

**Towards creating inclusive environments for LGBTIQ-parented families in Early Childhood Education and Care settings: A review of the literature.**

Xinyun (Meg) Liang

Melbourne Graduate School of Education, The University of Melbourne

Caroline Cohrsen

Melbourne Graduate School of Education, The University of Melbourne

**Abstract**

With Australia's overwhelming 'Yes' vote on marriage equality in November 2017, the need for early childhood educators to ensure that understandings of 'family' reflected in early childhood education and care settings include lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) parents and their children, is further reinforced. Here, a review of recent literature is framed by an ecological systems approach in order to identify key influences on the lived experiences of LGBTIQ parents and their children in the context of early learning centres. Attention is drawn to the need for further research that identifies how best to equip early childhood educators to ensure that all children and their families feel a sense of belonging *and representation* in their early childhood education settings.

**Keywords**

Family, LGBTIQ, early childhood education and care, initial teacher education

## **Introduction**

Every child should feel valued and have a sense of belonging in the early childhood education and care (ECEC) setting that they attend. However, recent long-awaited societal changes in many countries highlight the fact that the inclusion of a particular group of children, and their families, needs to be explicitly addressed. With the exception of Iceland, where same-sex marriage was recognised in 2004, the recent international groundswell towards recognition of marital equality around the world occurred in Australasia with New Zealand in 2012 and Australia in 2017. In 2019, Taiwan is the first to legalise same-sex marriage in Asia (CNN, 2019). However, children parented by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) parents were attending ECEC settings long before the success of the 'Yes' vote (Robinson, 2002). Despite this, the extent to which early childhood (EC) educators are equipped to reflect LGBTIQ-parents and their children in their programs is unclear.

Changing the law does not lead to overnight changes in practice. The use of neutral wording instead of explicit references to LGBTIQ parented families as an aspect of family diversity in policy documents relating to ECEC is common across countries (Cloughessy & Waniganayake, 2013; 2017; Church, Hedge, Averett & Ballard, 2018; Gunn, 2009; Surtees, 2003). For example, neutral phrases such as 'family structure' and 'family circumstances' are used when discussing family diversity and inclusive practices in Australian guiding documents such as the Code of Ethics (Early Childhood Australia, 2006, p.2), the Australian Early Years Learning Framework (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009, p. 24) and the National Quality Framework (Australian Children Education and Care Quality Authority, 2018, p. 2). However, a key impact of such neutral wording is that LGBTIQ-parented families are effectively made invisible in ECEC settings – in centre documentation and in the physical environment (including posters and storybooks accessed by children) (Cloughessy & Waniganayake, 2013; Gunn, 2009; Gunn, 2015; Surtees, 2003). Consequently, children and their LGBTIQ parents may continue to be affected by social stigma both inside and outside education settings (Crouch, Waters, McNair, Power & Davis, 2014; Gunn, 2015).

In this article, we raise more questions than answers. Our aim is to encourage discussion about a topic that gets to the heart of belonging, being and becoming for LGBTIQ parents and their children. Failing to reflect the lived experiences of these families in ECEC settings has the effect of denying their participation – and representation – in society. Whilst there is a growing body of research within Australia (Cloughessy & Waniganayake, 2014), most research relating to LGBTIQ-parented families' experiences in ECEC settings has been conducted outside the Australian context (Averett, Hedge, & Smith, 2015; Duke & McCarthy, 2009) and draws on adults' accounts of childhood experiences rather than researching with children to uncover their expert, emic insight into their experiences and perceptions. Much more research is needed.

## **Literature Review**

Fostering understanding of and respectful attitudes towards individuality and diversity in family structure in the earliest years of education is critical for building an inclusive society where individual rights are respected (Andrew et al. 2001). Achieving this requires educators to evaluate their attitudes and practices (Burt, Gelnaw & Lesser, 2010) and to purposefully disrupt heteronormative thinking in the learning environment (Taylor & Richardson, 2005), Gunn (2009) has defined heteronormativity as follows:

‘Heteronormativity is the concept that heterosexual sexuality is an institutionalised norm and a superior and privileged standard. It is perpetuated via discourses that position heterosexual sexuality as dominant and normative, and which construct heterosexual sexuality as the form of sexuality against which all others are compared’ (p.27).

Regardless of the presence or absence of an LGBTIQ-parented child in a group, if EC educators are to truly embrace diversity in their programs (Souto-Manning & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2008) it is necessary to reflect upon their attitudes and where necessary, to transform their teaching practice to reflect family diversity in their programs.

All children who attend ECEC settings are likely to interact with children who display gender-nonconforming behaviours and who may identify themselves as gender non-conforming later in life (Rieger, Linsenmeier, Gygax & Bailey, 2008; Robinson, 2002). Nonetheless, recent research focusing on LGBTIQ-parented preschool-aged children is limited. For example, in one recent study, LGBTIQ-parented families with children under five were excluded since older children were deemed to remember more than younger children about their family structure (Breshears, 2011). However, young children, their parents and their educators can attest to children’s ability to understand and describe their experiences of diverse family structures (Lee, 2010; Cooper, 2015; Bentley & Souto-Manning, 2016; Kelly, 2013; Kim, Kwangok & Carrola, 2017; Krikorian, 2016). Consequently, the priority is to find authentic ways in which to elicit children’s perspectives on family diversity.

