



LGBTQIA+ Early Years Magazine



Issue 1 | February 2021

www.lgbtqearlyyears.org

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Putting the child at the centre of practice for LGBTQIA+ pedagogy

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COME AND MEET THE LGBTQIA+ EARLY YEARS WORKING GROUP





From the Editor

The LGBTQIA+ Early Years magazine is all about being able to openly discuss and challenge our thinking to make our Early Years settings and practice a true reflection on our diverse society today.

This publication has been a labour of love, not just because of the LGBTQIA+ nature of its content, but the fact that it has brought so many professionals together to discuss the true meaning of inclusive and representative practice within our settings.

The magazine comes from a place of practice first and foremost, then research and finally the experiences of true life events that place us within the minds of our youngest children today. It is a story that navigates you through why we need to support the narrative of LGBTQIA+ within the Early Years.

The LGBTQIA+ Working Group was an idea of mine back in March 2020. I think for many of us the lockdown and mass short term closures of nurseries, childminders, pre schools and schools gave us some time to think about and reflect on our practice. I asked for support and many professionals came forward to offer their help to share the need for further discussions around representation within our Early Years settings.

I firstly want to thank everyone who has submitted an article to the magazine. Not only has this been done for free, but it has been done with passion, excitement and respect for one another. These values of the LGBTQIA+ Early Years Working Group hold true today and we hope these shine through within the magazine.

The LGBTQIA+ Early Years wouldn't have got off the ground financially if it wasn't for the generosity of the supporters who donated, so thank you. We also owe a special thank you to Family who matched funded the finances to enable us to reach our £1000 target so settings who are on low incomes were able to have hard copies of this magazine.

I hope that this magazine supports your CPD, child-centred practice, by being able to start the narrative with families and most importantly gathering the voice of the child, for a true and inclusive early years environment.

I hope you enjoy reading our magazine and take something from this to influence your practice within the Early Years.

Sending much love, respect and gratitude in acknowledging the immense hard work of all professionals in Early Years.



Aaron Bradbury
EDITOR

LGBTQIA+: What does the Initialism Mean?

by Eris Varga



L? G? B? T?
Q? I? A? +?

Navigating the ABCs of the LGBTQIA+ community can be tricky. You might have seen many variations of the initialism to include different identities, but LGBTQ+ or LGBTQIA+ are two popular forms in the UK. So what do all the letters mean?

L: Lesbian.

The first three letters (LGB) refer to sexual identity. The 'L' is for lesbian. The term was coined in the late 19th century, via Latin from Greek Lesbios, from Lesbos, home of Sappho, who expressed love for women in her poetry.

G: Gay.

'Gay' is generally reserved for gay men but can also be an umbrella term for a number of identities (as in 'gay men and women'). As the word 'homosexual' became more clinical and derogatory in the late 60s and early 70s, the gay liberation movement gained steam and the phrase 'gay and lesbian' became more commonplace.

B: Bisexual.

Bisexual (bi) can mean different things to different people but is generally known as the attraction to multiple genders, often including one's own gender. Not to be confused with 'pansexual', which is attraction to all genders or regardless of gender.

T: Transgender.

Transgender (trans) is when a person's gender does not line up with their assigned sex at birth.

Sometimes the letter is presented as Trans* or Trans+ to include all non-cisgender and gender non-conforming identities. This can include non-binary people – non-binary is an umbrella term for people who don't fit into traditional 'male' and 'female' categories.

Q: Queer/questioning.

Queer is a catch-all term for anyone in the community. The 'Q' was added to be more inclusive to people who don't fit into the other categories. Likewise, the Q might include 'questioning' people who are exploring their sexual or gender identities and may not want to commit to a certain label.

I: Intersex.

A term for someone born with biological sex characteristics that aren't traditionally associated with male or female bodies. According to The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, there are approximately 358,105 people with intersex variations in the UK alone. Some people may not be aware that they are intersex, since many intersex variations are not external. Intersexuality does not refer to sexual orientation or gender identity – it's important to remember that not all intersex people consider themselves to be part of the queer community and it depends on the individual.

A: Aromantic/asexual.

The 'A' is another letter that can have multiple meanings. Aromantic (aro) is when someone experiences little to no romantic attraction, and asexual (ace) is when someone experiences little to no sexual attraction. Asexual people do not always identify as aromantic; aromantic people do not always identify as asexual. Neither of these labels are indicative of someone's relationship status or whether they're sexually active. The 'A' can also include agender, which is when a person identifies with no particular gender, though some people include this under the T.

+: All other identities!

The plus was added to be further inclusive to all identities. These can include pansexual, polyamorous (poly), genderqueer, etc.

Other variations of the initialism can include 'P' for pan/poly people, 'U' for unsure or 'C' for curious. and '2S' for 'two-spirit', which is a third-gender (or other gender-variant) ceremonial and social role in the indigenous peoples of North America. This is by no means an exhaustive list, and it's important to respect people's interpretations of the initialism on an individual basis.



Inclusion for All

by James Butler



Inclusion in the early years and the broader world of education is about every individual feeling like they 'belong'. Parents, practitioners, visitors and children all feel that they have a place in our setting, they are equally valued and equally important. The problem, however, is that 'inclusion' and 'belonging' means different things to different people.

I can easily highlight this through my own experience of how the conversation has changed, even within the last twelve months. Traditionally, the focus of inclusion has been on children with SEND. I have sat in many meetings entitled 'Inclusion' and the only real topic is around SEND and how we cater for that within our classrooms. However, this last period, the focus has shifted to discrimination based on race. Meetings on 'inclusion' have focused increasingly on racism and how we ensure that our settings and curriculums are nondiscriminatory. These are both massively important areas of inclusion but they are not the total.

We should all want to work towards a totally inclusive world but in order to do this, we must first acknowledge that we are not totally inclusive in our settings. Once we have established this at the forefront of our minds we can begin our journey towards being more inclusive and giving everyone a place to belong. Nutbrown (2006) directs us toward the Index for Inclusion. The planning framework, within the index, encourages practitioners to think creatively about inclusion and develop inclusive practices/policies. I would highly recommend paying this website a visit.

www.csie.org.uk/resources/inclusion-index-explained.shtml

In the early years, the framework in England (both old and new) encourages us to think of the 'unique child'. We should consider every child to be "constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured." With this in our minds, it becomes clear that inclusion includes every single child. Every child comes with their own uniqueness and we must appreciate and celebrate that in our settings.

It is very important that we do not "treat everyone the same." It is clear that some children will require more support, additional resources, adults or modifications to the space in order to be included. Everyone is not the same and cannot be treated as such. What is important is that we believe that each child has the unique ability to achieve and succeed.



James is an experienced educator based in Southampton. He has worked in education for nearly 15 years and specialises in Early Childhood Education, Leadership, SEND and Wellbeing. James lives with his long-suffering wife Sophie, who is also a teacher, and his 2-year-old daughter B.

James is currently working as an Early Years Leader at a school in Southampton which has both a nursery and reception department on site. He has previously worked in both schools and nurseries. As well as teaching fulltime, James writes courses for several online training providers, writes articles for various blogs and magazines and provides tailored training to a variety of different settings. James holds an MA in Education as well as PGCE and Qualified Teacher Status.



Looking Through an LGBT Lens

by Lucy Rae



The importance of celebrating family diversity in early years

Writing this article has been a timely reminder that the things that are important to us professionally, come into even sharper focus when they have personal impact. It comes at the same time as my good friend's 3-year-old twins started preschool. They have two mummies, born to IVF using a donor. It took me right back to when my children were younger.

According to the Office of National Statistics, in 2019 there were 212,000 same-sex families in the UK, having increased by 40% since 2015. Data and statistics are not my strength, but I know that not all same sex families will show up in the system. Not all ways that families conceive are 'formal' and therefore reported, e.g., informal arrangements using donors without medical intervention. So, this number is probably larger. All of these children have the right to have their families and therefore themselves celebrated.

As parents, when our children leave us to start at a setting or school, we know that their world will open, their influences will widen. We hold our breath and hope that their experiences will be positive, that they feel safe and secure, that they make friends and settle. It can be an anxious time for everyone but what helps all children is undoubtedly familiarity. But what happens when what's most familiar to children is not there?

All parents feel these things I'm sure, but same sex families have further anxiety when their children leave them for the wider world. We know that even at home, in our own bubble, finding representation of our family to support our children's identity isn't easy, so what are the chances elsewhere?

We can't find ourselves mirrored on children's TV, there's nothing on CBeebies. We don't see ourselves in any of the books on mainstream bookshelves. We can't hear it when people talk about adult relationships around our children. Heteronormativity, that is the idea that society views heterosexuality as the norm, pervades and when it's coupled with entrenched gender stereotyping, it's almost impenetrable.

So, when our children start at a setting or school, just as the twins did this month, we gear ourselves for 'damage limitation'. Inevitably we know our family and child are in the minority, but what is harder, is that we're likely to be invisible. Invisibility for our children does not create the familiarity needed. They won't get the external affirmation of their identity and where they come from. This omission will reinforce something negative.

My friend told me that the twins were starting to ask about daddies – this isn't a surprise. They should know where they came from. Honesty, in an age-appropriate way, is always the best approach in helping children make sense of the world, even if it's tricky for the adults. But the lack of representation and visibility will have in part, fuelled that enquiry. It may be the difference between young curious minds noticing difference and working life out and an uneasy questioning of why no one else is like me. What does that do for self-esteem, confidence and a sense of belonging?

Lack of representation and invisibility has a damaging effect on the other children too.

They don't have experience of the true, breadth of society. They need a wider view of the world than their own bubble with authentic age-appropriate explanations. This makes everyone secure in their own lives, whilst understanding the lives of others. It is also the start of eradicating prejudice later in life, often put down to fear born of little understanding.



We work in early years because we care. We want all children to have a positive start, equal access and opportunity in a nurturing and exciting environment that they are happy to be in. But we can't pick and choose which areas of diversity we consider, choosing the ones that are more palatable to the majority of our families. In doing so, the unspoken messages about those we omit is loud in its silence for those it affects.

When something is missing in our practice, it's rarely intentional, more often it's because we don't know what we don't know. We are all the product of our own life experiences and use those as the basis of what we focus on. Maya Angelou famously said, "Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better."

As early years practitioners, we must strive to find out what we don't know. We have a legal and moral obligation to do so, for the good of all children. Otherwise we are complicit in perpetuating the cycle of invisibility, where the unknown remains excluded – this keeps certain children and their families as 'outsiders'; it breeds an unease about difference, rather than celebrating it and can become prejudice.

Just as with recent Black Lives Matters campaigning, it is not enough to say we are not racist, we have to be anti-racist. We have to be proactive – call it out, change practice, be an active ally. In the same way, it's not enough to not be homophobic, we have to be anti-homophobic.

It's easy to couch adult relationships and therefore same-sex relationships, in talking about different families. There is no talk of sex or how babies are made through intercourse – as early years practitioners we're skilled at 'fielding' those questions from children of heterosexual adults. It's no different a skill when you move the goal posts out a bit.

What makes a family? Ask the twins, or my children and they'll tell you the same things as the children of heterosexual parents. Celebrating family diversity is a 'win win' for children in single family households; those parented by extended family members; foster families; blended families. There's not an exhaustive list of family types but the outdated 2.4 family, one mum, one dad representation is still often all children see and hear about.

Some practitioners I talk to, whole heartedly believe that all family types and therefore different adult relationships, should be visible but they don't feel confident, comfortable or know where to start. There's a fear that they're not allowed to talk to children about this stuff, it's not appropriate or they'll get it wrong and offend someone. Some even think that talking about being gay, will influence children growing up to be gay. I have spent 40 something years in a predominantly heterosexual world and it has not made me heterosexual. However, more diverse representation growing up would have saved me years of anxiety trying to fit in. It would also have saved a few young men some heartache!

The first thing to be reassured by is, you have permission. Not only are we 'allowed' to, we are legally obliged to. We must prepare all children to live in 21st Century Britain. For more information on permission, where to start and how to do it, use the Getting Started Toolkit (www.stonewall.org.uk/system/files/getting_started_early_years.pdf) It has information on how to develop practice; support staff and manage challenge.

When you do that, you are striding towards FULL inclusion, whatever lens you look through. Swap same sex relationships for race for example, the approach will be the same – get informed; question practice; raise awareness; consider how it translates to and impacts on your children and families.

So, be brave if you're worried. Find out more if you need to. Be reflective, challenge yourself and adapt practice if you need to. Some of us will also need to be prepared to leave personal opinions at the door, imparting those are not part of our job description.

Don't overthink it. Celebrating family difference is the age-appropriate way to approach children's understanding of same sex relationships and ensures that none of our children, or their families are invisible.



Lucy Rae is an experienced early years trainer, author and consultant, specialising in gender equality and LGBTQ+ visibility; physical health and wellbeing in the under 5s and the importance of play for child development.

