



BEYOND BUILDING BRIDGES

Transforming Practice in ECE

to Support Queer Children and Families

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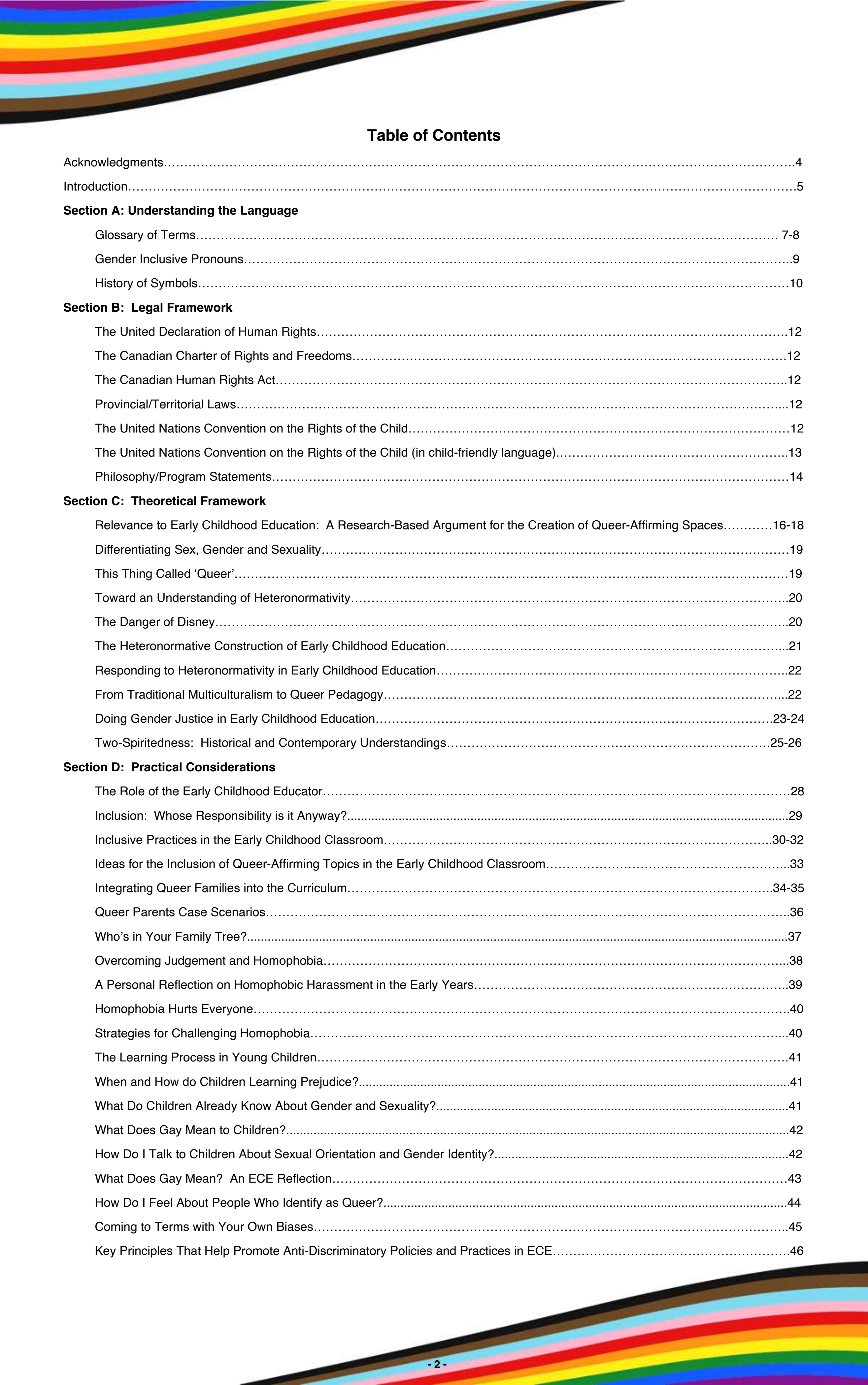
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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....4

Introduction.....5

Section A: Understanding the Language

 Glossary of Terms..... 7-8

 Gender Inclusive Pronouns.....9

 History of Symbols.....10

Section B: Legal Framework

 The United Declaration of Human Rights.....12

 The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.....12

 The Canadian Human Rights Act.....12

 Provincial/Territorial Laws.....12

 The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.....12

 The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (in child-friendly language).....13

 Philosophy/Program Statements.....14

Section C: Theoretical Framework

 Relevance to Early Childhood Education: A Research-Based Argument for the Creation of Queer-Affirming Spaces.....16-18

 Differentiating Sex, Gender and Sexuality.....19

 This Thing Called ‘Queer’.....19

 Toward an Understanding of Heteronormativity.....20

 The Danger of Disney.....20

 The Heteronormative Construction of Early Childhood Education.....21

 Responding to Heteronormativity in Early Childhood Education.....22

 From Traditional Multiculturalism to Queer Pedagogy.....22

 Doing Gender Justice in Early Childhood Education.....23-24

 Two-Spiritedness: Historical and Contemporary Understandings.....25-26

Section D: Practical Considerations

 The Role of the Early Childhood Educator.....28

 Inclusion: Whose Responsibility is it Anyway?.....29

 Inclusive Practices in the Early Childhood Classroom.....30-32

 Ideas for the Inclusion of Queer-Affirming Topics in the Early Childhood Classroom.....33