For many people, an important first step is to understand what the term ‘LGBTIQ-parented family’ means. An LGBTIQ-parented family includes at least one adult who identify as LGBTIQ raising at least one child as a parent. Children may be conceived in the context of a LGBTIQ parent’s previous heterosexual relationship. They may also become members of these families in the context of same-sex relationship through adoption, surrogacy or sperm donation. They may be raised in family constellations where one partner or both identify as LGBTIQ, or other significant family members such as a birth parent, a sperm donor or a surrogate mother share various arrangements for parenting (Surtees, 2017).

More than one year has passed since marital equality was achieved in Australia. This renewed focus on marital equality in Australian society provides an opportunity to capitalise on the broader social interest and to review what we know, and what we need to know, to best support the participation of LGBTIQ parents and their children in ECEC settings. An ecological systems model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) is helpful in identifying key societal influence on LGBTIQ-parented families and their children in the context of ECEC settings and is thus used to structure this review of recent literature. Bronfenbrenner (1979) conceptualised child development as evolving in nested ecological systems of multidirectional influence. An ecological systems approach accords developmental importance to child agency and recognises multiple proximal (direct) and more distal (more indirect) influences on child development. Positioning the child at the centre of the ecological systems, the most immediate system of influence on the child is known as the ‘microsystem’. Immediate family, and early childhood educators are situated within this system. The second level – ‘system’ – is known as the mesosystem. Relationships between elements of the microsystem are situated in this system: for example, the relationships between family and early learning centre. Connections with community are situated in this system. The third level of influence is known as the exosystem. Elements of the exosystem include social settings that do not directly influence a child’s learning and development but have influence that is mediated by the mesosystem. For example, religious organisations to

which parents belong, parental workplace, social services and mass media would be situated in the exosystem. The macrosystem is the outermost system – national laws, regulations and cultural values are situated in this space. This system is fluid: over time, changes in one system impact on changes in others, and the child both influences and is influenced by the ecologic system. The contribution of time to the gyroscopic ecological system model is known as the chronosystem. In this paper, we situate the participation and ‘presence’ of LGBTIQ-parented families and their children in early learning settings at the centre of the ecological system.

Marital equality in 2017 marked a significant change to the macrosystem and influences other elements of the overall ecological system surrounding LGBTIQ-parented families and their children. However, within the constraints of this discussion, we do not address the macrosystem societal, political and legislative processes that contributed to the ‘Yes’ vote. Rather, we focus on proximal influences that have a more immediate impact on the LGBTIQ-parented child and their family. Nonetheless, this immediately highlights the need for research to examine the impact of marital equality on exosystem components such as social services and mass media. Representations of LGBTIQ-parented families and their children may be profiled, marginalised or excluded in the media (Pickering, 2001) and in community spaces such as libraries, LGBTIQ-themed literature may similarly be excluded or marginalised in response to social opposition (Naidoo, 2013).

#### *At the centre: Children’s understanding of ‘family’*

Children’s firsthand accounts of LGBTIQ-parented families suggests that heterosexual-parented children have little knowledge about LGBTIQ-parented families and may experience confusion when confronted with real or depicted LGBTIQ people (Bentley & Souto-Manning, 2016; Kelly, 2013; Kim, Kwangok & Carrola, 2017; Krikorian, 2016), however perspectives of LGBTIQ-parented children themselves are mostly absent in the literature. Blaise (2005; 2010) discusses the dominance of heterosexuality in children’s play and how children use their knowledge about gender and (hetero)sexuality to produce and reinforce heteronormativity in ECEC settings. This highlights the need for ECEC educators to be aware of children’s developing theories of about (hetero)sexuality, and to be proactive in observing social interactions between children during play. This will in turn, assist educators to identify and challenge ‘othering’ of LGBTIQ-parented children. This draws attention to the need for explicit conversations with young children about the diversity of family structures (Blaise & Taylor, 2012; Sapp, 2010).

Indeed, conversations about diverse family structures contribute to the development of respect and tolerance in children (Schall & Kauffmann, 2003). Children recognise that being able to choose with whom a person would like to start a family is a matter of fairness (Bentley & Souto-Manning, 2016; Kelly-Ware, 2018), they are more open to conversation about differences in family structure than adults (Cooper, 2015), and are willing to include non-traditional families in their play (Kelly, 2013). Assumptions that adults may make about children’s discomfort appear to be unfounded (Bentley & Souto-Manning, 2016).

#### *Microsystem: EC educators’ understandings of ‘family’*

Our focus now moves to the microsystem: the influence of EC educators – their beliefs, teaching practice, available teaching resources and initial teacher education. For the LGBTIQ-parented child who attends out-of-home education and care, EC educators have a proximal influence on the child’s learning and development as core components of the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Whilst societal understandings of 'family' have progressed to include diverse family make-up, some LGBTIQ-parented families report that EC educators recognise and value the biological parent of a child more than the same-sex partner (Leland, 2017). Same-sex parents may be marginalised by school activities such as the celebration of Mother's Day and Father's Day (Goldberg, 2014; Lee, 2010). In addition, EC education curricula and centre policies may fail to explicitly reflect children with LGBTIQ parents (Robinson, 2002; Skattebol & Ferfolja, 2007; Michaud & Stelmach, 2019). Parental experiences of insensitivity to the needs of LGBTIQ-parented families in the context of school may affect children's psychosocial adjustment (Fedewa & Clark, 2009; Goldberg & Smith, 2017) and the nature and extent of their involvement in the education setting (Goldberg & Smith, 2014a; 2014c; Michaud & Stelmach, 2019), even relocating decisions since LGBTIQ-friendly communities are more inclusive and sensitive to their family structure (Hornby, 2011; Leland, 2017).