Lucy runs Under One Sky Learning, an independent consultancy which provides support, training and quality improvement to settings and schools on equality and inclusion, working to counter the negative impact of stereotyping on children's sense of self and others. She continues this work as an SLE for Equalities for Bristol Early Years Teaching School Alliance, helping settings and schools to create a fully inclusive environment. Lucy is also a Director for the Bristol Men in Early Years Network, a campaign to challenge gender stereotypes and encourages a more gender diverse workforce in children's learning, development, and care. Striving to offer all young children a broader experience by encouraging and promoting the value of diversity.

Lucy is also the author of Stonewall Early Years guide, 'Getting Started' and in addition is a trainer for Children's Scrapstore in Bristol and HENRY, a national charity, who deliver CPD to health practitioners and the early years workforce as well as parenting support to families with children under 5.



Interview with And Pasley on Gender Pronouns

by Sid Mohandas

gender identity



Sid: I have greatly appreciated your perspectives on gender and your work that complicates and challenges dominant conceptualisations of gender variability. In this interview, I'd like us to focus on gender pronouns. What are gender pronouns and why are they important to consider in creating inclusive spaces?

And: 'For those less familiar, pronouns are usually gendered words that designate personhood or possession, such as, "He has a ball. The ball is his. It belongs to him."

By the time a child begins to get a sense of their gender - around 3-4 years old - they already have a consolidated sense of gender roles, masculinity, femininity, and the idea that everything is gendered (or what is referred to as overcoded). Some children also have a sense that the way their bodies are coded by others doesn't fit with conventional understandings, that they relate to gender in unexpected ways (e.g. feeling both masculine and feminine), or that they simply don't feel they have a place in masculine-feminine binaries. I think an integral point to note is that this sense is connected to their sense of personhood: who they are.

Teaching students about pronouns is as simple as giving them another tool to be able to respect and celebrate each other's personhoods, be they different or similar. Moreover, they understand that their own personhood is valuable and they are entitled to have their sense of self respected.

Sid: Could you expand on what you mean by this and share some ways schools and educators can employ this in practice?

And: Well, a good place to start is that WE ALL HAVE PRONOUNS! Cis people simply have bodies that are conventionally associated with the pronoun they feel suits them. However, the act of asking for people to use different pronouns can be quite challenging for trans people as gender non-conformity is often paired with violence or social stigma (which is also violence). Currently, we live in a world where, in most contexts, people feel they can assume the pronouns of others because they assume everyone (not visibly transitioning or gender non-conforming) is cisgender. This is called cisnormativity.

As educators, we have a responsibility to ensure that our students feel/are included in our pedagogy, so it becomes necessary to consider new strategies that don't put the responsibility of changing gender dynamics on trans children. One example is normalising NOT assuming pronouns. However, rather than asking students or staff to disclose their pronouns, putting trans members of our community people in a vulnerable position again, cis people might contribute to this by disclosing their pronouns in contexts such as email signatures, social groups, and official settings. This puts no explicit pressure on trans people to disclose but signals that people have put thought into how they can make their community safer for trans members. This sort of support matters.

Sid: I've been in situations where I have accidentally misgendered a person and felt really bad, what are your thoughts on how to respond in such circumstances?

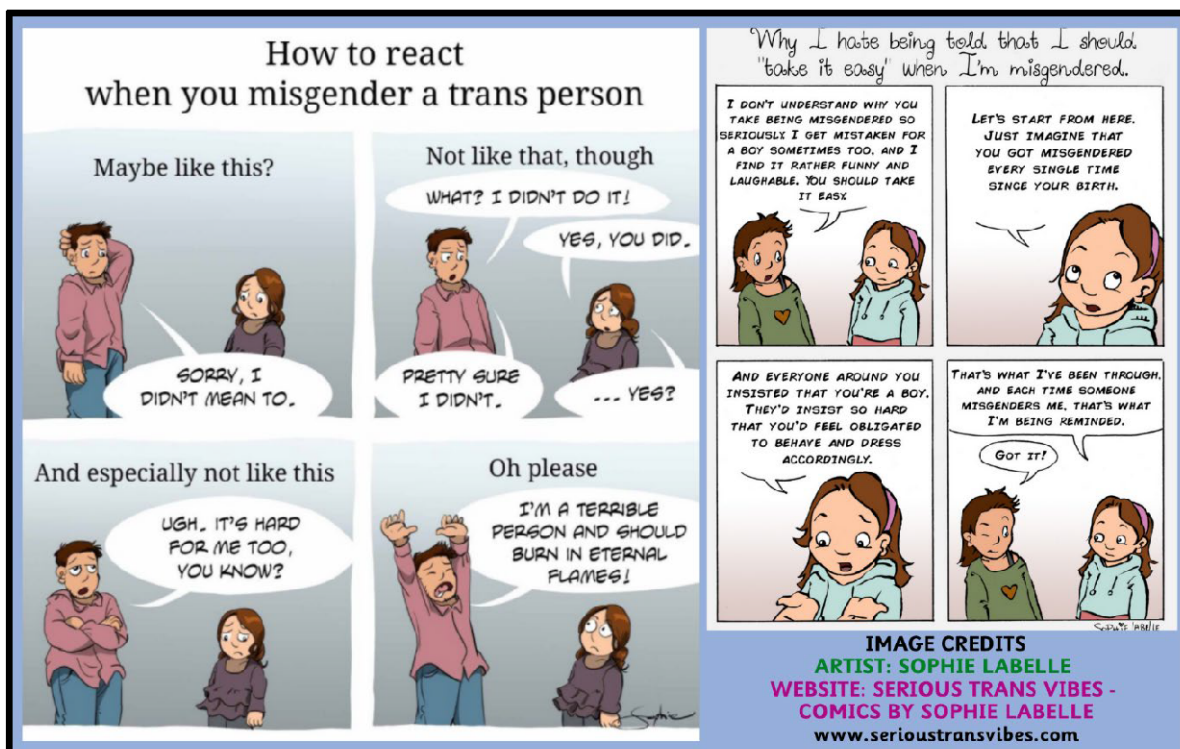
And: I think a guiding idea around this is that, when a trans person corrects you, they are giving you a chance. If they don't, they have probably decided that you are not worth the effort. So, the goal here is to demonstrate that you are worth the effort.

In the case where they correct you, say thank you, move on, and do your absolute best to make sure it doesn't happen again. This shows that you appreciate the energy that they are giving you and demonstrating a commitment to respect their identity. If it is a multiple offense, do apologise, but make sure that your actions match your intent.

A helpful tip is to internalise their name and pronouns - by yourself, say to yourself three things you like about them, using their names and pronouns. Also, use their pronouns and name with others, so you both get practice and you normalise the act of respecting pronouns.

If someone else is correcting you about a child's pronouns, thank them and continue with the conversation. Do NOT make a big deal of it - it is awkward and, rather than a genuine apology, that awkwardness translates into a sort of punishment for having corrected you. They probably won't bother next time. Don't deny it - this is a form of gaslighting and will breed distrust. Don't make it about you.

Below is an example of how these scenarios might play out from trans comic Sophie Labelle.



In the scenario where they did not correct you, do your best to correct yourself. But again, don't make it about yourself, don't dramatize, and own your mistake. Say sorry, move on. Remember that misgendering is often an act of violence for a trans person because of our histories of being misgendered. Again, this can be where normalising these sorts of practices can be really useful.

Sid: As a Montessori educator and trainer, I often try to find ways to link Montessori theory to what I am learning about gender. In her book 'The Absorbent Mind', Dr. Montessori talks about the need to 'follow the child'. How can we as adults follow the child in their gender knowings?

And: This is an excellent example of a time when it's ideal to give up a sense of expertise as a teacher. Children are already experts on their own gender and this is a great opportunity to let them lead in how they want to be treated. Talk to them about the possibility of using different pronouns, taking on another name, or using different clothes.

This is also a great opportunity to reassure any uncertain parents that exploring these things is healthy and helps a child settle into a way of being in the world which they feel comfortable with, and to know that they will be supported to do so.

This doesn't automatically mean anything in particular for a child's gender or sexuality. They may or may not be trans or queer, experimentation does not determine these things. It may be a good time to discuss the possibility of not conforming to the gender they were assigned at birth or being attracted to genders other than the one heteronormative society assumes they will; however, make sure that this is done in a way where there is no stigma attached. There is little point in alerting them to non-normative ways of being if we instantly tag those existences with prejudice.

Which is probably a good idea to finish on. Make sure that you examine your own prejudices as you engage in teaching. What are your assumptions around sex, gender and sexuality? Where did you receive these ideas and what evidence do you have for their veracity?



And Pasley is presently a PhD candidate in the Faculty of Education and Social Work at the University of Auckland. Their research broadly focuses on gender, sex, sexuality, and posthuman theory. Their doctoral research looks at the ways in which trans students' lives matter in Aotearoa New Zealand, employing an Agential Realist lens. They have been teaching sexualities education since 2016 and currently lecture on trans lives, transnormativities, and disability and sexuality.



Sid Mohandas (he/him/his) lives in North London and identifies as queer. He is a former Montessori educator and teacher trainer, guest lecturer and a doctoral researcher at Middlesex University, exploring gender in the early childhood workforce from feminist 'new' materialist and posthuman perspectives. He is also the founder of The Male Montessorian, an online project focused on complicating our understandings of gender in the early childhood workforce. Sid believes we must work from an intersectional social and environmental justice perspective, that is focused on dismantling cis het white ableist neurotypical classist antisemitic masculinist structures.



Creating a Partnership with Parents and Carers

Adapted from a blog by Aaron Bradbury



LOVE IS LOVE



Originally published on Aaron Bradbury's website (www.earlyyearsreviews.co.uk) in February 2020 as part of a series of blogs celebrating the LGBT History month 2020.

In this article I am focusing on parents and carers. Starting with this approach starts with a concept of strength. Enabling a meaningful partnership between yourself as the professional and the family starts with attitudes and practices that focus on the family's strengths. It is important that all families, including those with members who identify as LGBT, have similarities and differences. Like all parents and carers, those who identify as LGBT have their own goals, dreams and concerns about their child and more importantly their family.

It is important to get to know your parents and carers who identify as LGBT because recognition of their uniqueness is important. We need to ask the same questions you ask other families, but you could also include some which are specific to their family, such as:

- "What names does your child call you?" (for example, papa or mama)
- "How would you like us to refer to you when we speak to your child?"
- "How would you like us to describe your family to others, children and families etc?"
- "How would you like me to respond to questions about your family?"

Even though these questions are quite open, it is important that we understand that parents and carers who identify as LGBT will have their own individual preferences about the openness of their family. It is important to recognise that some parents and carers may be quite private. Some parents who identify as LGBT may not feel safe or be comfortable with sharing details about their home life or family relationships.

Some parents who identify as LGBT may be "out" in one aspect of their lives but not in others. (The phrase "being out" means a person has openly shared that they self-identify as LGBT.) For example, someone who is "out" to friends and family may not be "out" at work. This means they may not be comfortable with your sharing that they identify as LGBT with others without their permission. When and how to come out is a personal decision and is different for everyone.

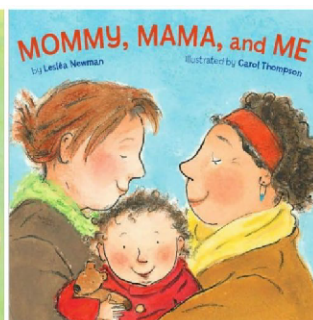
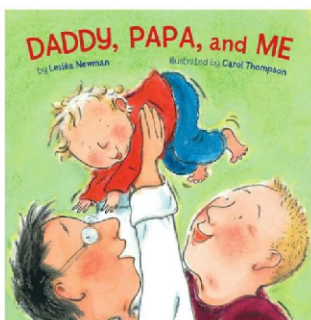
Create a welcoming environment for parents/carers who identify as LGBT

Within your setting, it is important to make every effort to engage with specific opportunities to make your environment welcoming and nurturing for members of the LGBT community.

These examples are a good starting place for you to reflect on your setting and how you can make your environment more inclusive:

1. Make your intake forms, and other forms that need filling in by the family reflect language that is welcoming to all kinds of families, for example, changing the spaces that request the names of 'father' or 'mother', instead using 'parent' or 'guardian'.
2. Written Communication – address families with such phrases as 'Dear Parents and Carers' or 'Dear Families'.
3. Make diverse images more visible in your setting for example:

Inclusive Books



Pictures on the wall, marketing brochures

You can share images of all kinds of families, including parents who identify as LGBT



- Put signs or posters on the walls to welcome families and their children. For example, signs could say, “We welcome ALL families and children!” or “ALL families welcome here!” This signals to parents that you are accepting of diversity.



- Personally invite parents who identify as LGBT to participate in programme activities—especially if you sense they seem uncomfortable with wanting to take part.