 Integrating Queer Families into the Curriculum.....34-35

 Queer Parents Case Scenarios.....36

 Who’s in Your Family Tree?.....37

 Overcoming Judgement and Homophobia.....38

 A Personal Reflection on Homophobic Harassment in the Early Years.....39

 Homophobia Hurts Everyone.....40

 Strategies for Challenging Homophobia.....40

 The Learning Process in Young Children.....41

 When and How do Children Learning Prejudice?.....41

 What Do Children Already Know About Gender and Sexuality?.....41

 What Does Gay Mean to Children?.....42

 How Do I Talk to Children About Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity?.....42

 What Does Gay Mean? An ECE Reflection.....43

 How Do I Feel About People Who Identify as Queer?.....44

 Coming to Terms with Your Own Biases.....45

 Key Principles That Help Promote Anti-Discriminatory Policies and Practices in ECE.....46

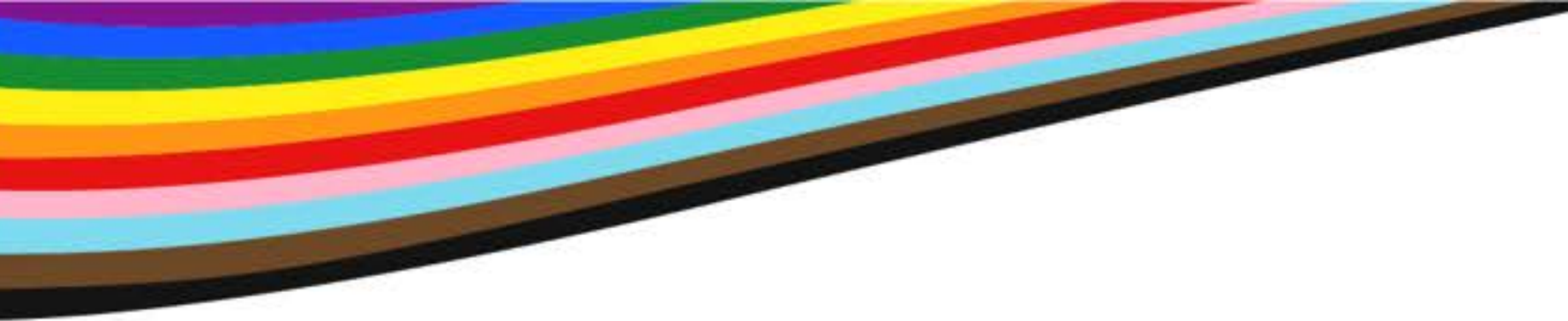


Table of Contents (cont'd)

ECE Coming Out Stories.....46

What the ECE Staff and Students Said.....47

How Can You be Supportive of Transgender/Transsexual People?.....48

A Trans ECE Student Reflection.....48

Section E: Appendices

A - Evolution of Queer Rights in Canada Timeline.....51-59

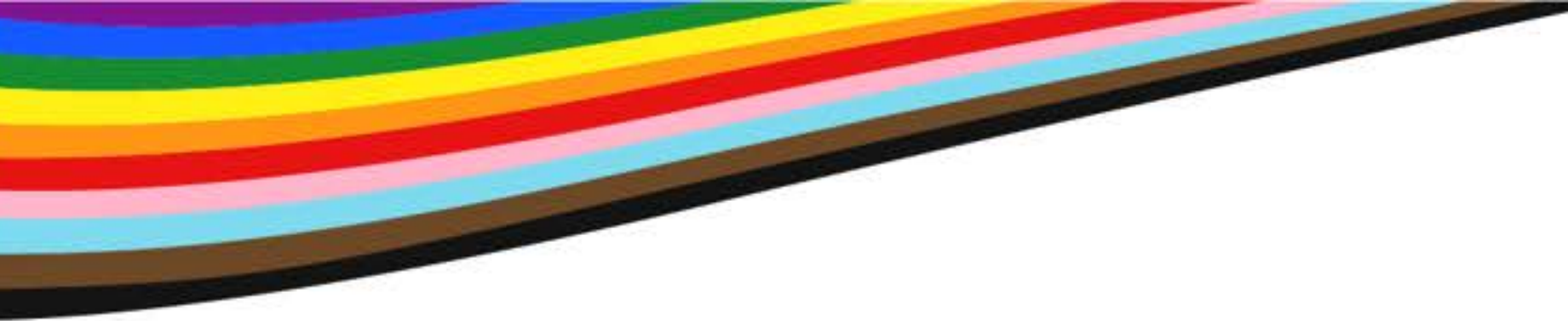
B - Queer Inclusive Children’s Booklist.....60-79

C - Queer Resources and Supports.....80

About the Authors.....81

References.....82-85





Acknowledgements

The first edition of *Building Bridges* was published nearly twenty years ago, with a second edition following in 2009. Since then, the social and political landscape for queer individuals has changed dramatically around the world. While much progress has been made concerning the protection of existing human rights, a noticeable shift in support for Canada's queer communities in some parts of the country is evident, largely because of the war on gender and sexual diversity occurring in the United States. In fact, numerous examples of a similar battle abound. This includes the legislated policing of children's usage of pronouns in schools in some provinces (Ibrahim, 2023; Talati, 2023), recent mass protests organized in response to Ontario's sex education curriculum (Carter, 2023), opposition to Drag Queen Story Hours, which has drawn ire from many parents (Zoledziowski & Sheldon, 2023), the defamation of Pride flags on the properties of several elementary schools (Mandes, 2023; McGowan, 2023; Peesker, 2023; Sachdeva, 2023) and the current campaign to ban queer-positive children's books (Beattie, 2023; Froese, 2023; Wong, 2024). *Beyond Building Bridges* was written, in part, as a response to these inequities and is a reminder that, where queer rights are concerned, the fight is not yet over.