### *EC educators' teaching practice*

A growing body of literature has documented how some educators initiate dialogues about LGBTIQ-parented families with young children in ECEC settings. Research conducted before the 'Yes' vote found that many EC educators believed that challenging heteronormative understandings of 'family' is unnecessary when there is no identifiable LGBTIQ-parented child in their classrooms (Cloughessy & Waniganayake, 2013). This is consistent with earlier literature (Robinson, 2002), indicating that despite societal change, little change may have occurred in ECEC practice in this regard. Increasingly, however, EC educators are proactively challenging heteronormativity (Bentley & Souto-Manning, 2016; Cooper, 2015; Kelly, 2013; Kim, Kwangok, & Carrola, 2017), taking on the 'political work' needed to transform ECEC classrooms (Bentley & Souto-Manning, 2016, p.196). This so-called political work is challenging in the absence of research-based evidence about how best to support the inclusion of LGBTIQ-parented families and their children in ECEC settings.

Unlike their heterosexual counterparts, who may have little experience working with LGBTIQ-parented families, some LGBTIQ educators are motivated to challenge heteronormative thinking (Cooper, 2015) while they may not necessarily be comfortable with revealing their sexual orientation in the workplace (Shin, 2019). However, it should be acknowledged that for both heterosexual and gender non-conforming EC educators, disrupting heteronormativity to create space for LGBTIQ-parented families is a risky business as the silence in ECEC settings reflects what has been a silence in broader community, social and cultural space (Church et al, 2018; Farago, 2016). EC educators, who did attempt to disrupt heteronormativity at the workplace reported that the value of doing this outweighed the resulting vulnerability they may experience (Bentley & Souto-Manning, 2016).

In the absence of research-based resources to support the inclusion and participation of LGBTIQ-parented families and their children in early childhood settings, other resources and recommended strategies to raise the profile of LGBTIQ-parented families in the general environment typically include the use of inclusive children's literature, toys and activities to create a welcoming environment (Brand & Maasch, 2017; Davis & Hanline, 2016; Evans-Santiago & Lin, 2016; Morgan & Kelly-Ware, 2016), encouraging LGBTIQ parental involvement (Davis & Hanline, 2016; Paton, 2019; Paula & Silva, 2014) and educator critical self-reflection on attitudes, practices, curricula and policies (Davis & Hanline, 2016; Evans-Santiago & Lin, 2016; Paula & Silva, 2014). Recent classroom-based studies support the efficacy of critical reading of LGBTIQ-themed literature in developing broader understanding of 'family' (Bentley & Souto-Manning, 2016; Comber, 2003; Kelly, 2013; Kim, Kwangok & Carrola, 2017; Riggs & Augoustinos, 2007), whilst explicitly reinforcing that emotional

bonds define 'family', rather than the gender identity or sexual orientation of the parents (Kelly, 2012; Surtees, 2017; Taylor, 2012). Few resources referred to in these studies are intended for prior-to-school settings, some fail to specify children's ages (e.g. Lester, 2014); others focus on middle and later childhood (Buchanan, Tschida, Bellows & Shear, 2019, Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2013; Threlkeld, 2014). Indeed, it is difficult to assess the validity of the claims made regarding the efficacy of resources and strategies listed in many teacher guides in achieving broader understanding of family structure (Cloughessy & Waniganayake, 2014), once again highlighting the need for research to investigate what would best equip educators working with children aged from birth to five years.

LGBTIQ-themed children's books are seldom freely available in playrooms, effectively obscuring the presence of LGBTIQ-parented families in ECEC settings (Crisp et al., 2016; Taylor, 2012). The frequency with which LGBTIQ-parented families are depicted in children's books that *are* readily accessible in classrooms can vary from 'never' in areas where ECEC settings serve predominantly low-income, ethnically diverse families (Crisp et al., 2016) to 'sometimes' in a major city where ECEC settings serve families of parents employed with high-income jobs (Cloughessy & Waniganayake, 2017). This may be because EC educators believe that conversations about sexuality are irrelevant or corrupting to preschool age children (Blaise, 2005; 2010; Robinson, 2002; 2005; Taylor, 2010). They may believe discourses of sexuality to be appropriate for adults only, and that children are asexual and innocent (Surtees, 2005; Taylor, 2010), needing to be protected from perceived developmentally inappropriate topics (Gunn, 2003; Walkerdine, 2001). Rather than recognising that the visibility of LGBTIQ-parented families in ECEC settings is an inclusion and social justice issue, ECEC educators may believe the issue to be one of sex and sexuality (Robinson, 2002; 2005).

#### *Mesosystem: Parent-early learning centre relationships*

Situated in the mesosystem, parents' experiences influence and are influenced by the education setting. Recent research has explored gay and lesbian adoptive parents' disclosure decisions (Cloughessy, Waniganayake & Blatterer, 2017; Goldberg, 2014; Goldberg, Black, Sweeney & Moyer, 2017), levels of involvement (Goldberg & Smith, 2014a; 2014b; 2014c; Goldberg, Black, Manley, & Frost, 2017), perceived stigma (Cloughessy, Waniganayake & Blatterer, 2017; Goldberg & Smith, 2014a), preschool selection considerations (Goldberg & Smith, 2014c), experiences of school mistreatment (Goldberg & Smith, 2014c), and the role of parent-school relationships in relation to child behavioural problems in the U.S (Goldberg & Smith, 2017).