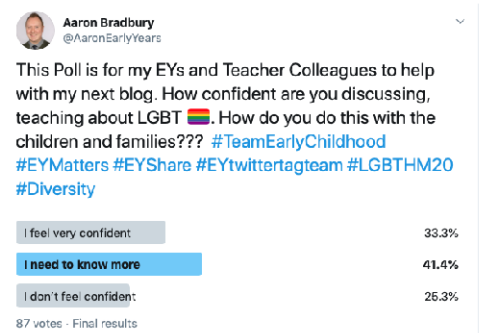
Develop a welcoming environment for all families and children

It is important as a practitioner that we listen for and intervene in hurtful or biased comments from children, whether about a child’s family, skin colour, age, gender, or another personal characteristic. It is important that we teach children to speak up for themselves and speak up for others. It is important that we help children feel proud of themselves and their families.

It is, therefore, important that your setting is a safe space where children, families, parents and carers can come to you if they feel hurt or confused about anyone’s comments. This can include children and other adults.

Continuing your professional development around LGBT and learning further about this.

I did a twitter poll on how comfortable Early Years Professionals felt when it came to teach about Family Diversity and LGBT; here are the results, as you can see, there was a confident approach, but further professional development could be useful.



So here are my 3 points to approach your line manager to ask about learning further about LGBT, the child and the family.

- Provide sensitive and cultural awareness training about topics relevant to working with families from the LGBT community. Ensure that certain topics are included in other diversity training, staff development sessions.
- Train staff about what they can do when colleagues or parents use derogatory language and/or act in a discriminatory manner toward either staff or parents who identify as LGBT. For example, should they speak up in the moment, or wait and talk in private later? Should they talk with a supervisor about it, or speak directly with the staff member or parent who made the remark?
- Budget funds for staff to attend conferences about topics related to working with LGBT-headed families.

Be ready for questions

It is important that as a practitioner you are fully confident to approach any questions that arise. Children are curious, so are many adults too, and want to know about things they see and hear. They may have questions such as, “why does Maria have two mums?” You could say, “She has two moms who love each other and who love and take care of her, just like your grandma takes care of you.”

They might ask, “Where is Isaac’s mum?” (pointing at Isaac’s two dads).” You could say, “Isaac has two dads instead of a mom and a dad. That’s who is in his family. A family can be made up of many different people.” Keep your answers simple and straightforward.

In a group of children, you can invite discussion about different kinds of families and the things that families have in common. Focus on love, relationships, and caregiving. For example, “Let’s talk about who takes care of us at home.”

However, you need to practice addressing discomfort about LGBT in your setting. You need to prepare in advance a response you might want to use if you hear adults saying insensitive things. You could say, “It seems you are uncomfortable with having a family with parents who identify as LGBT in our setting. Our goal is to maintain the dignity and safety of all our children and families.”

The fact here is that you are tackling it. It is important that your manager fosters an environment where you are able to feel comfortable and have the backing of your setting to do this.

Promoting anti-discrimination policies in your Early Years Setting.

Parents or carers may feel more vulnerable in ways that other families may not because of past or current experiences in their own families and communities. While being LGBT may be more visible and accepted in some communities, bias and prejudice still exists.

This can have huge implications; some LGBT parents and carers may withhold information due to fears of discrimination or rejection (especially their child) or fear that their confidentiality will be breached by staff members.

Ask yourself -

- How accepting is my community of LGBT families?
- How can I address diversity in my mission statements to include sexual orientation and gender identity?

Share your settings confidentiality policy with all families and reiterate to them that it exists when they feel conversations may arise. It is important that staff members also feel free to question, value diversity, discuss values, examine bias and evaluate their attitudes.

You can expand your setting's approach to diversity training and coaching to include opportunities for reflection and recognising individual biases, values and beliefs.

- Support staff in engaging with all families in a respectful and appropriate way
- Provide opportunities for staff to reflect as individuals, address concerns and questions with supervisors, and share ideas and strategies with peers. This could be done during individual supervision
- Encourage staff growth by creating a shared agreement about how to discuss challenging topics as a group in a safe and respectful way
- Create a balance of appropriate training and coaching opportunities to ensure staff have the skills to contribute to an LGBT-welcoming programme environment, and to work directly with parents who identify as LGBT
- Help staff develop skills to handle and be comfortable with experiences that can lead to professional growth.

Explore your own beliefs and practices.

We all have biases, though we may not always want to admit it. Explore your own feelings separately, and when you're ready, talk with a supervisor or a trusted colleague. Remember that you have the opportunity to join with each family and become their partner in their child's and family's development.



Aaron is a Principal Lecturer in Early Childhood at Nottingham Trent University with a specialism in Early Help, Child Development and Child Protection.

Aaron has been working in the Early Years / Childhood sector since graduating he has been heavily involved in the Early Years and has worked in this sector for the majority of his career; he has also taught Early Years and Care in Further Education.

His current roles cover many areas within the Early Childhood Arena including being a member of the Executive Committee of the ECSDN (Early Childhood Studies Degree Network), and he has recently become the joint Co-Founder and Co-Chair of The Early Years Academy which allows Early Years professionals to gain professional Recognition through Fellowship Awards.

Aaron is an active member of the Early Years community and positions his work within practice, still working closely with the PVI and Maintained sector, providing an online platform for practitioners and all Early Years professionals via his app and website, Early Years Reviews by Aaron which includes a blog which is well situated in the workforce, with many researchers and practitioners discussing contemporary topics.



Where can I get

Real Families Rock Poster



www.outforourchildren.org.uk/resources

Our Welcome Posters



Available free to download from our website

A Brief Guide to Navigating Pronouns

by Eris Varga

What are pronouns?

Pronouns replace the noun in a sentence to refer to someone without using their name, for example, *he/him/his* or *she/her/hers*. Some languages have more pronouns than others which might change depending on case, gender, or even the relationship between speakers.

Why is it important to learn someone's preferred pronouns?

We all like to be referred to in a way that makes us feel respected. You can't always know what someone's pronouns are by looking at them, and correctly using someone's pronouns is one of the most basic ways to show your respect for their gender identity. Being misgendered can make someone feel disrespected, invalidated, dismissed, alienated, and/or dysphoric.

What is a gender-neutral or gender-inclusive pronoun?

'Gender-neutral' or 'gender-inclusive' pronouns are pronouns which aren't associated with a particular gender, often used by non-binary people. 'Non-binary' is an umbrella term for people who don't fit comfortably into 'male' or 'female' categories. However, someone can use the traditional 'he' or 'she' and still be non-binary, as pronouns are not always indicative of someone's gender identity. A common gender-inclusive pronoun is 'they' (they/them/theirs). We're used to seeing 'they' in its plural form, but, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, the singular pronoun 'they' has been used since 1375. Denis Baron's 'Grammar and Gender' also states that: "In 1789, William H. Marshall records the existence of a dialectal English epicene pronoun, singular *ou*: 'Ou will' expresses either he will, she will, or it will." Marshall also traced the epicene pronoun 'a' back to middle English – so gender-inclusive pronouns are nothing new.

There are other examples of more modern pronouns, known as neo-pronouns. Neo-pronouns can include:

- Ne (ne/nem/nir)
- Ze (ze/zem/zir or ze/hir/hir)
- Ae (ae/aer/aer)
- Per (Per/per/pers)
- Ve (ve/vis/vir)
- Xe (xe/xem/xyr)
- Fae (fae/faer/faer)
- A set of pronouns known as 'spivak' (ey, em, eir).

There are many more examples of neo-pronouns, so it's important to listen to which pronouns a person uses.

How can I be an ally to someone who uses gender-neutral or neo-pronouns?

There are several ways to be an ally to people who use different pronouns to you. A good start is to take note of any gendered language you might use and make it more inclusive. For example, instead of referring to a group as 'ladies' or 'gents', you could use 'folks' to include everyone. If you don't know a person's gender, you could use 'they' to refer to them until you learn their preferred pronouns. Do not do this if you have learnt they use different pronouns to they/them, as this is still misgendering. If someone you know has come out to you as non-binary, you could check if they're happy to provide an example of their pronouns so you can understand how to use them.

Here are some example questions to find out how to use someone's pronouns:

- I saw you added your pronouns to your email signature as 'they/them'. Would you like me to start using those from now?
- I noticed you said your preferred pronoun is 'X-e' on your social media profile – could you tell me how to pronounce it?
- I heard you say you use 'Fae' please could you use your pronouns in a sentence so I can make sure I'm using them correctly?

You might even want to include your own pronouns on your email signature and social media bios, or share them when you introduce yourself. This lets a non-binary or gender non-conforming person that you're a safe space for them to be themselves around.

What if I make a mistake?

First of all, don't worry! Making an effort to use someone's preferred pronouns shows that you're trying to be inclusive and make them feel safe. If you accidentally use the wrong pronoun, say sorry and move on. Don't be afraid to ask questions no one expects you to be an encyclopaedia.



Eris was a little girl who is now a grown-up 'Whatever'.

She's worked as a researcher for BBC Bitesize, writing articles and quizzes for a living. In her free time she loved to draw and make stories.

She always dreamed of being a circus performer, an author or illustrator - so far, she's on two out of three.

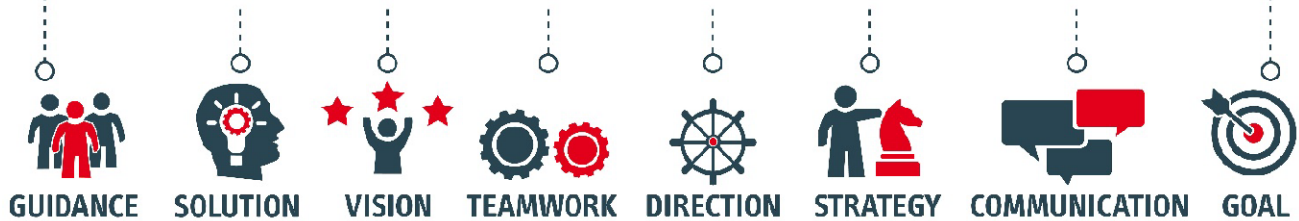
She believes you can be whatever you want to be, and that change starts with education.



Leadership & LGBTQIA+

by Kim Benham and Nazma Meah

LEADERSHIP



Leaders and managers of early years settings are responsible for ensuring that their ethos, vision and values reflect diversity, inclusion and non-bias. Many managers of course say they are 100% inclusive, however LGBTQIA+ can sometimes be overlooked in our practice even if it's in our policy. Policies often contain inclusive recruitment which includes LGBTQIA+ but we must go beyond that to ensure all staff children and parents feel a welcomed and accepted part of our community.

Managers and leaders need to explore their own feelings and prejudice and be confident they can successfully be inclusive. Knowledge supports our role and the best resource is the LGBTQIA community. There are valuable resources available to assist us such as the LGBTQIA+ Early Years website (www.lgbtqearlyyears.org) and Stonewall (www.stonewall.org.uk) and many people in the land of twitter and Facebook. If we're not secure in our role when promoting inclusion and equality then we cannot fulfil our legal requirement in the role to follow Equality Law (2010) and the statutory requirements regarding inclusive practice as stated in the EYFS. The LGBTQIA+ Early Years initiative was set up, to help and guide leaders, managers and practitioners in their role. The steering group is here to help and the group is very diverse to cover every base!

Your diverse setting

Settings may have LGBTQIA+ staff and parents, so it follows that they are bound to have LGBTQIA+ children too. There is no set age at which people are sure of their sexuality or gender identity so we will undoubtedly come across children who are part of the LGBTQIA+ community even if they don't have the language to express it yet. Interestingly, a questionnaire put to the LGBTQIA community went out recently from one of our steering group members. When asked when they found and read the first book where they felt represented, the earliest was 10, however the majority said late teens and some not until in their 50's. There is a wealth of research evidence showing a link between the LGBTQIA+ community and mental health problems, therefore, we need our settings to be spaces where all relationships and gender are introduced in an age appropriate way and accepted.

For some families and staff, religious beliefs can be a barrier to accepting people and they might experience discomfort in dealing with the LGBTQIA+ community. However, it is important to remain non-judgemental and welcome everyone equally into the setting.

Your staff

We must of course follow equality law when recruiting staff, however we must go further and question prospective staff about their feelings towards LGBTQIA+. We might ask questions such as, "What would you do to settle a child" and we can also ask, "What would you do to make a child with two mums/two dads feel welcome?" or "What would you do if a boy was being teased for wearing a dressing up dress?" This isn't necessarily about a perfectly formed answer but to gauge whether or not the candidate can engage positively in conversations regarding LGBTQIA+ identities. Will this candidate promote equality and uphold our ethos and values?

Welcoming everybody through the door and keeping them safe and comfortable in our setting is important. The successful candidate must possess these qualities.

Supervision and staff meetings can give opportunities to explore equality more. As managers it should always be from the stance of equality for all. Even uncomfortable conversations can lead to useful discussions. Prejudice needs to be challenged and resolved respectfully. Staff may not see the need to introduce LGBTQIA+ identities to young children, however, we believe that this is the age where their attitudes to others are beginning, and when LGBTQIA+ children might be forming their gender identity. We need to embrace the influence we can contribute towards acceptance and inclusion. It is therefore imperative that staff attitudes concur with this ethos.



