality ECE spaces for children, many facilities have wait lists, and parents are registering for spaces before their children are born. There are risks associated with unregulated home-based, day care; it is not the same as early childhood education.

There is room for improvement. Inclusion and diversity programming is an aspect of high quality early childhood education programs. However, there is a lack of quality consistency with early childhood education across the country. The regional regulation of early childhood education has resulted in varying levels of requirements and support, in terms of training, programming and funding, which impacts the quality of ECE centres and programs. Funding support and access across the country needs to be improved, to keep up with the costs, to ensure available spaces for children and to meet societal goals. In terms of diversity, with respect to the recognition of multiculturalism, sexuality, LGBT family support, resources, etc., there is no government funding allocated to diversity programs and resources, unlike the funding support provided to children with special needs. With respect to Aboriginal/First Nations culture, diversity needs are being addressed on several fronts in terms of Aboriginal/First Nations-based ECE centres, and post-secondary ECE training programs. Even gender bias in the sector is being addressed as the recognition of the need for more males as ECE providers is validated through research and programs to address this issue are implemented. The areas of diversity that seem to be the most difficult to address and tackle openly is the acknowledgment, acceptance and respect for children's sexual identity choices and the LGBT community. There have certainly have been gains in recognition for the LGBT community, but the phobia, the "closet", the "invisible" family still exists and although there is much more research being conducted and published, there is no sense that it is a mainstream aspect of diversity. Another area that there was no discussion or research in terms of diversity is the area of mental illness. This may be a result of mental illness

not being an issue for children of birth-12 years of age. It was also not mentioned as a diversity issue with regards to developing relationships with parents and family.

Improving early childhood education is not just a function throwing in more money, although it would certainly help, but more work needs to take place on a national level to improve the consistency of quality across the country and to improve access to licensed, regulated high quality early childhood education centres. ECE centres can prove to be a catalyst for social change, but government needs to have a long-term vision to make the required investment.

Eurydice is an education network of 40 European countries whose mission is to facilitate cooperation in the field of education by providing information and analyses to national education policy makers. In its 2009 report *Tackling Social and Cultural Inequities Through Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe*, it states in the preface that based on the outcomes of a previous 2006 report, *Efficiency and Equity in European Education and Training Systems*, a business case can be made for the investment in pre-primary childcare to address social and cultural issues:

It is both more efficient and more equitable to invest in education very early: correcting failure later on is not merely inequitable, but highly inefficient in comparison. This is so not only because pre-primary education facilitates later learning, but also because a substantial body of evidence shows that, especially for disadvantaged children, it can produce large socio-economic returns. In its Communication, the Commission concluded that:

Pre-primary education has the highest returns in terms of the social adaptation of children. Member States should invest more in pre-primary education as an effective means to establish the basis for further learning, preventing school drop-out, increasing equity of outcomes and overall skill levels.

Early childhood education is a means for governments to achieve important social and cultural goals. It is an opportunity to view early childhood education as part of the spectrum of education, a means to give all children the opportunity to reach their potential and to develop the attitudes, knowledge to live productively in a diverse Canada and the global community.

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