LGBTIQ parents tend to be quick to ensure that their families and their children are fairly treated (Cloughessy, Waniganayake & Blatterer, 2017; Goldberg & Smith, 2014a; 2014b; 2014c; Goldberg, Black, Manley & Frost, 2017; Goldberg, Black, Sweeney & Moyer, 2017), regardless of staff attitudes towards their sexual orientation (Cloughessy, Waniganayake & Blatterer, 2017; Goldberg & Smith, 2014a; Goldberg, Black, Manley & Frost, 2017). However, when other parents cause them to feel unwelcome, they are likely to be less involved to avoid uncomfortable situations (Goldberg & Smith, 2017; Leland, 2017). Whether their active role is the result of perceived concerns or an attempt to be proactive in ensuring the inclusion of their children is not evident from research. Some LGBTIQ parents may over-intervene in educators' practices whilst others disengage from the settings (Cloughessy, Waniganayake & Blatterer, 2017; Goldberg & Smith, 2014a). Both responses have been shown to impact parent-educator relationships, which in turn has implications for their children's psychosocial outcomes (Goldberg & Smith, 2017). Taking a different approach, some LGBTIQ parents respond to concerns regarding the inclusion of their children in ECEC programs by enrolling their

children in services reputed to be more inclusive (Hornby, 2011; Lee, 2010; Leland, 2017; Michaud & Stelmach, 2019) – however many parents are unable to respond in this manner, highlighting the importance of *all* early learning programs enacting high-quality inclusion practices. Once again, there is a need for evidence-based strategies to equip ECEC staff to create a more inclusive environment for LGBTIQ-parented families.

Ensuring that all families remain engaged with the ECEC community is important as it impacts on child outcomes (Goldberg, 2014; Gold & Smith, 2014a; 2014b; 2017). Children’s learning outcomes are closely related to the parent-educator relationship (Izzo, Weissberg, Kasproh & Fendrich, 1999; Kim, Sheridan, Kwon & Koziol, 2013; Goldberg & Smith, 2017) and the way in which LGBTIQ parents and EC educators view and interact with each other is likely to influence the perceived safety and inclusivity of the ECEC environment for LGBTIQ-parented families and their children (Cloughessy, Waniganayake & Blatterer, 2017; Goldberg & Smith, 2014a). Indeed, the influence of centre staff goes beyond the educator in the room: educational leaders and centre directors also play an important role in the adoption of inclusive practices for LGBTIQ-parented families (Church et al., 2018; Cloughessy & Waniganayake, 2013; Michaud & Stelmach, 2019).

### *Initial Teacher Education*

Partnerships between family and early learning centre are situated in the mesosystem. Whilst the importance of partnerships with families is emphasised in initial teacher education through core practice principles (DEEWR, 2009; DET, 2016), research suggests that most EC educators perceive parent sexual orientation to be less significant than cultural, ethnic or socioeconomic diversity (Robinson, 2002). Little or no training on working with LGBTIQ-parented families is a major challenge for EC teachers to create an inclusive environment for these families across settings and countries (Averett & Hedge, 2012).

Despite LGBTIQ parents’ accounts of insensitivity and stigma in EC settings (Cloughessy & Waniganayake, 2017; Cloughessy, Waniganayake & Blatterer, 2017; Goldberg, 2014; Goldberg & Smith, 2014a), and early childhood educators’ self-reported need for training and resources on working with LGBTIQ-parented families (Beren, 2013; Church et al., 2018), limited research has focussed on the provision of pre- or in-service teacher training on meeting the needs of LGBTIQ-parented families (see, for example, Beren, 2013; Janmohamed, 2014; Riggs & Due, 2013). Somewhat counter-intuitively, it appears that even when EC educators hold overall positive attitudes towards LGBTIQ-parented families, they are less likely to act upon their stated attitudes (Hedge, Averett, White & Deese, 2014). LGBTIQ parents have also reported the responsibility of educating EC educators about their needs (Cloughessy, Waniganayake & Blatterer, 2017; Michaud & Stelmach, 2019). Indeed, implications for teacher education have been widely addressed in the literature (Church et al., 2018; Cloughessy & Waniganayake, 2013; Goldberg & Smith, 2014b; Hall & Rodgers, 2018; Hedge et al., 2014).

The reasons for this complexity require further investigation, particularly in light of what appears to be a gap between what EC educators expect to learn from professional development and what LGBTIQ-parented families suggest that EC educators in fact need to know. For example, early childhood educators have expressed resistance to adopting an explicit curriculum (Beren, 2013), yet LGBTIQ-parented families have recommended children’s picture books depicting LGBTIQ-parented families as an appropriate approach (Goldberg, 2014; Goldberg & Smith, 2014b). Similarly,

challenging heteronormativity by adapting activities that have historically prioritised heterosexual family structures (such as Mother's Day and Father's Day) to include gender non-conforming families and thus promote a more inclusive parent community (Goldberg, 2014) appears to meet with resistance at times.

Although this topic may be addressed in some initial teacher education courses (Hedge et al., 2014; Riggs & Due, 2013), it is suggested that addressing this across all initial teacher education courses is important. Riggs and Due (2013) found an unassessed on-campus workshop to be effective in increasing pre-service teachers' comfort with, and knowledge and beliefs about the inclusion of LGBTIQ-parented families in ECEC settings. Leaving this important focus unaddressed would constrain EC educators' ability to draw on research evidence and knowledge of appropriate and effective strategies to include LGBTIQ-parented families in practice.

