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

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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 discussion 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 heteronormality 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 & Augustinos, 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, Kasprow & 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 updates 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