Children and Families

Resources need to reflect all our children and families. As touched on before we will have LGBTQIA+ children in our setting. An inclusive setting will meet the individual needs of the children and families. The earlier we introduce children to all our differences the more they will be inclusive in the wider community. This may be idealistic, however that's our aim, to influence the future generation and implant values of equality and equity. Children tend to be very accepting of other children, and through our inclusive attitudes we can support our children to grow a similar attitude that treats everyone with fairness and respect. Children are very matter of fact and we can have frank discussions suitable to their age and stage of development around the diverse resources we have.

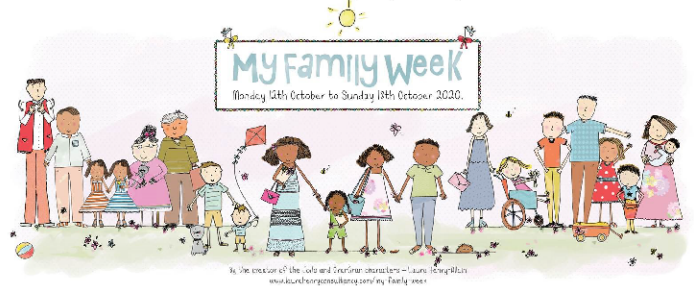
Inclusive initiatives, for example Laura Henry's Family Week can embed good equality practice.

Laura says,

"My Family Week aims to celebrate all families... including children with same-sex parents, those who are fostered, who are young carers, have step families or half brothers and sisters, are bereaved, blended, those who are adopted or who live with grandparents and other family members."
(www.laurahenryconsultancy.com/my-family-week)

Initiatives such as this may help to celebrate diversity of families in our settings.

We are celebrating My Family Week!



Parents

We need to ensure that our LGBTQIA+ parents are comfortable within our setting from the very start. Our settings should have a professional family feel to them where there is mutual respect for everyone. We must ensure our paperwork, from admission forms to newsletters, can be generically used and read by all families, e.g. on admission forms, asking for parent/carer names rather than mother/father and asking parents what the child calls them. Equality is key in all we do and this stands for all families we work with.

Challenging prejudice

Leaders must be strong in challenging those parents who demonstrate prejudice or discriminate against LGBTQIA+ families and accept gender stereotypes. These may be uncomfortable conversations and parents may be concerned about our ethos. We need to be strong in our own values so we can answer any questions that come our way with confidence, knowing that we are backed up by law, the EYFS and not forgetting the LGBTQIA+ Early Years team!

Our role in this is hugely important as we shape attitudes and behaviours of the next generation. We will undoubtedly be the first influence for LGBTQIA+ children, so resources, values and equality must be a part of our setting all the time. Leaders and their leadership play a vital role.

On a parting note, everyone is learning all of the time. If we do not know something, we need to find out and educate ourselves. **As Nelson Mandela claimed, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."**

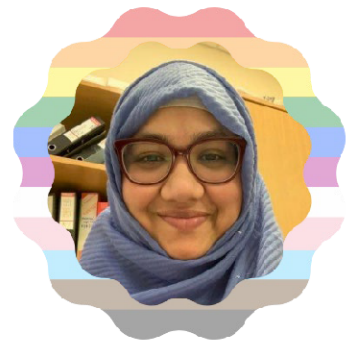


Kim Benham is the renowned and well-respected Senior Manager and Owner of two successful provisions, Sparkles Pre-School and Millies Pre-School in Croydon. She is married with two grown-up children, one of whom, Fifi, works at Millies Pre-School as an Early Years Educator and SENCO. Kim has worked in the Early Years sector for over forty years, originally training as NNEB and later upgrading her qualification to a BA in Early Years, as well as attaining Early Years Professional Status.

Kim divides her time between the two settings, supporting and caring for her staff and the children. She is passionate about inspiring young children and those that work with them to be the best they can be, very much with a focus on wellbeing and mental health. Kim is devoted to creating spaces where the children and families she works with are all included, feel safe and represented.

Nazma Meah is a qualified Early Years Teacher, Manager and Owner of Aston Pre-School, the Director of some other pre-schools alongside working as a Consultant Manager.

Nazma opened her first pre-school in 2010 for the children and their families within her local community and ten years on it is still going strong! She has helped hundreds of families, not just with early education, but also supported families with many issues including domestic violence, immigration, poverty and even with the more mundane tasks such as applying for school places! She is very passionate about the early years and especially about children in deprived areas. She hates the labels, disadvantaged, deprived, FSM, EAL... all the things that have a negative connotation. Working in some of the most deprived areas in the country, Nazma comes across children and families that are in desperate need of someone to support, encourage and not judge them.



Reframing Safe Spaces

by Dr Valerie Daniel



Safe spaces are generally associated with University Campuses and not as an aspect of the workforce in Early Years. In today's climate of pushing back against any action with respect to systemic oppression, the concept of safe spaces is now rife with disinformation.

Disinformation is dangerous! It creates confusion and misunderstanding about important social and political issues. This in turn curtails any progress in regard to systemic oppression. A safe space is not congruent with ideas of no platforming, there is no wish to impede free speech, in fact the concept of a safe space is a protected time and place for open debate without reprisals. Outside of that context if staff display unacceptable, anti-social or discriminatory behaviour as a pattern of behaviour, this will go through the school's disciplinary procedure. We are also, not in the strict sense, seeking to support individuals from historically marginalized groups but rather to open up debate about topics that impact on our ability to form meaningful relationships. A safe space is a place intended to be free of bias, conflict, criticism, or potentially threatening reprisals. A "safe space" is not a physical location. It is a concept to commit to consistently provide a supportive, respectful working and learning environment. The current climate of political correctness vs the boundaries of free speech is further complicated by creeping political constraints of cultural absolutism which espouses that certain principles and values are objectively right or wrong in every context and therefore free from cultural, historical, and social conditions, combined with rising moral relativism which advocates for diversity in moral standards across various populations and cultures is also further complicated by the concept of robust individualism, which values independence, self-reliance and self-fulfilment of individuals over public, social and national interests. As a result, most leaders and educators operate from this intersectional space which is a scary, confusing place to be in a climate that now asserts arbitrary legal reprisals for addressing issues of oppression and inequality in educational environments.

We generally work in environments where people do not feel safe to speak up about their feelings or about anything they perceive as unfair. Yet we know that "how we see the world shapes who we choose to be — and sharing compelling experiences can frame the way we treat each other, for the better. This is a powerful perspective" (Unknown). Leaders of educational establishments know that solid leadership, good communication and access to good resources all contribute to a successful team but essentially what drives this, is productive collaboration by people who understand each other and work well together. We live and work in diverse communities so despite the philosophy of absolutism, we are faced every day with a range of human differences – race, gender, sexual orientation, physical abilities, age, social class, religion, political beliefs, personal backgrounds and ethical value systems. Employees need to feel included and that their values are heard and understood. Leaders are abjectly aware that "early educator work environments are children's learning environments: children depend on educators who are not only skilled, but have their well-being and needs supported, too. Just as children's environments can support or impede their learning, teachers' work environments can promote or hinder teachers' practice and ongoing skill development" (Schlieber and McLean, 2020). To create an environment with genuine, authentic relationships can be a challenge when working with people who have not only culture but values, beliefs and conventions that are distinctly different to each other. Differences that are left to organically evolve may not lead to the kind of productive collaboration that is necessary for a successful learning community.



Heterogeneity creates opportunities to share, learn and grow from others. Certain cultures value robust individualism and competition. Other cultures value community and some value direct authority and privacy. Within this dynamic we also have people whose personalities reflect these preferences and this is before we even consider varying ideologies, childhood circumstances and experiences that influence individual belief systems. Success at managing and maintaining diversity comes about when we see and acknowledge diversity and we create that safe space to accommodate and challenge and grow in understanding together because without it, limitations arise and knowledge is gained in the absence of understanding. This can lead to embedding unconscious bias that starts to impact on how we as educators interact with children who are different to us.

When the concept of a safe space becomes normal practice, of itself it is not remarkable as it forms a part of our core practice but the impact on every child and our learning community is indeed remarkable.

If we use racial difference as an example; there are a number of myths associated with racial difference and these myths have seeped into the fabric of our society and if they have also seeped into our sub-conscious it may impact on the way we interact with children of a different race to us. I know that the level and nature of stereotyping black people for example, in contemporary UK society is deeply embedded into the culture. Boskin and Plous and Williams write specifically about American slavery however, these stereotypes still exist in some form or other in modern UK society. Recent research has shown that white people are still likely to hold these stereotypes as an unconscious bias especially with respect to issues of crime, intelligence, family values, work ethics and welfare. There is a need to understand that political and legislative decisions are still basically controlled by white males and these negative biases often find their way into policy formation. There is an obvious trend in today's society to discriminate against black people and we have to break that down within ourselves through conscious effort. If we extrapolate this example against other areas of oppression within our society we then begin to understand why a safe space for open debate is essential for making the changes that make a difference to our children and families.

In my school we use a variety of activities in establishing our safe space ethos. These are:

- **Anonymous surveys** – the reason why, is that we believe it is more important to know what people feel than who feels that way. This survey data is collated and fed back in its raw state with all the comments and then analysed against our ethos and our philosophy as a setting. It has never failed to have an impact and to change hearts and minds.
- **The string conversation** – this is an exercise to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to speak and share their ideas. They do not have to speak if they don't wish to and in that case they can throw the string to someone else. This exercise also helps to manage the louder and more confident voices and allow the quieter voices a chance to be heard.
- **Fishbowl exercise** – we bring difficult situations to this forum and unpick them through direct challenge. This sort of exercise I would only recommend for a team that has attained a certain level of maturity through a concerted effort to build up relationships and is therefore able to withstand the directness of this exercise.
- **Non-defensive listening exercise** – the aim is to listen to understand, not respond, defend or blame. It helps to reframe what you understand the person as saying and gives them a chance to clarify if you have misunderstood. This exercise is not as easy as it sounds as people have a natural affinity for responding and defending themselves.
- **The Round Table discussion** – we bring areas associated with the equalities legislation to this forum as well as other pertinent changes to legislation that affect us on a personal level within our school. So we can have a gender issues round table discussion, issues of sexual identity (LGBTQIA) – beliefs, community, culture, issues regarding community cohesion, race and unconscious bias. We have dealt with various stereotypes as a round table talk e.g. all Muslims are terrorists, black people are 'the rough kind', white people are not allowed special treatment in their own country, my religion says homosexuality is wrong etc. In some cases we do not come away with a solution but we have a better understanding of where someone is coming from and why they hold these opinions and how they need to manage them in an educational setting. You might balk at hearing some of these opinions being dealt with openly but we are mindful that no-one is highlighted, so round table discussion topics are placed anonymously in a box and pulled out for discussion. What is interesting is that over the years as staff are comfortable with each other, every now and then someone will say "That is my question/comment".
- **The 360 Degree questionnaire** – This is a team exercise where you rate yourself and the team rates you. It is all done anonymously and handed in to the co-ordinator of the activity. The questionnaire can be adapted to whatever situation needs to be dealt with. The data is collated and feedback to individuals so they understand how they perceive themselves and how others perceive them. Team leaders/SLT also fill in a questionnaire, no one is exempt. If there are surprising anomalies, development points or someone is upset, this is addressed using a coaching approach.

A safe space is not a neutral feel-good, Kum-ba-Yah space where we shy away from uncomfortable conversations. It is a space where we deal with our differences head-on and we learn from each other and we develop meaningful relationships. This safe space environment does not insulate us from personality clashes and conflicts, it just gives us an agreed strategy for dealing with these issues and it helps us to become more self-aware, to turn up as our true, authentic selves and to understand how we impact on others and how to manage ourselves to make that impact a positive one. We devise protocols together for our different safe space activities with the main elements being, no one should leave feeling upset, ashamed or angry and if there are residual, nagging feelings then the issue needs to be raised for one to one discussion until we have a compromise, we agree to disagree or we have a clear course of action as next steps. This is about winning hearts and minds to make a difference for all of our futures.

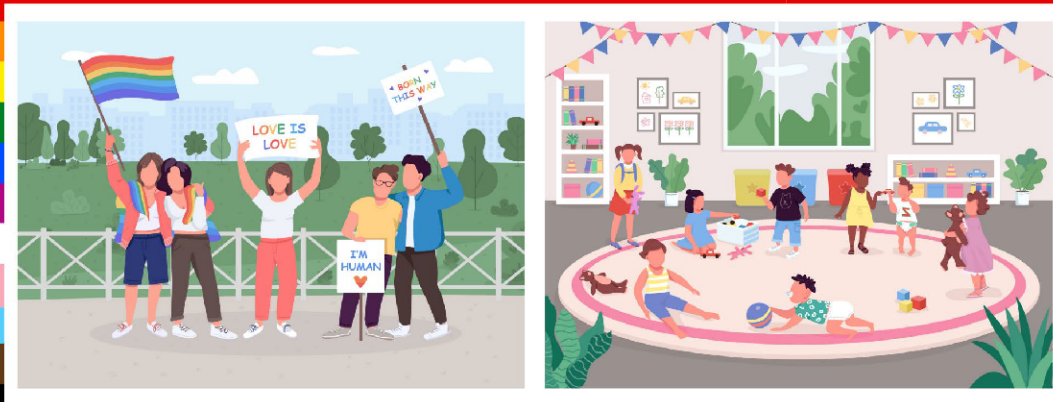


Dr Valerie Daniel is the Head Teacher of Washwood Heath Nursery School in Birmingham and is a qualified Teacher with over 30 years' experience and a school leader for the last 17 years. Her other roles include being a trustee for the Birmingham Nursery Schools Collaboration Trust (BNSCT), a member of Birmingham Schools Forum and the current chair of Birmingham Nursery Heads Forum.