### **The need for an holistic approach**

With the recent introduction of marital equality, Australia has spoken. However, one conversation is not enough – we need to keep talking. Supporting the learning of our earliest citizens, EC educators are well positioned to take a lead role in supporting bottom-up social transformation (Cooper, 2015). The contact hypothesis proposed by Allport (1979), suggests that interactions between different groups provides opportunities for both groups to counteract negative attitudes and false assumptions. Creating an inclusive environment in which families are able to disclose their LGBTIQ status would increase opportunities for EC educators to get to know them better, and consequently reduce prejudices and stereotypes of LGBTIQ parenting (Davis & Hanline, 2016). Increasingly, a narrative is emerging of 'sameness': LGBTIQ-parented families are perceived to be as the 'same' as heterosexual families (Cloughessy & Waniganayake, 2013; 2017) and thus the purposeful inclusion of LGBTIQ-parented families may be regarded unnecessary. Whilst it is true that children become more accepting about LGBTIQ-parented families once they discover the similarities between LGBTIQ-parented families and their own (Kim, Kwangok, & Carrola, 2017), the notion of 'sameness' normalises the differences between LGBTIQ-parented and heterosexual families, thus hiding the stigma that LGBTIQ-parented families may experience in society (Clarke, 2002). EC educators may deny or be unaware of their complicity in this (Cloughessy & Waniganayake, 2013; Riggs & Due, 2013), however the notion of 'sameness' ignores the variability in diverse family compositions, silences the institutionalised stigma of LGBTIQ-parented families and further legitimates one dominant family paradigm.

In this discussion, we have focussed primarily on ECEC educators and their role in supporting the participation and 'presence' of LGBTIQ-parented families and their children in early learning settings. This is not intended to suggest that they are the only stakeholders who need to be influenced to ensure inclusion for these families and their children as we also emphasise the need for research to deepen understanding of additional systems within the ecological model. One year after the 'Yes' vote, ECEC centre-based staff need better preparation and support to include LGBTIQ-parented families meaningfully in their programs. Whilst multiple guiding documents mandate inclusive practice, we suggest that there is a need to name LGBTIQ-parented families and their children explicitly in such documents in order to ensure that they are visible in this space. Concerns about inadequate educational resources and insensitive practices are not new (Clay, 1990; Meadows, 2001). Curriculum guidelines need to provide more specific evidence-based information about how best to support the particular needs of these families and their children and peak organisations that



provide professional learning for in-service teachers could address this priority. If such profiling were to happen in the broader sector, centres would be better equipped to update philosophies of practice.

## **Conclusion**

The backdrop to this review of recent literature is the transformative change in the legislative understanding of 'marriage' and 'family' in Australia that occurred in November 2017. There has always been an imperative to ensure that all children feel valued and represented in their early learning contexts, however there is heightened urgency for EC educators to reflect on the extent to which the particular needs of LGBTIQ parents and their children are met.

In the context of this discussion, LGBTIQ parents and their children are situated at the centre of the ecological systems model. Each individual child has the right to have the uniqueness of his or her family fully acknowledged and respected, as 'children are more likely to be confident and involved learners when their family and community experiences and understandings are recognised and included in the early childhood setting' (EYLF, DEEWR, 2009, p. 36). Framing this review of the literature within an ecological systems approach has revealed there is much we need to know in order for early childhood professionals to best support the full participation of these families. Due to the interconnectedness of the ecological systems, understanding more about the impact of macrosystem legislative change on the meso- and microsystems as well as seeking child perspectives on authentic inclusion would better facilitate an holistic understanding of the lived experience of LGBTIQ parents and their children. This would in turn equip early childhood educators to better support the families' participation in early learning centres and would inform the development and evidence-based teaching and learning resources.

Perspectives of LGBTIQ-parented children were mostly absent in the literature. Further, participants in most recent studies have been LGBTIQ parents and educators or ECEC settings providing service to LGBTIQ parents who identify primarily as white Caucasian, lived in or near a metropolitan area, were well-educated and held well-paid jobs (Cloughessy & Waniganayake, 2013; 2017; Cloughessy, Waniganayake & Blatterer, 2017; Goldberg & Smith, 2014a; 2014b; 2014c; Goldberg, Black, Manley & Frost, 2017; Goldberg, Black, Sweeney & Moyer, 2017). Greater demographic diversity is needed in future research. Longitudinal research is also needed: LGBTIQ-parented children's experiences associated with family identity in ECEC settings may have long-term impacts on their learning and developmental outcomes. Most research has been cross-sectional; little is known regarding long-term child outcomes (Goldberg, 2017), the remainder of LGBTIQ-parented children's school careers (El Nokali, Bachman & Votruba-Drzal, 2010).

Pedagogical resources that propose strategies for building relationships with LGBTIQ parents are yet to be tested and consequently their efficacy is unknown. An audit of initial teacher education courses to identify how and to what extent pre-service teachers learn about including LGBTIQ-parented families and their children is needed. In addition, there is a need for commercially available, multi-media resources to be developed and evaluated to determine the extent to which they authentically represent the lived experiences of LGBTIQ-parented families and their children. In addition, research is needed to examine heterosexual parents' attitudes towards LGBTIQ-parented families and their children in order as an evidence base that informs systematic strategies to

facilitate a stronger sense of community and participation for all families and their children in ECEC settings.

This review of recent literature drew on an ecological approach to represent the multidirectional interactions between LGBTIQ parents and their children with the learning environment in ECEC settings. Much work lies ahead for us to understand how best to support the particular needs of these children and their families. The time for talk has passed; it is now time for action.