In this edition, the title of the resource was changed to *Beyond Building Bridges: Transforming Practice in Early Childhood Education*. This was done as a deliberate effort to incite change in the field. It is a call to early childhood professionals across the country to build the responsive relationships they are required to form with all families, including those headed by queer parents, and instigate meaningful and enduring social change. In other words, those working with young children must make a concerted effort to alter taken-for-granted practices that render gender and sexuality invisible in early childhood curriculum. It is time to walk the talk, so to speak; to commit oneself to queering the classroom so that a sense of belonging is established for all stakeholders, including queer children and families.

The project is housed at the Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development at OISE and the Faculty of Life Sciences and Wellness at Humber Polytechnic, as it fits into their mandates of access, equity and public education. We want to acknowledge several people who helped our vision for this third instalment come to fruition. Our appreciation is extended, first and foremost, to Emma Wontorra for the research she conducted to create our queer rights timeline and children's booklist. Additionally, we'd like to express our deepest gratitude to Kristan Lingard and Lisa Salem-Wiseman, the Dean and Associate Dean of the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences at Humber Polytechnic for helping us find the resources necessary to make this project come to fruition. A big thank you, as well, to William Horton, Leslie Allison and Jeremy Fook Sen Chue Kee Cheung, who kindly volunteered their time and expertise to support us with the layout and design of the *Beyond Building Bridges* resource. We also extend our gratitude to the Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development at OISE and to Humber Polytechnic for housing our document online, both in Humber library's database and on the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences' website. We are also grateful to Tammy McGivern and Chasson Gracie for their endless hours of proofreading and the various families and practitioners who brought their original stories forward. Additionally, we are appreciative of all the people who have continued to share their personal experiences since the first edition of *Building Bridges* was published in 2006. Finally, we would like to thank our families for their ongoing support of our work and for providing feedback on content, which has helped us ensure that the material is written in an accessible manner.

We hope that *Beyond Building Bridges* becomes a resource that inspires a commitment to social transformation and is widely used by members of the profession across the country. In it, there is a little something for everybody – from theoretical discussions that set the stage for practice to recommendations for including gender and sexual diversity in the programs in which you work. It is ultimately our hope that *Beyond Building Bridges* will continue to shrink the gap between educators and Canada's growing queer community.

Ryan and Zeenat
October 2025

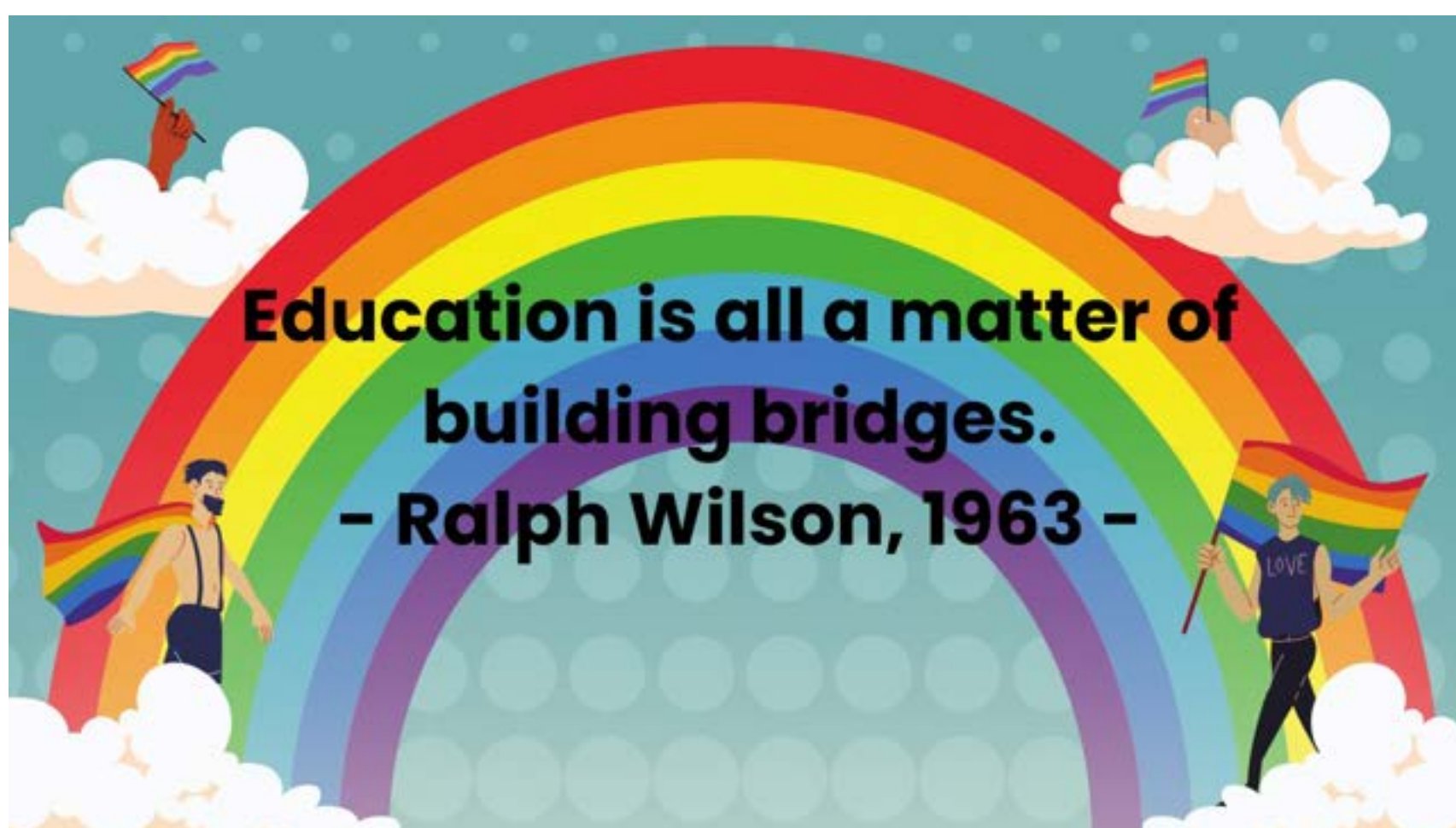
Introduction:

