

Challenging the rhetoric of inclusion: Breaking the silence on sexuality in early childhood

On the 3rd of March 2001 a group of childcare workers, parents, and community members marched in the Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras. Marching under the auspice of the Social Justice In Early Childhood Group, this group of social advocates were aiming at challenging the rhetoric of inclusion.

The Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras has had a long-standing history within the gay and lesbian community of Sydney. With its inception grounded in resistance of conservative politics, the Social Justice In Early Childhood Group believed that their involvement in this years Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras signalled an important political move for the early childhood community.

The Social Justice In Early Childhood Group had several aims in mind when participating in this years Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras. These included

- ❑ Raising the issues of social justice as they affect gay and lesbian families;
- ❑ Providing the opportunity for individuals to demonstrate their support for the gay and lesbian community;
- ❑ Demonstrating that diversity within the community should be celebrated; and
- ❑ To raise the profile of the Social Justice In Early Childhood Group.

The principles of an anti-bias program have provided support for practitioners to explore and reflect areas of diversity within the curriculum. Undoubtedly one of the most silenced areas of diversity is that of sexuality. Living within a community which positions sexualities other than heterosexuality as the “other”, has provided many challenges for early childhood. Negotiating the reflection of sexualities within the early childhood curriculum has usually resulted in the invisibility of all sexualities other than heterosexuality.

It is vital for practitioners to acknowledge the power associated with particular families through the ongoing presence of heterosexuality within the early childhood curriculum. Images of traditional families and the sharing of stories amongst children and staff about their own families, has provided ample opportunities for children to explore traditional notions of family units.

In essence all children and families should feel comfortable with the diversity which exists within their families, without fear of prejudice or retaliation from those around them. To adhere to an anti-bias approach requires services to move out of the ‘comfort zone’ and explore areas of diversity which exists beyond their own services. It is essential that the children of gay and lesbian families have the same opportunity to celebrate their families without suffering at the hands of conservative politics and practices which may exist within Australia.

The Social Justice In Early Childhood Group would like to thank all those who participated in this event and we hope that our involvement in the Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras has demonstrated to the wider community the commitment the early childhood community has to the celebration of difference.

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