## References

- Allport, G. (1979). *The nature of human prejudice*. Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley.
- Andrew, Y., Baird, J., Benjamin, R., Dean, S., Holmes, R., & MacNaughton, G. et al. (2001). Mother Goose meets Mardi Gras: Lesbian and gay issues in early childhood. In E. Dau, *The Anti-Bias Approach in Early Childhood* (2nd ed., pp. 63–81). Frenchs Forest, New South Wales, Australia: Pearson Education Australia.
- Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA). 2018. “Quality Area 6. Building Partnerships with Families.” Retrieved from <http://files.acecqa.gov.au/files/QualityInformationSheets/QualityArea6/QualityArea6BuildingPartnershipsWithFamilies.pdf>
- Averett, P., & Hedge, A. (2012). School social work and early childhood student's attitudes toward gay and lesbian families. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 17(5), 537-549. doi: 10.1080/13562517.2012.658564
- Averett, P., Hedge, A., & Smith, J. (2015). Lesbian and gay parents in early childhood settings: A systematic review of the research literature. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 15(1), 34-46. doi: 10.1177/1476718x15570959
- Bentley, D., & Souto-Manning, M. (2016). Toward inclusive understandings of marriage in an early childhood classroom: Negotiating (un)readiness, community, and vulnerability through a critical reading of King and King. *Early Years*, 36(2), 195- 206. doi: 10.1080/09575146.2015.1104899
- Beren, M. (2013). Gay and lesbian families in the early childhood classroom: Evaluation of an online professional development course. *Learning Landscapes*, 7(1), 61-79.
- Blaise, M. (2005). *Playing it straight: Uncovering gender discourses in the early childhood classroom*. London: Routledge.
- Blaise, M. (2010). Kiss and tell: Gendered narratives and childhood sexuality. *Australian Journal Of Early Childhood*, 35(1), 1-9.
- Blaise, M., & Taylor, A. (2012). Using queer theory to rethink gender equity in early childhood education. *Young Children*, 67(1), 88-96, 98. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42731139>
- Brand, S., & Maasch, S. (2017). Updating classroom libraries and cross-curricular activities: Celebrating gender identity and diversity through LGBTQ books. *Childhood Education*, 93(5), 430-439. doi: 10.1080/00094056.2017.1367240
- Breshears, D. (2011). Understanding communication between lesbian parents and their children regarding outsider discourse about family identity. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, 7(3), 264-284. doi: 10.1080/1550428x.2011.564946
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *Ecology of human development*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Buchanan, L., Tschida, C., Bellows, E., & Shear, S. (2019). Positioning children’s literature to confront the persistent avoidance of LGBTQ topics among elementary preservice teachers. *The Journal of Social Studies Research*. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jssr.2019.01.006i>

- Burt, T., Gelnow, A., & Lesser, L. (2010). Creating welcoming and inclusive environments for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. *Young Children, 65*(1), 97-102.
- Church, J., Hedge, A., Averett, P., & Ballard, S. (2018). Early childhood administrators' attitudes and experiences in working with gay- and lesbian-parented families. *Early Child Development and Care, 188*(3), 264-280. doi: 10.1080/03004430.2016.1213725
- Clarke, V. (2002). Sameness and difference in research on lesbian parenting. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology, 12*(3), 210-222. doi: 10.1002/casp.673
- Clay, J. W. (1990). Working with lesbian and gay parents and their children. *Young Children, 45*, 31–35.
- Cloughessy, K., & Waniganayake, M. (2013). "Raised eyebrows": Working with lesbian-parented families experiences of childcare centre directors in Australia. *Children & Society, 29*(5), 377-387. doi: 10.1111/chso.12065
- Cloughessy, K., & Waniganayake, M. (2014). Early childhood educators working with children who have lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender parents: What does the literature tell us? *Early Child Development and Care, 184*(8), 1267-1280. doi: 10.1080/03004430.2013.862529
- Cloughessy, K., & Waniganayake, M. (2017). Lesbian parents' perceptions of children's picture books featuring same-sex parented families. *Early Years, 1*-14. doi: 10.1080/09575146.2017.1342225
- Cloughessy, K., Waniganayake, M., & Blatterer, H. (2017). "This is our family. We do not hide who we are": Stigma and disclosure decisions of lesbian parents in Australian early childhood settings. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies, 1*-19. doi: 10.1080/1550428x.2017.1362617
- Comber, B. (2003). Critical literacy: What does it look like in the early years? *Handbook of Early Childhood Literacy, 355*-368. doi: 10.4135/9781848608207.n29
- Cooper, K. (2015). *"I just want to be who I am": Exploring the barriers faced by lesbian early childhood teachers as they disrupt heteronormative practices in Aotearoa/New Zealand* (Master's Thesis). University of Canterbury.
- Crisp, T., Knezek, S., Quinn, G., Bingham, M., Girardeau, K., & Starks, F. (2015). What's on our bookshelves? The diversity of children's literature in early childhood classroom libraries. *Journal of Children's Literature, 42*(1), 29-42.
- Crouch, S., Waters, E., McNair, R., Power, J., & Davis, E. (2014). Parent-reported measures of child health and wellbeing in same-sex parent families: A cross-sectional survey. *BMC Public Health, 14*(1). doi: 10.1186/1471-2458-14-635
- Davis, J., & Hanline, M. (2016). Young children with same-sex parents: Supporting families and children in early childhood programs. *Young Exceptional Children, 21*(3), 127- 141. doi: 10.1177/1096250616659122
- Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). (2009). *Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*. Canberra: Commonwealth Copyright Division.