Valerie is a Dr of Education is a trained Systems Leader and Leadership Mentor for other headteachers and leaders in the Early Years Sector.



Case Studies



We felt it was important to reach out to settings and families with the request for them to share their experiences of diversity and inclusion relating to LGBTQIA+ in the Early Years. We have created a special page on our website to record the responses we have received to date and we hope to add to these following the publication of this magazine and our special Early Years LGBTQIA+ Awareness Week (22nd – 28th February 2021).

We would like to extend our thanks to those who have expressed an interest to date and those who have returned their completed questionnaires; we hope that this page will continue to grow as more of you get involved and share with us your own experiences. Please see, below, details of a couple of the Case Studies we have published at the time of going to print, and you can read these, and others by scanning the QR Code at the bottom of the page, which will take you directly to them.

| | | | |
|----------------------|---|-------------------|--------------------|
| Setting Name: | Paintpots Pre-School, Harefield, Southampton | Age Range: | 2 – 4 years |
| Author: | Dawn Hebblethwaite | Role: | Manager |



| | | | |
|----------------------|--|-------------------|------------------------|
| Setting Name: | Sparkles Pre-School & Millies Pre-School, Croydon, Surrey | Age Range: | 2 – 5 years |
| Author: | Kim Benham | Role: | Owner / Manager |



Working with Families:

by Ruby Brooks



How can we work effectively with children and families to promote inclusivity and diversity?

We understand the importance of diversity and inclusion for our children, but how do we promote this in practice? How can settings effectively work with families to ensure diversity and inclusion are considerably recognised? Here are some key pointers to help encourage diversity and inclusion for the families you work with:

- Ensure there are a variety of resources available for children in your setting. There need to be appropriate and accessible books, toys and equipment for children, staff and parents/carers.
- Facilitate the opportunity for conversations on LGBTQIA+ (and diversity related) topics. Is your setting a safe and enabling environment for children, families and staff to approach you and ask questions? How could it be improved? Opening dialogue is essential for good practice and for the promotion of LGBTQIA+ inclusion. What resources are available for families to take home and explore themselves?
- Observe good practice from colleagues and model it yourself.
- Create a sense of belonging. Do the children in your care feel they belong within your setting? How could you encourage a homely and welcoming environment that families and children can be part of? Are there resources that the children can identify with and that reflect their own values and beliefs?
- Empower your staff team to be knowledgeable and open-minded. Do families feel they can approach you if they have questions regarding inclusion and diversity? Do they feel their questions will be received in a non-judgemental and considerate manner? Are you able to facilitate discussion?
- Improve the knowledge base. Staff training, resources and continuous professional development are all effective ways of increasing your collective knowledge and awareness of issues surrounding the inclusion of LGBTQIA+, which will consequently affect your practice and the interactions you have with the families you work with.
- Finally, centre the child. Differentiating and attuning to the children in our care is essential for good practice. Do they feel represented in their setting? How could you improve their representation?

Building on the pointers above you can encourage effective and considerate inclusion and diversity within your practice: whether that is by building stronger relationships with families, facilitating opportunities for conversation, or ensuring your resources are appropriate and inspiring. Working together is the most effective way to encourage the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ into our practice.



Ruby is a PhD student in education and gender studies; specifically looking at femininity in the early childhood sector and the female domination of the workforce. Within her research, Ruby emphasises the importance of practice and the practitioner's voice. She has joined the LGBTQIA+ working group as there is synergy with her own doctoral study and she is eager to be active in promoting inclusion and diversity into practice.

Ruby lectures in Education and Early Years and has a professional background in a variety of early years settings as a practitioner, nanny and forest school leader. She has a Masters in Psychology and Education from The University of Sheffield and is a qualified Level 3 Forest School Leader.



Somewhere Over the Rainbow

by Ruth Sharp



I love working with our youngest children, they teach me so much every time I make the time to slow down, stop, listen and let myself be part of their world. That exciting, complicated, overwhelming, new, honest, matter of fact way their world is.

Those of us who have worked in the sector will have no doubt experienced the brutality of their honesty! One of my favourites was when a child looked at me for a good few minutes with a look of concern on her face. Then she asked: *“Oh dear, you have crack eyes, does it hurt? Can I get you a plaster?”* She was referring to my wrinkles! There was no malice but genuine concern for my wellbeing and she had not experienced wrinkles, at least not close up or maybe not as fabulous as mine! We had a chat about them, got a mirror, pulled faces and found others who had ‘crack eyes’, dimples (dimples) and the next day she brought in a picture of a rhino as she’d noticed his wrinkles too. She went on to explore this for some time and learnt the word creases which led to contours and eventually how things move – hinges, spinners, cogs etc. You don’t plan this but you do support it, facilitate through communicating and modelling language, showing, explaining, demonstrating, exploring ideas, encouraging, questioning, recalling, providing a narrative for what they are doing, facilitating and setting challenges both in planned and child initiated play (see Ofsted’s definition of teaching 2016).

As an EYs practitioner this seems perfectly logical, giving children what they need to learn, grow and develop. Best practice demonstrates effective pedagogy to enable this through a balance of adult directed, adult supported, independent and child initiated teaching and learning. I think we tend to find this easier with some areas than others. Personal Social and Emotional Development is one of the Prime areas of our curriculum and a fundamental building block for learning and development. When reflecting on teaching equality, diversity and acceptance I have found it beneficial – sometimes challenging – to reflect on my own thoughts, feelings and experiences. I feel very fortunate to have got to work and continue to work and share experiences with some amazing people from diverse cultures, religions, sexualities and nationalities. It’s been a privilege to get to know them, share in their stories and experiences, which in turn broadens my own. Most of these people have been kind and generous and modelled acceptance, inclusion and acceptance through their actions in their work and everyday life. Others have not, and I have learnt from them also as is often the case.



So where is the link to LGBTQIA+ For me, I think we can learn a lot from the young children we work with in the EYs. They often show us inclusion, acceptance and celebrate diversity. In the EYs I think supporting LGBTQIA+ children, families and staff is in the PSED of our framework. The sense of belonging, feeling connected, positive attachments, feeling safe and loved. I understand this as a need for our children to thrive. But don’t we need that throughout our lives as adults? To feel secure, a sense of belonging, love and kindness?

For me a lot of the terminology is new and I’m still learning and get tripped up, but I apply the same principle as I have done when I work with children and families with SEND. I always ask which labels (or not) and terminology they feel comfortable with using, respecting that everyone is different. I found initially

I was insecure and scared of offending or ‘getting it wrong’. But like with most things in life ignorance can affect our behaviour. Asking questions, reading, talking and communicating will always help our understanding and is a starting point to connect, listen and respond.

One of the principles of the EYFS is the 'Unique Child', to truly embody this I need to ensure this applies to the adults too. I still have lots to learn and I am grateful to Aaron Bradbury-Coffey for reaching out, connecting and creating the EYs LGBTQIA+ group. It is a safe place to ask questions, listen, learn, connect and grow. My dad always told me; "There are two things in life you have control of Ruth, what you do and what you say. Just concentrate on giving the best of yourself and there you will make the difference." I have found this so valuable, allowing me to remember I'm a role model and it matters!

My amazing, chaotic and fabulous daughter also continues to teach, challenge and love me daily. I feel that responsibility, as her mum, to learn and grow with her. She celebrates difference and diversity intrinsically, to her we are all unique and that's exciting not threatening. Thinking of homes and the richness of the different homes we all come from, the people who make up our family, who we love, where we belong. There really is no place like home – in both the positive and negative sense. Our EYs provision or school can often be an extension of home for our children. I feel it is important for all our children and families to feel that sense of belonging, love and acceptance, for some it can be incredibly essential and for all it is a building block of humanKINDness!



Ruth currently leads the States Early Years Team in the Bailiwick of Guernsey, and in her words 'It is an exciting sector to be part of here in the Bailiwick, working with a passionate and committed workforce.'

She has experience of working for local charities for children and adults with disabilities, in North Yorkshire and in New York, writing and developing community based programmes and in the role of a support worker. She has experience teaching in Nursery and Primary phases and in FE, with lead responsibilities in EYFS and SEND including some area SENDCo responsibilities and have been part of SLTs in schools. She is a trained and accredited EYFS Moderator and has been writing and delivering training across the sector for over 10 years.



Ruth believes Education is part of a wider jigsaw piece within child development and it is vital we recognise this as we develop policy and, in our teaching, and learning. In her privileged role of leading the States Early Years team, she believes in the strength of working in partnership to achieve the best outcomes for our children. *'Within Early Childhood Education we don't see children as empty vessels to fill up with facts and data, but unique creative learners who need our support and guidance (teaching) to give them opportunities to be actively involved in meaningful experiences. Learning happens best in context and PLAY is how we learn! Our role is to support and enable this, meeting children where they are and enabling them to put down the strongest foundations on which to build their life chances.'*



Some recommended books ...



Interest Age: 0 – 3

This book is full of warm colours and down to earth glimpses of family life, this book supports the way babies naturally learn language and with over 100 words to learn including the modern 'phone' and 'laptop' as well as the more traditional 'shoes' and 'spoon'.

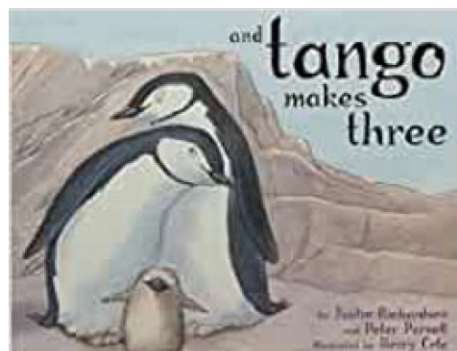
However, where the book really shines is its inclusive references to the different kinds of families that children really have; the parents shown are same-sex, of mixed ethnicity and a stay-at-home Dad who is quite happy to Hoover.

Interest Age: 3+
Reading Age: 5+

The story of a New York zookeeper who notices that two of his male penguins are particularly close and building a nest together.

The zookeeper knows that penguins struggle to raise many chicks, and when an egg becomes 'spare', he gives it to the two male penguins, Roy and Silo, to care for. The two daddies do this with such loving care, that the egg incubates, and hatches and the baby penguin is named Tango.

The fact that this is a true story and has since happened in other zoo's around the world, just adds to the delightfulness.



their feelings hidden. Another particular memory was a friend explaining how they were estranged from their family because they were gay, and the pain they lived with as their parents would prefer them to be dead rather than 'unnatural'; at the time I felt horror and sadness, but had not really understood the devastation that hearing these words had inflicted.

It is then, when your eyes and ears are opened, you start to see it all around you a little like when you are expecting a child, all of a sudden the world seems filled with pregnant women, little babies, small children, prams etc. They were always there, but you just didn't notice them as they were not part of your world. This is how I now feel about the very real prejudice and oppression that exists, it had always been there, I was just not open to it and others' experiences, I had not allowed it to be part of my life, so had never truly embraced the impact on others.

I can really only write about this on a personal level as to be honest, I am still at the start of what is proving to be an often emotional journey as I read more, listen properly and research into the real meaning of prejudice and oppression and the effect this has for the many diverse individuals that make up the rich fabric of our society.



And why am I writing this now?

I have long held the belief that the privilege of being involved in the Early Years / Early Childhood sector is the fact that we are in a position of influence over the most formative years of any person's life; this being the case, then we can make a real difference to these children, teaching them to fully embrace and celebrate the diversity of others whether this is due to race, religion, family structures or just simply who other people are and help them to take this forward as they grow. And for the child, whom as they grow is attracted to others of the same sex or feel they are in the wrong body to not feel any shame on being who they are. To be able to be proud of the person they are. It is not just about accepting but really opening up, so we have full inclusion.

My wish is that any of these children we are looking after will then not reach the age of 50, without having a real understanding of everyone in our society and not judge others by who they love, how they feel, their family structure, their race or their religion. There are many different ways that we can support this, and I will not just be looking to do the administration for the Early Years LGBTQIA+ group, but to learn and grow with the hope that we can influence an inclusive society and be part of the eradication of prejudice and oppression so that all can say that these have never affected them, but for very different reasons that I thought this for many years.