20 Years of Building Bridges with Queer Families in Early Childhood Education

Queer rights in Canada have seen significant change in the last two decades and Canada is seen as a relatively welcoming country for people of various backgrounds. Canadians recognize the right to marry a partner of the same sex and has built in protections in the Canadian Human Rights Act. Some provincial and territorial jurisdictions include additional protection for Trans individuals. Parents are permitted to register the birth of their child with biological and non-biological parents and non-birth parents are permitted to legally adopt their children. In some jurisdictions, children and youth, who choose to use their non-birth name and gender, are permitted to do so within the school environment. In Ontario, gender affirming surgeries are covered by publicly funded health plans. Pride celebrations are held every summer, often leading to a significant contribution to the local economy. It is the time when rainbow flags seem to be flying in abundance. The notion of inclusion is touted in the media with many stories of queer individuals and their families.

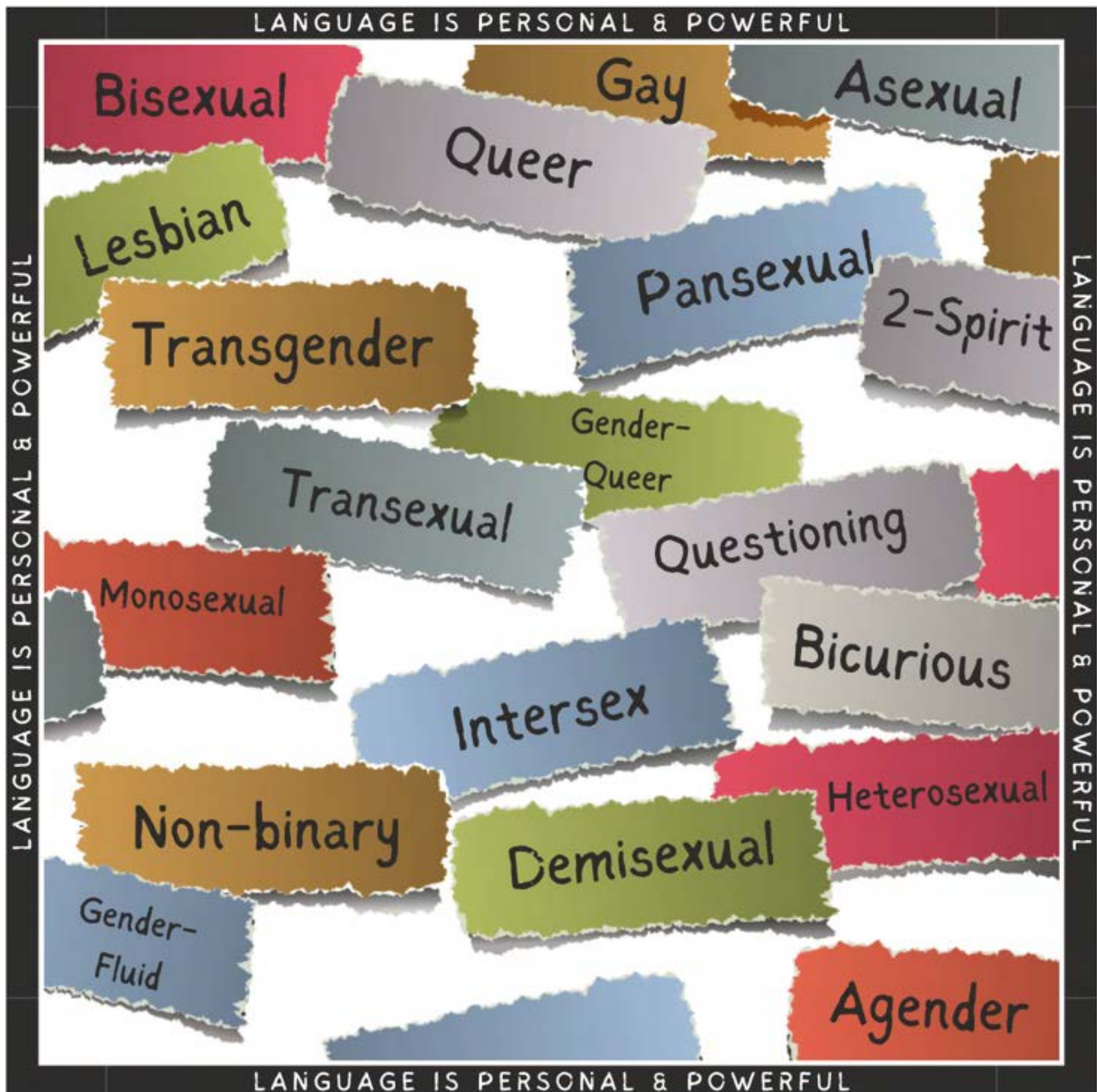
Although legal protections have improved for queer individuals, discrimination based on gender and sexuality continues across Canada. This is especially true for marginalized communities, who continue to face discrimination and violence. Trans individuals face a higher rate of unemployment and harassment in the workplace. Urban communities may provide a wider safety net for queer individuals with a sense of anonymity. However, this is only true in some communities. The level of discrimination, isolation and harassment is more prevalent in rural communities with fewer supports available for queer individuals. Transgender youth face significantly more challenges accessing appropriate health care. Communities within Canada can be welcoming and supportive. They can also be harsh and exclusionary of queer individuals.