- Duke, T., & McCarthy, K. (2009). Homophobia, sexism, and early childhood education: A review of the literature. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education, 30*(4), 385- 403. doi: 10.1080/10901020903320320
- Early Childhood Australia (ECA). (2018). *The Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics*. ECA. Retrieved from [www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/ECA-COE-Brochure-2016.pdf](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/ECA-COE-Brochure-2016.pdf)
- El Nokali, N., Bachman, H., & Votruba-Drzal, E. (2010). Parent involvement and children's academic and social development in elementary school. *Child Development, 81*, 988–1005.
- Evans-Santiago, B., & Lin, M. (2016). Preschool through grade 3 inclusion with sensitivity: Teaching children with LGBTQ families. *YC Young Children, 17*(2), 56-63. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/ycyoungchildren.71.2.56>
- Farago, F. (2016) *Early childhood educators' beliefs, attitudes, and classroom practices regarding race and gender* (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from ASU Electronic Theses and Dissertations
- Fedewa, A., & Clark, T. (2009). Parent practices and home-school partnerships: A differential effect for children with same-sex coupled parents? *Journal of GLBT Family Studies, 5*(4), 312-339. doi: 10.1080/15504280903263736
- Goldberg, A. (2014). Lesbian, gay, and heterosexual adoptive parents' experiences in preschool environments. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 29*(4), 669-681. doi: 10.1016/j.ecresq.2014.07.008
- Goldberg, A., & Smith, J. (2014a). Perceptions of stigma and self-reported school engagement in same-sex couples with young children. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity, 1*(3), 202-212. doi: 10.1037/sgd0000052
- Goldberg, A., & Smith, J. (2014b). Predictors of school engagement among same-sex and heterosexual adoptive parents of Kindergarteners. *Journal of School Psychology, 52*(5), 463-478. doi: 10.1016/j.jsp.2014.08.001
- Goldberg, A., & Smith, J. (2014c). Preschool selection considerations and experiences of school mistreatment among lesbian, gay, and heterosexual adoptive parents. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 29*(1), 64-75. doi: 10.1016/j.ecresq.2013.09.006
- Goldberg, A., & Smith, J. (2017). Parent-school relationships and young adopted children's psychological adjustment in lesbian-, gay-, and heterosexual-parent families. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 40*, 174-187. doi: 10.1016/j.ecresq.2017.04.001
- Goldberg, A., Black, K., Manley, M., & Frost, R. (2017). 'We told them that we are both really involved parents': Sexual minority and heterosexual adoptive parents' engagement in school communities. *Gender and Education, 29*(5), 614-631. doi: 10.1080/09540253.2017.1296114
- Goldberg, A., Black, K., Sweeney, K., & Moyer, A. (2017). Lesbian, gay, and heterosexual adoptive parents' perceptions of inclusivity and receptiveness in early childhood education settings. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 31*(1), 141-159. doi: 10.1080/02568543.2016.1244136

- Gunn, A. C. (2003). A philosophical anchor for creating inclusive communities in early childhood education: Anti-bias philosophy and Te Whāriki: Early childhood curriculum. *Waikato Journal of Education*, 9, 129-141.
- Gunn, A. C. (2009) "But who are the parents?" Examining heteronormative discourse in New Zealand Government early childhood reports and policy. *Early Childhood Folio: A collection of recent research*, 13, pp.27-30.
- Gunn, A. C. (2015). The potential of queer theorising in early childhood education. In A. C. Gunn & L. Smith (eds.). *Sexual Cultures in Aotearoa New Zealand Education*, (pp. 21-34). Dunedin: Otago University Press.
- Hall, W., & Rodgers, G. (2018). Teachers' attitudes toward homosexuality and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer community in the United States. *Social Psychology of Education*, 22(1), 23-41. doi: 10.1007/s11218-018-9463-9
- Hedge, A., Averett, P., White, C., & Deese, S. (2014). Examining preschool teachers' attitudes, comfort, action orientation and preparation to work with children reared by gay and lesbian Parents. *Early Child Development and Care*, 184(7), 963-976. doi: 10.1080/03004430.2013.845563
- Hornby, G. (2011). *Parental involvement in childhood education*. New York: Springer.
- Izzo, C., Weissberg, R., Kasprow, W., & Fendrich, M. (1999). A longitudinal assessment of teacher perceptions of parent involvement in children's education and school performance. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 27(6), 817-839. doi: 10.1023/a:1022262625984
- Janmohamed, Z. (2014). *Getting beyond equity and inclusion: Queering early childhood education* (Doctoral Thesis). Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of University of Toronto.
- Kelly, J. (2012). Two daddy tigers and a baby tiger: promoting understandings about same gender parented families using picture books. *Early Years*, 32(3), 288-300. doi: 10.1080/09575146.2011.652074
- Kelly, J. (2013). Supporting diversity picture books featuring same-gender parental families. *Early Childhood Folio*, 17(1), 24-29.
- Kim, S., Kwangok, S., & Carrola, P. (2017). Living together in a diverse world: Conversations about the stories of two mommies and daddies among Mexican-descent bilingual kindergarteners. *Multicultural Learning and Teaching*. doi: 10.1515/mlt- 2016-0012
- Kim, E., Sheridan, S., Kwon, K., & Koziol, N. (2013). Parent beliefs and children's social-behavioural functioning: The mediating role of parent-teacher relationships. *Journal Of School Psychology*, 51(2), 175-185. doi: 10.1016/j.jsp.2013.01.003
- Krikorian, C. (2016). *Inclusive classroom environments: Creating space for gender non-conforming, diverse family structures* (Master's Thesis). The Faculty of Graduates (Early Childhood Education) at The University of British Columbia.
- Lee, D. (2010). Gay mothers and early childhood education: Standing tall. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 35(1), 16-23.