Juliette, known as Juls, is an experienced Virtual PA/Admin working under the banner of Virtual Support UK Ltd. who specialises in working in the Early Years sector quite simply because of her love for it and also her admiration for the professionals who work with and care for children, in what she believes to be the most important area of education, being a child's most formative years. Juls is the founder of EY Matters which she describes as her heart where she provides support to the Early Childhood sector where she can

More recently she has become the joint Co-Founder and Chair of The Early Years Academy with Aaron Bradbury and is looking forward to the formal launch early in 2021 to further support and raise the profile of the Early Childhood workforce.



My Story

by Sharifah Lee



“Mum, dad, can you come upstairs? I have something really important to tell you” said my 16-year-old looking anxious. What would be your immediate thoughts be if your child asked you this? Well these things raced through my mind: Was she Pregnant? Drugs? Failed exams? Money laundering? What?!?!?!...

As Dave and I sat down in our bedroom on the bed, she stood over us and said, “Ummmmm... I like girls... I’m gay.” Before we carry on with what should, in this day and age, be an appropriate response, let’s go back a few years...

I dreamt of having a large family. Anyone who grew up watching the American drama series *The Waltons* would know what I mean as at the end of each episode, when the lights dimmed during the credits, each member of the seven-sibling family would shout good night to each other – aww bliss! How magical! How difficult could motherhood be?

Roll on to 1996 and my daughter was born. I helped to create the most precious and wonderful human being who was the centre of our lives. Number two and three came along, each 18-20 months apart and besides what I believe is the normal upheaval of having a young family, life was good. We had fun, disasters, accidents but through it all was a lot of love. I forgot to add that I was brought up a Muslim from quite a conservative family where faith is concerned. I also grew up in conservative Singapore. I married a white British man, to the consternation of my family, but he was accepted when he converted to Islam. This is quite an important point to make and all will be revealed further along the story.

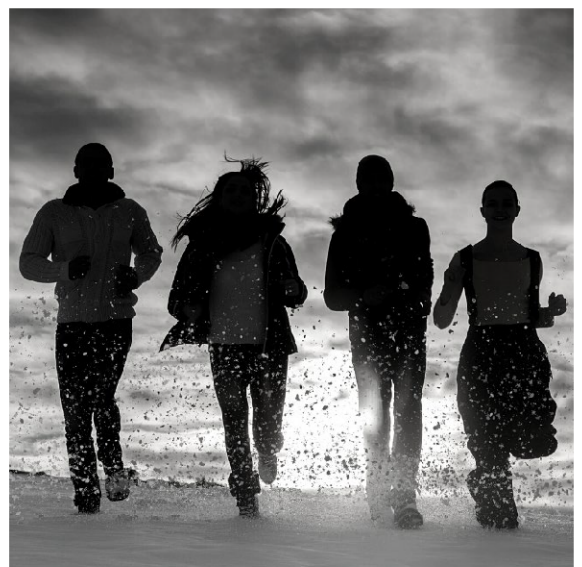
Back to motherhood and I am now on my way to become ‘Mrs Walton’ (my dream), being pregnant with number 4 only 18 months later again. This time, though, I was anxious and worried about this pregnancy as I questioned my run of luck. What if this one was less than perfect? What if they had a serious disability or worse, a stillbirth? It was irrational and silly I know but I could not help it. I finally felt brave enough to raise my concerns with my midwife (my husband never knew) who reassured me that these feelings were natural because I had such ‘normal’ pregnancies and births before. I do not think there is such a thing as a normal birth – easy maybe, very hard – probably, but each one is so unique to you. By the way, I think I forgot how unique each one was as my body recovered and my brain forgot the trauma of each experience.

We were a relatively happy family with all the dramas that having 4 children under the age of 5 would bring. It was mad, chaotic, and crazy busy but I loved it! Again, I think I remember these times through rose-tinted glasses as my husband and children recall certain events very differently to me. My four grew up loved, nurtured, privileged, educated and had a ‘stay at home mum’ who looked out for their every need as we couldn’t afford for both of us to work and pay for childcare too. It was easier and simpler for me to stay at home; apart from the few times (quite a few times) where I threatened to go on strike or leave – oh I could be stropky!

So, Ayesha (now 24) was vocal, intelligent, passionate and grew up feeling her entitlement as the eldest of 4. Adam (now 22) was quiet, philosophical, mature, and very deep with his thoughts. Hannah (nearly 21) was dramatic, extremely sensitive, the middle child who was always trying to fit in. Danyal (19) LOUD, energetic, loved, babied and who provide the comic element in our busy lives. I could tell a story every day for each day for each one of them and perhaps someday I will but today is about Ayesha Elizabeth Lee, so beautiful that Stevie Wonder wrote a song about her. “Isn’t she lovely? Isn’t she wonderful? Life is Aisha, the meaning of her name.”

When everything changed!

Back to Ayesha who revealed her ‘news’ on that warm summer night. Was I shocked? YES! Did I not know or guess? Absolutely not! My husband was instantly pragmatic and reached out to her immediately reassuring her and saying how brave she was to let us know. And me? What did I do? I stood up (a bit too quickly), crossed my arms and said, “.....” Nothing. I said nothing. Can I please say that I look back with shame at my reaction to the news? “What the %\$# was she thinking?” I can hear you say. “Her daughter is being honest, brave and true to



herself.” I wouldn’t say I rejected the news, but I also found it extremely difficult to accept the news. Remember, I was raised by conservative Muslims. My daughter will be damned or at least my family would believe that. What would my mum say, what would people say when they found out? This went on and on ...I tried not to make it obvious, so I just did not talk about it. Kept it in, hid it. If I left it long enough, she would come round, find a man and we will live happy ever after.

Of course, that did not happen. Ayesha went to school every day and confided in friends and talked to teachers about her sexual identity. She talked to my husband and her brothers and sister – all who believed in her. Can I please make it clear that I did not reject Ayesha? That was no open confrontation or drama. There were, however, quite a few pursed lips and face pulling (not by her...by me). Roll forward a few months, and I sat on a garden bench with a good friend and my first teaching mentor, a wise old owl Scottish owl called Alison.

Alison mentioned her daughter Layla becoming successful in her job at Network Rail as a regional manager and was now setting up home with her partner Rachel. Huh? What? Rachel? A woman? Alison talked about her anxieties and worries when Layla came out and as I listened to mother owl, I could hear my own anxieties and hang ups and I opened for the first time. Alison held my hand as I travelled through the bends and dead ends of my map. Of my fears and hopes, of being terrified that my daughter will be rejected by God and my family, my own personal understanding of faith.

At the end of that very long and winding road (bless Alison, she was so patient), I felt exposed, better, worse, brave(r) and I could finally see how I had let my beautiful daughter down. She needed me to be her champion. I had forgotten the promises I made the day she was born of my unconditional love, my superpowers to protect her and build a better world for her. I had failed and now I need to step up, step in and be the mother she needed – her protector, her nourishment, her love. I opened up my mind, and realised that tradition, culture and values (even faith) were things you could choose, and you could build. I (just like my children) have choices and I choose my daughter and every daughter who are true to themselves, who stand up for themselves and emerge as leaders in their own right. Over a long period of time, I lost my faith in religion and gained my faith in human kindness, compassion, and diverse lives and lived experiences.

When I changed

I am so proud of my daughter, her life, her bravery and in this very short piece of writing that can never hope to convey every ounce of my thoughts and feelings, I ask her to forgive this mother who should have done better at the time she was needed most.

I suppose it is only right that I tell you that Ayesha is one of the best and most compassionate human beings I know in this world. She now lives with her partner Rachel and they both tirelessly work to make our world a better place for everyone. And so, do I.



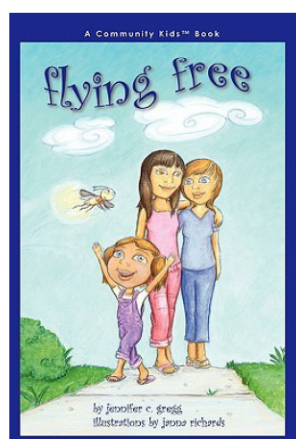
A Deputy Headteacher who is aspiring to Headship, Sharifah Firza Jelany-Lee (Sharifah Lee) is currently completing her NPQH qualification with the second ever women-only cohort organised by Ambition Institute and WomenEd.

Sharifah is passionate about education and eradicating social inequity and discrimination at all levels in society. She has been awarded with a Fellowship at the Chartered College of Teaching for her work in education and now works closely with WomenEd in empowering women to leadership.

Sharifah sees her role in education as educating not only children, but families and society as a whole. She is a firm believer that education is a powerful driver for change, but the change must be in the right direction and, as a direct consequence of Black Lives Matter, change must start to happen now.



Another recommended book ...



Interest Age: 2+
Reading Age: 5+

A picture book for children of LGBT and diverse families. Flying Free is narrated by a firefly captured by a five-year-old girl named Violet. Violet plans to use the firefly as her very own nightlight. Her mummies go along with the idea, but the firefly refuses to live in a glass jar. After several attempts, the firefly devises the ultimate escape plan. . .what will her fate be?

“This book is absolutely beautiful. The illustrations are colourful and bright. I love that the focus is on the firefly, not the same-sex parents, therefore it is just like books that represent heterosexual parents, and not over emphasizing on the two mums. The way it is written is beautiful and the colour analogy of red and blue make violet is great.”

“Finally, a sweet story with a beautiful family. We absolutely loved this story. Our daughter has renamed the parents, so when we read the story we have to replace the little girl’s moms’ names with ours.”

Getting Started: Representation in Early Years

by Maggie Smith (Pseudonym)



This quick guide is designed to be used by room-based practitioners and may be used in conjunction with the Checklist to Reflect on Your Early Years Setting Outcomes for Diversity and LGBT Families by Aaron Bradbury available on the LGBTQIA+ Early Years website (QR Code below).



What is Representation and why is it important?

The Quick Answer:

Representation is how people of diverse backgrounds are presented in our settings and the stories and subtext that are implicit in the way they are showcased. Representation links to wellbeing and a sense of belonging because if you are markedly and visibly different from those around you, you may feel ostracised. In fact, according to a 2018 Government report bullying of children from LGBTQ families or those who are LGBTQ+ themselves continues in schools. It is part of our duty in providing an enabling and safe environment, to make sure all children feel safe and a sense of ownership and belonging over the spaces they share with us within our settings. Even if we do not think any LGBTQ+ families exist in our settings, it is still part of our duty in helping to create a better world for all our children to dismantle discrimination and bigotry by normalising the existence of LGBTQ+ people as well as people of every other minority, disability or diverse group. This may not end systemic discrimination but if society changes eventually institutions and laws will bow to the pressure to be fair.

Please note True Representation is continuous, it is not the tick box exercise of, "Oh we have Handa's Surprise or And Tango Makes Three somewhere in the building". Or "It's Diwali so we will ensure we make Rangoli patterns or diyas and post them on social media to show how we value diversity". These are examples of tokenism and virtue signalling and are meaningless.

The Practical Guide

Step 1 Who do you currently represent?

In a staff meeting, discuss this scenario and then think about and reflect upon any implications over the following week: Imagine aliens land in your classroom when the setting is closed. They are 3-foot-tall and cannot read any human language. Everything they can learn about earth comes from what they can see. Who do they think lives on this planet based on your classroom?

The latest CLPE Reflecting Realities Report (2020) found that characters from minority ethnic backgrounds remain significantly under-represented in books in our settings, so it would not be surprising if the aliens thought a large percentage of our population were animals who can talk and walk and generally act like humans!

Step 2: Quick, cheap (COVID-19 secure) ways of bringing your community in

The fastest and easiest way you can reflect your nursery community is to create books telling each child's family story, asking families to donate family pictures. Children love to see stories of themselves and these books can act in a similar way to chatterboxes, helping to develop their communication and language skills. They can also add meaningful text to your environment. Children will spend hours pouring over their own or their friends' books, and will get snap shots into the wider community.

A second use of these photos would be to use them in displays or collages at children's eye level. Perhaps in a home corner where you can also ask parents to donate empty food packaging. I know that my cupboards contain many jars and bottles with labels in languages that are not English, and you can never quite get the smell of spices out of a cardboard packet. This could promote discussions on different foods.

You could also make puzzles from laminated pictures that reflect the breadth of human society. Print and laminate photos, then cut them up to make puzzles. The puzzles can provide talking points and you could also write your own picture book designed for your audience. If you need help or ideas I would suggest using a twitter hashtag such as #LGBTQEarlyYears or #TeamEarlyChildhood #TVTtagteam and #EYMatters and reaching out for help the twitterverse is filled with people who are willing to help.