The practice of early childhood education is built on an understanding of a legal and policy framework for young children and their families. It is built on a practice that includes ethical responsibilities to demonstrate advocacy and inclusion of all children, including those who live in queer families or who may identify as queer. After the birth or adoption of children, where parents engage with health professionals, the next group of professionals' families will see are early childhood educators – in a drop-in program or family resource programs, early childhood centres or home care. They may meet them in kindergarten programs or through organizations that serve children with diverse needs. Early childhood educators have an obligation and a responsibility to be inclusive of all children and their families – including those who may be queer. *Beyond Building Bridges* is designed to provide a resource for the early childhood sector to expand their knowledge in queer rights and improve their practice in supporting all children and their families.



Section A:

Understanding the Language



"Without language, one cannot talk about oneself. Without language, one does not exist."

— Toni Morrison —

A Glossary of Terms

Language is important in terms of identity, as labels such as those identified below are deeply personal. In some cases, families may openly disclose their preferred label(s). Most often, however, educators must first build trusting relationships with individuals who self-identify as non-cisgender and/or non-heterosexual before the language they use to describe their identity/identities is revealed.

Queer: Historically, the term “queer” was a derogatory term used to describe lesbians and gay men. In the 1980’s, within the lesbian and gay civil rights struggle, a movement emerged to reclaim the word and use it in a positive way. Today, “queer” is frequently used as an umbrella term to refer to an array of identities that challenge heterosexist constructions of sexuality and gender. It is argued that the use of “queer” as a unifying category remedies the failure of the widely known “LGBTQ” acronym to acknowledge the myriad of sexual and gender identities found in Western societies including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, intersex, two spirited and “questioning” people. With this in mind, we have chosen to use the term “queer” in place of “LGBTQ” to recognize all expressions of gender and sexuality.

2SLGBTQQ+: A widely used acronym that refers to a range of identities that fall outside gender- and sexuality-based norms.

2S = 2-Spirited: An umbrella term used in many Indigenous communities, which is meant to capture a wide range of identities related to sexuality and spiritual and gender identity.

L = Lesbian/G = Gay: Describes Preferred, self-chosen terms to describe individuals whose primary romantic and sexual relationships are with members of the same sex. The term gay is sometimes used to refer to both men and women, although many women prefer the term lesbian. Both words describe more than sexual orientation. For many lesbians and gay men, they also reflect a sense of community, shared history, culture and experience.

B = Bisexual: A man or woman who can be attracted to or have a romantic/sexual relationship with members of either sex.

T = Transgender: An umbrella term intended to include anyone whose gender identity or expression falls outside the stereotypically expected behaviours of men and women. The word is commonly used to refer to individuals whose biological sex does not align with their gender identity (i.e. an individual who was born male but feels like they are female).

T = Transsexual: People who may had made or are making a transition from one gender to another so that their bodies match the gender they feel they truly are. This often, but not always, involves some kind of medical intervention (ex. taking hormones; sexual reassignment surgery).

I = Intersex: General term for a range of physiological conditions in which a person is born with reproductive or sexual anatomy that does not fit the typical definition of female and male. For example, a person may be born with external female genitalia but internal male reproductive anatomy.

Q = Queer: An umbrella term that describes individuals who identify as anything other than cisgender and/or heterosexual.

Q = Questioning: A person who is engaged in the process of questioning his or her sexual orientation or gender identity.



