Queering Early Childhood Studies: Challenging the Discourse of Developmentally Appropriate Practice

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Presentation Outline

• How can we integrate queer perspectives into ECE training?
• What’s the problem with DAP in Ontario, Canada?
• Research Study: What the parents have to say.
Why queer?

- Alberta Journal of Educational Research, Fall 2010

- Theoretical Framework

- Bridging the gap between developmentalists and critical reflective practitioners
Queer Rights in Canada

- Canadian Criminal Code: homosexuality is decriminalized (1969)
- Charter guarantees equality, liberty and security and prevents discrimination of all individuals
Queer Rights in Canada

- Equality rights battle challenged the government’s actions as unconstitutional based on Charter
- Same sex adoptions in Ontario (1995)
- Canada legalizes Civil Marriage Act (2005)
- Responsibility to tax laws and rights to social benefits
Queer Rights in Canada

- Birth Registry Charter (June 2006)
- Multiple Parents’ Recognition AA vs. BB (January 2007)
- UNDHR - statement to end violation of queer rights (December 2008)

But not all is glorious in Canada and we are not ready for a pluralistic analysis of citizenship
A growing trend

- 2001 Canadian census: the first to inquire about same-sex partnerships

- Census Canada data (2006) indicates an increase of 33.9% of same sex parents

- Does not include people who don't self-identify on the census

- Family law has changed significantly but ECE remains dominated by a heteronormative lens
‘Heternormativity’ refers to the ‘normal’ and ‘natural’ status accorded to heterosexuality in Western society, routinely reinforced through a societal preference for “all things straight” (Robinson, 2005, p. 20).
Queering Early Childhood Studies

- Research questions
  - what is a queer family? Who counts?
  - what do early childhood educators understand about gender identity?
  - what are the experiences of queer parents in EC settings?
  - What changes are required in pre-service training?
Common educator misconceptions

- Development of sexual and gender identity
- Vulnerability to emotional development
- Difficulty in social relationships
- Majority of children between 5 – 12 experience normative developmental patterns (Patterson 2005)
What do queer parents say

- 16 sets of parents in rural, small town and large urban communities
- random sampling with semi-structured interviews
- Trans, lesbian, gay dads, bisexual mothers
What do queer parents say

• focus on relationships between teachers and children

• Parents worry about subtle forms of homophobia through exclusionary practice

• Principals and managers can set the tone by establishing progressive anti-harassment policies and practices
What did queer educators say?

- Pre-service training has to be the first place to discuss the presence of queer families and staff

- Personal life of educators is silenced due to fear of homophobia

- Remaining closeted creates a sense of low morale and stress
What did queer educators say?

- Homophobia is not always overt - assume everyone is “straight”
- School principals have to show leadership to create safety and inclusive policy
- Encourage the integration of queer stories into pre-service curriculum
Queering Early Childhood Studies:
The exploration continues

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