Step 3 Continue to review your practice

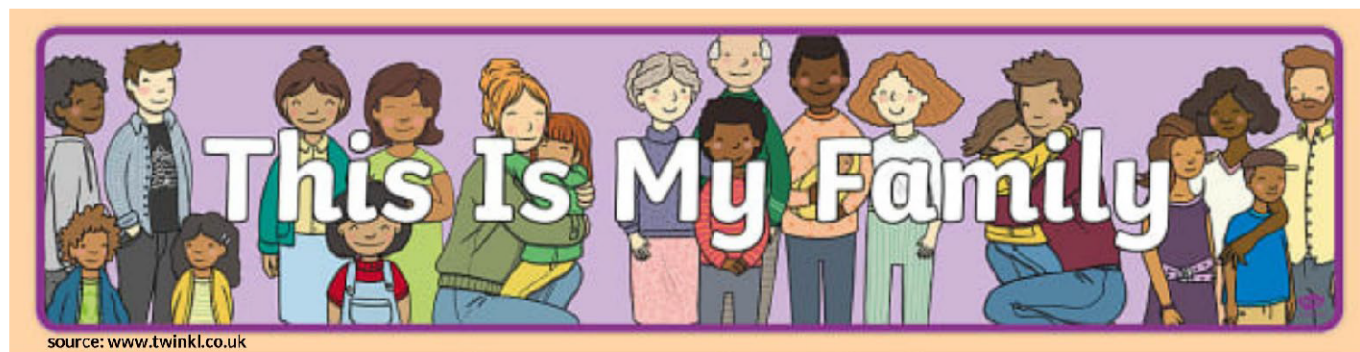
Most of us have unconscious biases and this is normal but it can help to identify where our biases are influencing our practice in the classroom. Questions to ask yourself and your staff as a reflective practitioner include:

- 1) Do you choose which resources to put out based on the gender of the children or based on what you know about these individual's likes and interests? Why are you choosing these?
- 2) Do you assume certain toys will appeal to certain genders?
- 3) Are you giving children sexual orientation labels? For example, calling a boy a 'ladies man' or saying a child has lots of 'girlfriends' or suggesting that a girl who chases the boys will 'be trouble when she's older...' and my absolute pet peeve, "Oh my little gay boy - he loves princesses/dressing up." There should not be any sexual or romantic element involved, they are children and playing with their friends!
- 4) Do you 'correct' children who identify with the gender other than the one they have been assigned at birth?
- 5) Do you allow and encourage children who are acting out well known stories to swap genders and roles? For example, is there any real reason a girl can't be a Shepherd in the nativity? Or a boy can't be Red Riding Hood or Goldilocks?

Step 4 when COVID-19 is over

Once we are allowed to have visitors in settings again invite members of the wider community to come in and read to the children or share an aspect of their traditions all year around. So instead of only acknowledging minorities in at Yom Kippur, Black history month, Pride month, Ramadan, Diwali. Welcome people of all types (ideally with a DBS) into the setting to tell the children a story or bring something in to show and tell. Introduce them to people who are differently-abled, women in traditionally male jobs, trans folk, people with different accents, people of all colours and walks of life.

Give your children the world, normalise all people and hopefully this will be a big step towards making the world a better, safer, love-filled place.



Maggie Smith is a pseudonym being used because this person is worried about repercussions to family members who continue to live in part of the world where being (and more importantly promoting positively) anything other than cisgender heteronormativity is illegal and potentially punishable by death.

S/he is a mixed race, asexual person who is a passionate advocate of life long learning and curiosity. For a period of time during their past Maggie dodged tear gas and rubber bullets to fight for freedom, justice, equality for all. Maggie fundamentally believes that all injustice and oppression are linked and the only true "weapon for peace is education" (Montessori) and that world "peace starts in the changing table" (Pikler).

Maggie is currently based in the North of England and has worked in early years for nearly a decade working with children aged 15 months to five years old. Maggie believes that only by striving to be a better person everyday and modelling this continuously to young children will the world become a better, fairer place.



An Inclusive Environment

by Claire Francis



Firstly, what is inclusion?

The aim of inclusion is to promote equal access to opportunities, embrace all and remove discrimination and barriers which prevent this right from occurring. Throughout history, people have faced exclusion for several reasons, and despite societal laws and policies in place today supporting inclusive and equality for all, it still exists. For Early Years, this is about ensuring everyone, children, parents, families and staff are all welcomed and have a sense of belonging.

Regardless of race, sexuality, religion, disability or other factors, it can be argued that inclusion is a need and a right; this article focuses on the LGBTQIA+ community and gender equality, however the ideas and reflective questions can be transferable to other potential barriers in your setting.

The Inclusive Environment

When asking whether a setting has an inclusive environment, often the first thoughts turn to resources. Resources can be a great way to share and promote positive imagery and prompt conversation. Children learn from the things they see and their environmental experiences so choosing appropriate resources can make a positive difference. We need to include books, posters, puzzles etc. depicting various family structures and challenging gender stereotypes. They must reflect society today, promote positive attitudes and a normalised viewpoint of the families that they, their friends or extended families may have. It is important that these resources are purposeful, not just tokenistic for fulfilling a set of tick boxes.

Research has shown that very young children are aware of gender with the consensus view that gendered play becomes evident during these first years of a child's life. It is during this critical period of a child's development that stereotypes, bias and prejudice are learned and then, acted upon. An inclusive environment will allow children the freedom to explore their own preferences and interests without bias or stereotyping. Meaningful resources coupled with early years workers who show genuine interest in the children's play choices helps validate their feelings and themselves as a person.

The staff are often forgotten when thinking about the setting's environment. The early years workforce is one of the most important aspects of the environment, therefore it is crucial they understand, reflect and challenge their own practice. Practitioners can play a crucial part in tackling and breaking stereotypical behaviours and attitudes.

By promoting and reinforcing the values and importance of inclusion during the early years, an inclusive setting will help shape and develop positive and fairer life chances in the future.

Getting Started

A good place to start is an open discussion as a team to collectively put down and share together everyone's thoughts and feelings around inclusion, what it means and why it is important. Understanding 'why' you are doing something supports the achievement of the desired outcomes.

Points for Reflection:

- Remember an inclusive environment is welcoming to all, not just the children.
- Do you have a biased approach? It can be extremely challenging to critically reflect on your own views, opinions or actions which may well be acted upon subconsciously.
- Partnerships with parents, families, the community and other agencies are an asset in supporting the environment.
- Audit your resources. Examine what already challenges stereotypes and represents the LGBTQIA+ community, and what could be changed, added or removed. Refer to our website (QR Code below) for a list of recommended stockists and suppliers of LGBTQIA+ resources suitable for early years settings.





Claire is an experienced Early Years Practitioner working at a preschool in Wiltshire, in the town she grew up. She has worked in early years for 10 years, and previously before that spent several years at an after school and holiday club with children aged between 5-15.

In July 2020, Claire completed her foundation degree in early years and will now be studying towards her BA(hons). Claire has begun branching out from her comfort zone to participate in new projects and widen her horizons and connections within the Early Years sector, particularly focusing on inclusion and diversity.

In December 2012 Claire was diagnosed with cancer and received treatment in 2013. Following this in 2014, despite the long term health effects of her treatment, Claire took part and completed Ride the Night, a 100km cycle ride across London to raise money for women's cancers. In that same year she met her partner with whom she currently resides along with their children, dogs and a dragon.

**Read Claire's other article on our website: 'Who Am I?'
(scan the QR Code below)**



Further reading from our website:



'Boys and girls come out to play' by Tamsin Grimmer



'LGBTQ+ A short history in my settings' by Kim Benham



'Allyship' by James Butler



'Celebrating difference and promoting equity' by Fifi Benham

Unpicking Unconscious Bias

by Tamsin Grimmer



You may have watched a video called [Life of Privilege explained in \\$100](#) race which clearly outlines how some of us are implicitly more privileged than others just because of when or where we were born, our home circumstances and the colour of our skin. Some of us have a head start in life. I was reflecting about this and relating it to unconscious bias and how this has a significant impact on people's lives and our work with children without us really knowing which can lead to prejudice.

Let me explain. Everyday our brains are adding to our picture of the world by our experiences and knowledge that we acquire and, in order to make sense of this information, we unconsciously create mental structures which help to order our thinking. These are generalisations about the world and what it is like. These pictures tend to be very flexible as new learning often requires us to adjust our thinking to account for new information.

When we are little, we use these frameworks to recognise and organise our thinking, for example, we may learn the 'dog-ness of dogs': dogs have 4 legs, a waggy tail and bark. This is a bit like a stereotype of a dog which helps us in our youngest years differentiate dogs from cats... These frameworks are very helpful and our brains continue to do this throughout our lives, however, they can be problematic when they become rigid and we are unable to stray from this thinking. This is when we can become prejudiced and discrimination can occur. For example, we might have a stereotype that helps us to recognise boys and girls. Our brains may sort out children we meet into the binary 'boy/girl' categories and then one day we meet a child who doesn't easily fit into either. Our thinking needs to be flexible enough to cope with this and to accept that this child may not easily fit into our original thinking. If we then make assumptions based on our thinking or act less favourably toward this child we are discriminating against them. This negative stereotype has become unhelpful and full of prejudice.

How does this fit with unconscious bias? Imagine you are on the train and you need to pop to the toilet. You've really made yourself at home, unpacked your laptop and put your water bottle on the table. You think you have time to quickly pop to the washroom and be back before the train stops at the next station. So you look around the carriage at your fellow passengers so that you can ask someone to keep an eye on your things while you vacate your seat. Who do you choose? This is where your unconscious bias takes over. You are more likely to ask someone who you perceive to be trustworthy or 'like' you. Our unconscious bias in this case would use mainly visual characteristics, for example, colour of skin, gender, clothing, and other cues, like accent, name or snippets of an overheard conversation to help us decide who to ask. Who is the safest person and the most likely to help?

Unconscious, or implicit bias as it is sometimes called, is our automatic awareness or thinking that we do not have conscious control over. Research shows us that white people are more likely to trust white people, and we would be more likely to choose the clean-shaven businessman in a suit over the tattooed youth in a hoodie to mind our belongings. Our brains are making snap judgements about these people using the information it has available, which is mostly obvious characteristics like age, gender, race and cultural cues. Everyone is subject to unconscious bias and this is not discriminatory in itself, however, our unconscious bias can lead to discriminatory behaviour as there is potential for prejudice. For example, when reading CVs for a job we may be unconsciously influenced when reading a candidate's name, age, sex, religion or other cultural reference before we have even met the candidates.

So we have unconsciously organised our thinking in ways that help us to function on a daily basis and this can contribute to unconscious bias. It is this thinking that helps us to decide who to ask to mind our laptop. We probably have a mental picture of a 'thief' and we are choosing someone who is least like this picture. It would be impossible to remove this from our thinking and our unconscious bias can be very helpful, for example, when we see a red light, we know to stop without thinking about it. However, there are things that we can do which will reduce the



potential for prejudice and keep our unconscious a little more in check. For example, if I know that, as a white person, research shows I might be biased towards black people, I need to consciously reflect upon my thoughts, words and actions in relation to race to help ensure that my unconscious bias doesn't discriminate.

Some theorists claim that talking about unconscious bias can, in reality, fuel racism rather than address it. "Unconscious bias is the acceptable face of racism, the phrase that a majority white sector feels comfortable with using and discussing to describe itself" (Tate & Page, 2018:142). This is because when we talk about the unconscious, we are moving beyond our responsibility, it is as if we are saying, 'I have no control over this and cannot be held responsible for it'. However, this is not true. There are things that we can actively do to help to address this bias.

Here are some ideas of how we can address unconscious bias:

- 1) Allow time to reflect upon ourselves, become aware of our biases and identify them
- 2) Be determined and motivated to address our bias and challenge the system
- 3) Review all aspects of our practice (including policies and procedures) and try to identify any hidden biases
- 4) In our direct work with the children focus on the unique child and their individual strengths and abilities
- 5) Continue to develop empathy and perspective-taking skills
- 6) Deliberately counter unconscious bias by sharing stories that challenge stereotypes
- 7) Actively promote diversity, equality and inclusive practice
- 8) Educate yourself and others in relation to unconscious and implicit bias.

It is worth bearing in mind that attending a short training session on unconscious bias will not adequately address this issue and could even be described as tokenistic or a box-ticking exercise. True change needs to come about through a thorough reflective review and impact on the whole culture of our setting. However, a training course might be a good place to start because I believe that education is key to understanding ourselves, our biases and acknowledging our difficulties in this area.

We also need to avoid shaming or blaming ourselves or others for unconscious bias - this is unhelpful and will not address the cause. Instead, follow the above steps and open a dialogue about this issue, then we can help to break down barriers and make our settings more inclusive places.

References and additional reading

- Life of Privilege explained in \$100 race (You Tube) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ky14EJhq47A>
- Dee, T., & Gershenson, S. (2017). Unconscious Bias in the Classroom: Evidence and Opportunities. Mountain View, CA: Google Inc.
- Tate, S. A., & Page, D. (2018). Whiteness and institutional racism: hiding behind (un)conscious bias. Ethics & Education, 13(1), 141–155.



Tamsin is a part time lecturer at Bath Spa University, early years consultant and author. She has been working within education since 1998 and has improved outcomes for children and families as a qualified teacher, Area SENco, childminder and is currently the early years director for Linden Learning. She has Masters Degree in Early Childhood Education (University of Chester), is a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. Tamsin is passionate about young children's learning and development and fascinated by how very young children think.