Term	Definition
Agender	Identifies as having no gender or being gender neutral. Often describes a lack of connection to gender categories.
Androgynous	Having both male and female characteristics. Another term used is transgender and pan gendered.
Androsexual	Attracted to masculinity or men (regardless of one’s own gender).
Bigender	Identifies as two genders, either at the same time or alternating between them. The two genders can be male and female or include other non-binary identities.
Cisgender	Refers to individuals whose gender identity and expression aligns with their sex at birth. For example, cis-males are people who were born male and identify as such. Cis females, on the other hand, were born and identify as female.
Coming out	A lifelong process where queer people become aware of, acknowledge, accept, appreciate, and inform others of their sexual or gender identity. Coming out can involve self-knowledge, or sharing this information with friends, family, employers and their children’s teachers and caregivers.
Demisexual	Experiences sexual attraction only after forming a strong emotional connection.
Gender	Is a social construct that refers to one’s identity as male or female. Gender also encompasses how one expresses themselves (i.e. as masculine, feminine, both or neither) and the roles one takes in society (ex. as caretakers, breadwinners, etc.).
Genderfluid	A person whose gender identity changes over time or depending on the situation. May feel more male some days, more female others, or something else entirely.
Genderqueer	A non-binary identity that challenges traditional gender norms. May blend, shift between, or reject gender categories.
Gynosexual	Attracted to femininity or women.
Heteronormativity	Heteronormativity is a term that is used to describe the marginalization of non-heterosexual lifestyles and the view that heterosexuality is the normal sexual orientation.
Heterosexism	The institutionalized set of beliefs that heterosexuality is normal, natural and superior to homosexuality. Heterosexism confers certain privileges such as legal protection, the rights to marry, and freedom to be publicly affectionate, on people who are heterosexual or appear to be.
Heterosexual	A category of identity where one is physically attracted to and has a romantic interest in members of the opposite sex.
Homophobia	The fear, hatred, or intolerance of queer people. Homophobic acts can range from avoidance, to name calling, to denial of the right to equality, to violence targeting queer people and their families.
Homosexual	An umbrella term used to describe individuals who are attracted to/have sexual relationships with members of the same sex. Homosexuality was once classified as a mental illness. Thus, the word carries with it negative connotations and is rarely used in contemporary discourse.
Internalized homophobia	The negative beliefs and attitudes about same sex orientation that lesbian, gay and bisexual people inevitably absorb through growing up in a heterosexist culture.
Non-binary	A gender identity that does not fit within the traditional categories of male or female. Can include identities like genderqueer, genderfluid, agender, etc.
Pansexual	Refers to individuals who are attracted to someone irrespective of their gender and/or sexual identities. It is the most inclusive form of sexuality.
Sex	One’s biological distinction as male, female or some combination of both. Sex is usually determined by one’s genitalia, hormones and chromosomes.
Sexuality	Determined by who one’s erotic desires and emotional attractions. Sexuality has an orientation component (which we are born with) and a behaviour component (practices we choose to engage in). In some cases, one’s orientation aligns with their behaviour. For example, a female who is attracted to males engages in sexual relations with males. In other circumstances, however, one’s orientation may be at odds with their behaviour. This is often the case with individuals who are born non-heterosexual but choose, for various reasons, to engage in sexual acts with members of the opposite sex.
Skoliosexual	Attracted to non-binary or gender-nonconforming people.
Straight ally	A heterosexually identified person who supports and advocates for the equal rights of individuals within queer communities.



Gender Inclusive Pronouns

Subjective	Objective	Possessive	Reflexive
She	Her	Hers	Herself
He	Him	His	Himself
They	Them	Theirs	Themselves
Ze	Hir	Hirs	Hirself
Xe	Xem	Xirs	Xemself
Ver	Vir	Vis	Verself
Te	Tem	Ter	Temself
Ey	Em	Eir	Emselves

Gender Pronoun Considerations

1. Don't assume someone's gender identity.
2. Don't outright ask someone what pronouns they use, especially when first meeting them. This could make them feel uncomfortable.
3. Introduce yourself with your own pronouns: "Hi, I'm Rinaldo and my pronouns are he/him."
4. Once a relationship has been established and if it's still unknown, respectfully ask what someone's pronouns are.
5. Avoid using the phrase "preferred pronouns," as this implies that someone's gender is a preference.
6. Consider using a gender-neutral honorific when describing someone's position in a professional setting. Mrs., Mr. and Ms. are examples of common honorifics. Gender neutral variations include: Mx. (the most common gender-neutral honorific), Pr. (derived from person), Msr. (a mix of miss and sir) and Misc. (miscellaneous).
7. Gently correct others if a mistake in pronoun usage is made.
8. Ask for pronouns only in cases where the interaction is significant. For example, you wouldn't necessarily ask someone serving you at a restaurant what their gender pronouns are.
9. Be open to continuous learning.



A History of Symbols

The gay pride flag has undergone many iterations since it was first used in San Francisco in 1978. The image below outlines its evolution, from an artifact that is representative of common gender and sexual identities to one that is more inclusive...



1978
Gilbert Baker designed the first Pride Flag at the request of gay San Francisco Mayor Harvey Milk. It debuted at the San Francisco Gay Freedom Day Parade (June 25, 1978).



1979
Baker updated the flag the following year, removing two stripes.



2017
The Philadelphia Office of LGBT Affairs added black and brown stripes for underrepresented queer people of color.



2018
Daniel Quasar added a chevron to represent people of color and transgender people, and people affected by HIV/AIDS.



2021
Valentino Vecchietti added the intersex flag to the chevron.

Image from: https://www.reddit.com/r/lgbt/comments/1evuh93/evolution_of_the_lgbtq_pride_flag/

The following are additional symbols related to queer rights. Displaying any of these in your workplace is a visual indication that you endorse gender- and sexuality-based rights for all...



The Nazis required known male homosexuals to wear an inverted pink triangle (one tip pointing down) so that they could be quickly targeted for special abuse. In the 1970's, gay activists began using this symbol as a way of identifying themselves and at the same time calling attention to this long-forgotten chapter in gay history. In many instances, the triangle has been turned up (one tip pointing up) as a sign of reversing the fortunes of LGBTQ people. Lesbians were assigned black, upside-down triangles.