- Leland, A. (2017). Navigating gay fatherhood: the experiences of four sets of gay fathers with their children's education. *Gender and Education, 29*(5), 632-647. doi: 10.1080/09540253.2017.1303824
- Lester, J. (2014). Homonormativity in children's literature: An intersectional analysis of queer-themed picture books. *Journal of LGBT Youth, 11*(3), 244-275. doi: 10.1080/19361653.2013.879465
- Meadows, M. (2001). Gay, lesbian, transgendered and bisexual Families: The teacher or caregiver's role in the development of positive relationships. Rural, urban and minority education. *Journal of Early Education and Family Review, 8*(3), 24-29.
- Michaud, C., & Stelmach, B. (2019). Lesbian and gay parents' experiences and their relationships with/in Schools: An Alberta study. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy, 188*, 69-85.
- Morgan, K. & Kelly-Ware, J. (2016). "You have to start with something": Picture books to promote understandings of queer cultures, gender and family diversity. *Early Childhood Folio, 20*(1), 3-8.
- Naidoo, J. (2013). Over the rainbow and under the radar: Library services and programs to LGBTQ families. *Children and Libraries, 11*(3), 34-40.
- Paton, M. (2019). Welcoming rainbow families: How your service can be more inclusive of LGBTIQ+ families. *Rattler (Sydney), 126*, 9-11.
- Paula, A., & Silva, P. (2014). Supporting gay and lesbian families in the early childhood classroom. *YC Young Children, 69*(4), 40-45. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/ycyoungchildren.69.4.40>
- Pickering, M. (2001). *Stereotyping. The politics of representation*. Hampshire: Palgrave.
- Rieger, G., Linsenmeier, J., Gygax, L., & Bailey, J. (2008). Sexual orientation and childhood gender nonconformity: Evidence from home videos. *Developmental Psychology, 44*(1), 46-58. doi: 10.1037/0012-1649.44.1.46
- Riggs, D., & Due, C. (2013). Moving beyond homonormativity in teacher training: experiences from South Australia. *Sex Education, 13*(sup1), S99-S112. doi: 10.1080/14681811.2012.760447
- Robinson, K. (2002). Making the invisible visible: Gay and lesbian issues in early childhood education. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood, 3*(3), 415-434. doi: 10.2304/ciec.2002.3.3.8
- Robinson, K. (2005). Doing anti-homophobia and anti-heterosexism in early childhood education: Moving beyond the immobilising impacts of 'risks', 'fears' and 'silences'. Can we afford not to? *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood, 6*(2), 175-188. doi: 10.2304/ciec.2005.6.2.7
- Ryan, C., & Hermann-Wilmarth, J. (2013). Already on the shelf: Queer readings of award-winning children's literature. *Journal of Literacy Research, 45*(2), 142-172. doi: 10.1177/1086296x13479778
- Riggs, D., & Augoustinos, M. (2007). Learning difference: Representations of diversity in storybooks for children of gay and lesbian parents. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies, 3*(2-3), 133-156. doi: 10.1300/j461v03n02\_06

- Sapp, J. (2010). A review of gay and lesbian themed early childhood children's literature. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 35(1), 32-40.
- Schall, J., & Kauffmann, G. (2003). Exploring literature with gay and lesbian characters in the elementary school. *Journal of Children's Literature*, 29(1), 36-45.
- Shin, K. (2019). Examining the experiences of lesbian prospective kindergarten teachers. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Research in Early Childhood Education*, 13(1), 85-106.
- Skattebol, J., & Ferfolja, T. (2007). Voices from an enclave Lesbian mothers' experiences of child care. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 32(1), 10-18.
- Souto-Manning, M., & Hermann-Wilmarth, J. (2008). Teacher inquiries into gay and lesbian families in early childhood classrooms. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 6(3), 263-280. doi: 10.1177/1476718x08094450
- Surtees, N. (2003). Unravelling the woven mat: Queering the Whāriki. *Waikato Journal of Education*, 9, 143-153. doi: 10.15663/wje.v9i0.391
- Surtees, N. (2005). Teacher talk about and around sexuality in early childhood education: Deciphering an unwritten code. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 6(1), 19-29. doi: 10.2304/ciec.2005.6.1.5
- Surtees, N. (2017). *Narrating connections and boundaries: Constructing relatedness in lesbian known donor familial configurations* (Doctoral Thesis). University of Canterbury.
- Taylor, A. (2010). Troubling childhood innocence: Reframing the debate over the media sexualisation of children. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 35(1), 48-57.
- Taylor, N. (2012). U.S. children's picture books and the homonormative subject. *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 9(2), 136-152. doi: 10.1080/19361653.2011.649646
- Taylor, A., & Richardson, C. (2005). Queering home corner. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 6(2), 163-173. doi: 10.2304/ciec.2005.6.2.6
- Threlkeld, A. (2014). A critical queer literacy approach to teaching children's literature about same-sex parenting. *Advances in Early Childhood And K-12 Education*, 223-242. doi: 10.4018/978-1-4666-5059-6.ch010
- Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET). (2016). *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework*. East Melbourne: State Government of Victoria.
- Walkerdine, V. (2001). Safety and danger: Childhood, sexuality and space at the end of the millennium. In K. Hultqvist & G. Dahlberg, *Governing the child in the new millennium* (pp. 15-34). NY: Routledge.