Tamsin lives with her husband Richard and tries to put theory into practice with their three children, all of whom have Asperger's Syndrome. It has been said that their home runs on love, laughter, tea and chocolate cake!



Read more from Tamsin



Understanding Terminology



A Walk Through the Day

A light-hearted look at equality in practice through the eyes of a setting manager

The Early Years Inclusion Revolution

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Liz Pemberton & Aaron Bradbury-Coffey discuss why the way we look at Race and Inclusion in the Early Years needs to change.



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We need to bring the conversation about racism and anti-LGBTQIA+ back to the Early Years. Right now, we have an opportunity to trailblaze an inclusive dialogue through Early Years practices, to allow this conversation to be at the centre of inclusive practice and change the way we think and act about race and inclusion.

There's no magic looking glass for us to see what changes may happen in the future, but one thing is certain – the discussions we have in Early Years will ultimately have a massive impact on the world our children will grow up in.

Let's relate this to the shock reactions from non-Black people towards the racist responses about Sainsbury's latest Christmas advert that featured a dark-skinned Black family. These are indicative of the fact that we are yet to get to grips with the realities of how deeply racism is festering within our society. This reaction is only accompanying the overwhelming evidence by way of statistical data, reports, write ups, blogs, podcasts and media. These have always stated that Black and Brown communities are suffering because of racism, but the apparent blindness of the Early Years sector to acknowledge that this same racism penetrates our sector too is disappointing at best.

That's why we want to help Early Years practitioners in having deeper discussions around anti-racist practice and representation of LGBTQIA+ within their settings.

The 6 Key Areas in Inclusive Practice

One of the most important ways to change the way we approach this is to remind ourselves to never lose sight of what 'child-centred inclusive practice' means. We need to keep the child at the heart of inclusive dialogue, and recognise that each child is unique and diverse in their own way.

The six themes below must be addressed in order to completely redefine how we approach Racism and Anti-LGBTQIA+, and we are using similar goals in our research into how these fit into Early Years curricula.

- Anti-racist pedagogy
- LGBTQIA+ representation
- Cultural capital
- Access to provision
- Ableism
- National narrative

Today, we're going to tackle the ideas of anti-racist pedagogy and LGBTQIA+ representation in Early Years settings, and discuss why our current attitude towards them has to change.

The way we talk about Race isn't good enough

The tensions amongst professionals with regards to topics of race are clearly felt in the sector. I have seen and observed the numerous ways conversations about race are derailed and downplayed. I have questioned if it's a good idea to focus on race as a specific area in the Early Years sector, when a lot of the time the message isn't getting through to people. But then I remember how important it is to be an advocate for the sake of Black children.

Early Years does not call out racist practices systematically and structurally, which is why we need to place a greater focus on race as a topic of discussion. This need to 'not rock the boat' in the sector has used "kindness" to mask the real need for change. In order to not cause a fuss, the conversation ends with the idea that we all need to be kind to one another. But we still have structures in place that oppress and marginalise certain groups, and simply being "kind" does not lead us along the path to equality.

“Safe spaces” are a good example of these kinds of limits in our current approach to inclusion in our settings. Non-white professionals in the sector may fear being labeled as troublesome if they call out racism too boldly, or even just bring it up as a discussion by using these spaces. This shows why we need to make a much bigger effort, and why the act of having something such as a safe space should not be seen as an ultimate solution to end harmful racist practices. They are simply an easy way out of having a difficult discussion.

This leads into the idea of tone-policing. We need to stray from the obsession with being polite while calling out racism. Not only does this detract from the fact that racism is being experienced, but it’s actually extremely harmful – particularly because it places the focus on the wrong person. We are essentially giving the person experiencing racism the responsibility to call it out and do something about it, which shouldn’t be the case at all.

Why our current hierarchy isn’t helping

Why is it that the responsibility too often falls on the person on the receiving end of racism? And why aren’t we doing more about it? It’s not the fault of Early Years for creating these inequalities – if we look outside the walls of Early Years settings, the power structure within society is to blame.

White, middle-class, cisgender men are kings of the castle. This supremacist ideology does not make room for anti-racism or inclusive practices as it doesn’t directly benefit these men at the top of the pyramid. Women are part of this structure too, as they are fighting a gender-equality battle for power in today’s world.

I’d like to bring up Jannette DeFelice’s point that it’s ‘impossible for the white supremacist male hierarchy to be turned on its head when so many white women are “entrenched” in it.’ It’s hard for women to fight this concept of white supremacy and patriarchy, partly because many white women are complicit in maintaining it. They are so deeply ingrained in the male supremacist dialogue that it is difficult to remove themselves from it as they battle to take back their own power.

This power struggle does not give Equality, Diversity and Inclusion the space it demands in conversation. Women’s struggle in the battle for dominance heavily detracts from the importance and attention we also need to give to anti-racist pedagogy.

But why is this so important to bring up in the context of Early Years settings? Because 80% of Early Years practitioners are white females – that’s why. This racial imbalance isn’t being discussed, and it really should be.

We need to acknowledge that we too play a role in maintaining this dominant white-cisgender-male narrative. If we don’t realise that we are all part of the problem, then we won’t be able to fix it.

Whiteness at the heart of Early Years

We can’t get to the root of the weed of racism and homophobia if the sector is not committed to digging deep to ensure that every child matters. Anti-racist practice requires some personal commitment from those white colleagues in the sector to take this bull by the metaphorical horns and act for all mankind.

As previously stated, Early Years is still part of the supremacist framework. We need to explore ‘whiteness’ in our sector, as it lies at the very heart of it. We need only to look at the lack of representation with regards to Early Years experts, or the people who hold editorial positions in the sector to see that there are stark racial inequalities both directly within and outside of Early Years settings.

We also need to address the use of a ‘token’ non-white individual to defend of our own non-inclusive practice. Too often, an individual of South-Asian heritage is used to represent inclusivity as a BAME individual. However, how can they be used as a weapon to fight a challenge about the absence of Black speakers in the room? This is why I believe BAME to be the most unhelpful term coined in recent times.

What can we do about this? Within my work, I have explored the need to eliminate fear in anti-racist practice. This fear of ‘getting it wrong’ when we talk about race should not stop us from having open discussions about it. These discussions are the way for us to get closer to doing something about it. The only way for us to embrace and include anti-racist practices is from those who are white in the sector – we need their commitment to the fight.

LGBTQIA+ Representation

Prejudice and discrimination are rife in society, and these dispositions are learnt in Early Years. Being inclusive from an early age is absolutely key if we are to counteract these issues in today’s society, and become as inclusive as we can be.

Over the past 20 years, research has become much stronger in showing the importance of dealing with diversity and discussing prejudice in early childhood education. However, it’s not just about being inclusive towards the diversity of a child’s own culture and what kind of family environment they have.

The way children understand practices towards diversity are made up of the things that surround them in their daily lives – they build their understanding around the things they are told and exposed to. That’s why Early Years professionals play a key role in children’s perception of diversity and differences. From their actions to their teaching and curriculum, they are giving children a representation of diversity.

The same applies if they avoid certain topics – that has a massive impact on a child’s perception of diversity, too. Topics that are ‘irrelevant’ or ‘inappropriate’ to address with children, such as social justice issues that oppress the lives of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intersex and Asexual individuals are not part of the discussion. How can diversity truly be discussed if we are silencing these topics altogether?

We need to break down the myth that issues affecting the lives of sexual minorities have no bearing or relevance to the lives of heterosexuals and this is why it is imperative to allow LGBTQIA+ children and families to have a voice, be seen and heard within a national sector endorsed Early Years Guidance.

How we can make a difference

Our educational settings need to become clear and representative of the national narrative – they need to reflect the real world and a child's cultural capital. We can't just raise children's awareness of family diversity and diversity in the home – it doesn't go far enough.

We need to let children know that if you are a child, a parent or a sibling, and you are LGBTQIA+ or a Person of Colour – you matter! We need to put representation of diversity into the way we treat the individual child – we need to put this into Early Years policies that place the uniqueness of the child at the centre.

Instilling these values of uniqueness and acceptance early on in a child's experiences is key – and we can only do that by teaching them about humanity, racism, sexism, homophobia and the truth about the society we live in.

We need to celebrate Race and Sexual Identity

Instead of marginalisation and silencing of sexual identity or pushing racism under the carpet within Early Years, let's celebrate. Let's allow ourselves to learn and think of ways within our practice to allow the child to identify with their own values, value their own positionality without us as Early Years professionals doing that for them.

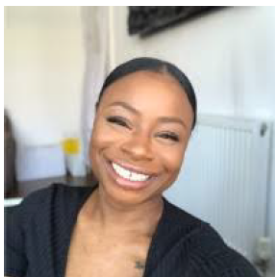
It's crucial that early childhood educators do not fall into the trap of assuming that just because they can't physically see how a child is different, that it means it isn't there. And in turn, that it isn't relevant to talk to the child about diversity. There are many LGBTQIA+ and Black families who are present in Early Years settings who are forced to remain silent and invisible – they do not feel as if they are able to use their voice in a society that is still built on homophobia and racism.

What can the Early Years sector start doing? We need to identify more with sexual identities, understanding of privilege and not allow ourselves to force people back into the early childhood 'closet'. That also applies to the environment we give children, not just the way that we talk to them.

How you can start the conversation

We've given you a few pointers to help you reflect on your practices – have a think about them and ask yourself how you can encourage inclusive practices in your own setting.

- Are you bringing the topics of race and LGBTQIA+ into your setting in a way that children can understand and ask about them? This could be through stories or pictures, for example.
- Are you giving the children in your setting an accurate representation of the world around them? You could show them diverse images of people from different cultures, backgrounds and sexual orientation, for instance.
- Do you encourage questions about race and LGBTQIA+ when children ask about them? And do you encourage other children to join in on this discussion?
- Are you putting the individual child at the heart of your practices? I.e. Are you considering their unique background and upbringing?



Liz Pemberton is a former Nursery Manager, Qualified Secondary Teacher of Childcare and Health & Social Care and is the Director of her own company, The Black Nursery Manager Training and Consultancy, which specialises in anti – racist practice in the Early Years. You can follow her on Instagram @Theblacknurserymanager



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Faith Settings & LGBTQ+

by Frances Towers



Religion and the LGBTQIA+ group are not two things you would naturally discuss together and the subject can cause people to crumple their faces in discomfort. Add early years education to the mix and you have a topic that will crush any conversation. So why does this cause friction and how do overcome it?

Historically, religion is built upon rules and laws that were designed and created for the time that they were written. For some unknown reason, these rules and laws might have missed out on 'installing updates' and although religious groups have made some changes, there are still several of these laws and rules that cause confusion and discomfort for many living in today's world. Some people recall the day when every church service was spoken in Latin. When the changes came into place to speak them in English and other languages there was a divide between those who thought this was a great idea (typically those who couldn't understand Latin) and those who didn't like the idea (typically those who could understand Latin.) Over time, attending a service spoken in English was the new norm and people adjusted.

The core religions of our world all have one thing in common: to be kind and considerate to others and to live harmoniously. When you delve deeper into different beliefs, this same overarching theme runs throughout. Many non-religious, atheist and non-faith folk also hold this as quite important in their own moral compass, as if it is ingrained in us as human beings - religion aside. Historical laws and the finer details of religious beliefs can cause many people to feel confused and uncomfortable about discussing LGBTQIA+ matters. Yet when we refer to the overarching theme, logistically, religion and LGBTQIA+ should go hand in hand! Each core faith celebrates and rejoices in loving one another, being kind to each other and generally being nice. Unsurprisingly, this is where early education neatly fits in. Being nice to one another is built up from a number of skills that are all developed in early childhood.

Practitioners are constantly supporting children in negotiating problems, communicating clearly, being considerate to others and understanding that their words and actions provoke a range of feelings and emotions in others. Religion aside, every child needs to learn these fundamental skills to succeed in life. Like all things in life, there is pressure to get this right from the very beginning. By normalising same sex relationships, encouraging others to question gender stereotypes and creating an environment that is open and honest in age-appropriate conversations, we can make a difference.

Faith schools and settings all promote welcoming and caring environments based on moral values that underpin their beliefs. They are vital parts of the faith community that are places of worship in their own right. They are all constantly striving to 'get it right' and if you think they're missing the mark, or not quite being as inclusive as they should be, challenge them on it. It's probably something that just hasn't been raised before. We have a duty to love and welcome all, not just because our faith dictates it, but because everyone knows it's fundamentally the right thing to do.



Frances is an experienced Catholic teacher living and working in Wiltshire. She's been married to Neil for 11 years and they have 2 children together. She is passionate about strengthening links between schools and the wider community. She loves to spend time outdoors and follow children's interests to enhance learning opportunities. Frances believes that we can always improve on supporting minority groups in education, to create spaces where all are truly accepted for who they are.

Frances studied at Plymouth University for a Bachelor in Education combined with Art and Design and graduated with Qualified Teachers Status in 2009. In 2016, she studied for a Post Graduate Certificate in Education specialising in Early Years at Bath Spa University. She now teaches Reception in the community she grew up in.





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