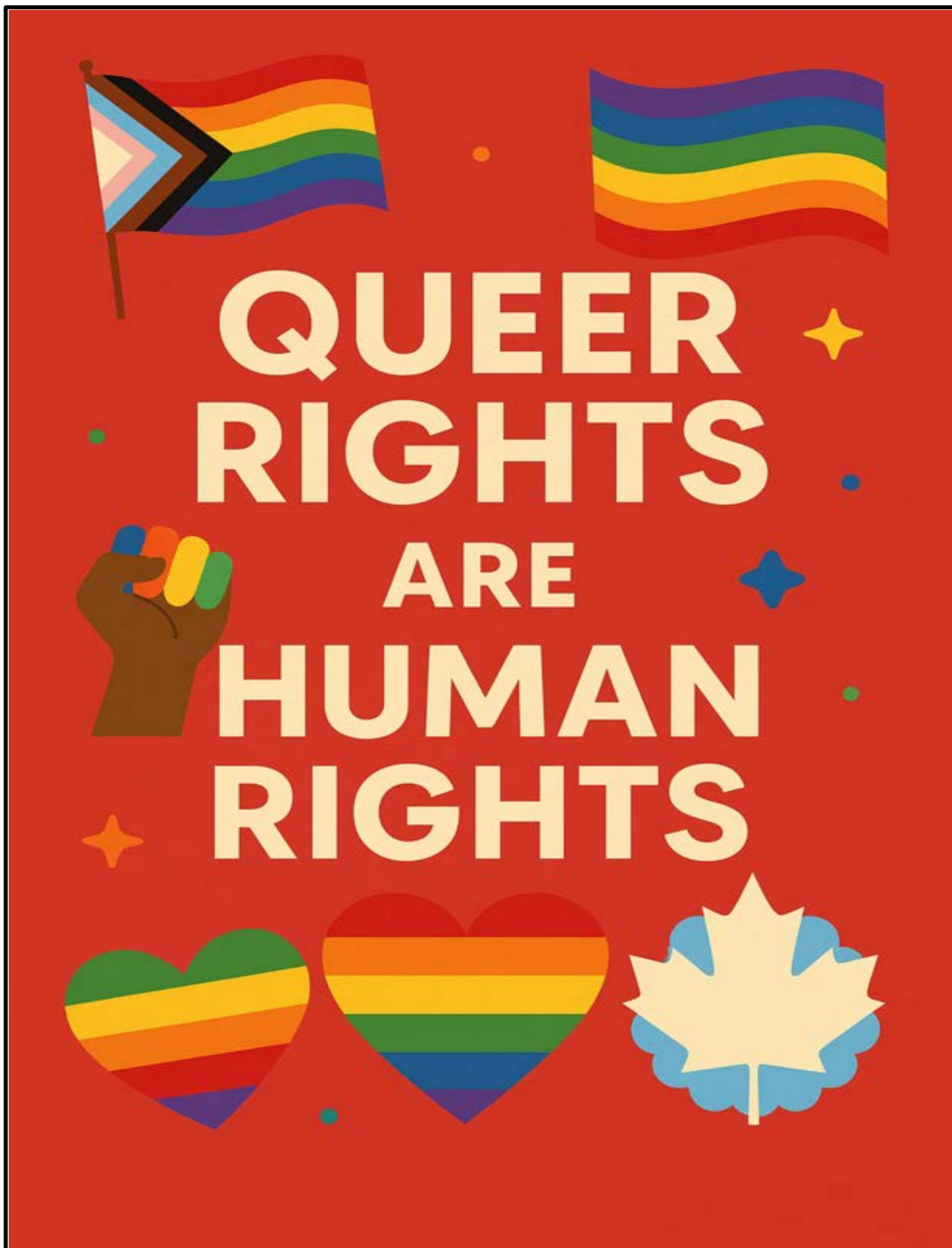
Image and description from:
<http://si.unl.edu/lgbtqa/SafeSpaces/symbols.html>

A more progressive Pride flag was first used in 2018 and was updated again in 2021 to be more reflective of marginalized groups within queer communities, such as People of Colour and those living with HIV/AIDS. The colours are representative of the following: Red = life; orange = healing; yellow = sunlight; green = nature; blue = serenity; purple = inner strength and dignity; brown/black = for People of Colour and the HIV/AIDS community; pink/baby blue/white = for transgender/nonbinary people; arrow shape = emphasizes progress; circle = for intersex people.

The straight ally symbol indicates that you are heterosexual and cisgender but support gender- and sexuality-based rights for all. Individuals demonstrate allyship in a variety of ways, including participating in Gay-Straight alliances (GSA) in schools; attending annual Pride celebrations; protesting anti-queer policies or simply by befriending individuals who do not identify as heterosexual.

Section B:

Legal Framework



"No pride for some of us without liberation for all of us."

– Marsha P. Johnson, 2013 –

Canada is often regarded around the world as a cultural mosaic, a place where people from diverse backgrounds can co-exist while maintaining their different identities. Like other social groups, Canada's queer community has experienced much progress in terms of support for basic human rights, often enshrined in law, which protects them from discrimination based on their gender and/or sexual identities. The following section outlines some of the most significant measures to protect the rights of queer people in this country and includes laws of international, national and provincial/territorial significance. You will note that, in some cases, queer rights were ensured from the outset of the law's enactment, while others were later revised to include attention to gender and sexual differences. Such is the case now that queer rights parallel rights accorded to other marginalized populations, thereby positioning Canada as a leader on the global stage as a beacon of hope and humanity for all citizens.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

In December 2008, a statement endorsed by more than 50 countries (including Canada), which called for an end to the violation of queer rights around the world, was heard by the UN General Assembly. The reading of the statement was the first time that the General Assembly formally addressed the abuse of human rights based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Specifically, the draft statement condemns violence, harassment, discrimination, exclusion, stigmatization and prejudice toward the world's queer population. It also condemns killings, executions, torture, arbitrary arrest and deprivation of economic, social and cultural rights based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Although the UDHR was drafted 60 years ago and was intended to ensure the protection of human rights without exception, violence and prejudice against queer individuals endured. In fact, despite this commitment to universality, many countries continued to uphold laws that criminalized consensual sexual conduct between partners of the same sex and failed to address the ongoing persecution of queer individuals in many parts of the world. This most recent statement, however, sends a resounding message that the inequitable application of the UDHR will no longer be tolerated. Instead, international support for this statement is a major milestone in the protection of human rights for the global queer community.

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms was enacted in 1982, as part of the Constitution Act. This marked a significant moment in Canadian history, as it entrenched a wide range of civil liberties and human rights into the country's constitution, making them enforceable by courts. Essentially, Section 15 guarantees access to a range of fundamental human rights, one of which is the right to live a life free of discrimination. While the Charter itself does not address sexual orientation and gender identity explicitly, it does hold that no Canadian shall be treated differently under the law for any reason.

The Canadian Human Rights Act

Passed in 1977, the Canadian Human Rights Act is a piece of legislation that prohibits discrimination. In 1996, it was amended to add sexual orientation to its list of protected categories. In 2017, the Act was further amended to include gender identity and gender expression as protected grounds.

Provincial/Territorial Laws

Many provinces and territories have their own human rights legislation that prohibits discrimination of any kind, including discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation. One such piece of legislation is the Ontario Human Rights Code. Established in 1962, the Code makes the discrimination and harassment of Ontarians based on their sexual orientation or gender identity illegal. Reference to sexual orientation was officially included in the Code in 1986, while assurance against differential treatment based on gender identity and gender expression was added in 2012 through Bill 33, also known as Toby's Act.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989 and enforced nearly a year later, world leaders vowed to protect the rights of children across the globe. Canada signed in support of the Convention on May 28th, 1990. The Convention provides protection from discrimination of any kind (Article 2); the right to an identity (Article 8); the right to an opinion and for it to be listened to and taken seriously (Article 12); the right to a private life (Article 16); the right to be protected against hurt or bad treatment (Article 19); the right to individualized medical care that ensures an overall sense of health and wellbeing (Article 24); the right not to be punished in a cruel or hurtful way (Article 37) and the right to help if hurt, neglected or badly treated (Article 39).

For more information on human rights in Canada, please visit the Canadian Human Rights Commission's website @ <https://www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/individuals/human-rights/about-human-rights>.

UN Declaration of Human Rights:
Child-Friendly Version

1 DEFINITION OF A CHILD	2 NO DISCRIMINATION	3 BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD	4 MAKING RIGHTS REAL	5 FAMILY GUIDANCE AS CHILDREN DEVELOP	6 LIFE, SURVIVAL AND DEVELOPMENT	7 NAME AND NATIONALITY
8 IDENTITY	9 KEEPING FAMILIES TOGETHER	10 CONTACT WITH PARENTS ACROSS COUNTRIES	11 PROTECTION FROM KIDNAPPING	12 RESPECT FOR CHILDREN'S VIEWS	13 SHARING THOUGHTS FREELY	14 FREEDOM OF THOUGHT AND RELIGION
15 SETTING UP OR JOINING GROUPS	16 PROTECTION OF PRIVACY	17 ACCESS TO INFORMATION	18 RESPONSIBILITY OF PARENTS	19 PROTECTION FROM VIOLENCE	20 CHILDREN WITHOUT FAMILIES	21 CHILDREN WHO ARE ADOPTED
22 REFUGEE CHILDREN	23 CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES	24 HEALTH, WATER, FOOD, ENVIRONMENT	25 REVIEW OF A CHILD'S PLACEMENT	26 SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC HELP	27 FOOD, CLOTHING, A SAFE HOME	28 ACCESS TO EDUCATION
29 AIMS OF EDUCATION	30 MINORITY CULTURE, LANGUAGE AND RELIGION	31 REST, PLAY, CULTURE, ARTS	32 PROTECTION FROM HARMFUL WORK	33 PROTECTION FROM HARMFUL DRUGS	34 PROTECTION FROM SEXUAL ABUSE	35 PREVENTION OF SALE AND TRAFFICKING
36 PROTECTION FROM EXPLOITATION	37 CHILDREN IN DETENTION	38 PROTECTION IN WAR	39 RECOVERY AND REINTEGRATION	40 CHILDREN WHO BREAK THE LAW	41 BEST LAW FOR CHILDREN APPLIES	42 EVERYONE MUST KNOW CHILDREN'S RIGHTS
43-54 HOW THE CONVENTION WORKS	CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD					

To download a copy of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in child-friendly language, visit Unicef’s website @ unicef.org/child-rights-convention/convention-text-childrens-version

* For a more thorough overview of the evolution of queer rights in Canada, please refer to Appendix A. *

Philosophy/Program Statements

Philosophy or program statements are generally designed to demonstrate for the public an organization’s stance on a variety of issues, including their beliefs about the importance of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging. They are often developed as an extension of laws in which human rights are enshrined, such as the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Canadian Human Rights Act. Philosophy or program statements that clearly articulate a commitment to gender and sexual diversity are essential as they render transparent an organization’s approach to the inclusion of queer issues in classroom spaces for young children. Below is a sample statement developed by Humber Polytechnic’s Child Development Centre. As you will note, it is unequivocal in its support for gender- and sexuality-based differences.

All of the educators at Humber Child Development Centre (CDC) strive for an open, respectful, welcoming, and authentically inclusive child care environment – where ALL families are welcome irrespective of their race, ethnicity, language, nationality, sex, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, ability, religion, family structure, age and size. We value and support a sense of belonging through being responsive to the needs of the children and their families in our care. The CDC proudly reflects the diversity of Humber Polytechnic and its surrounding community, which is represented in our programming and pedagogical approaches to learning and is at the forefront of building relationships. We are dedicated to the holistic development of children and embrace the unique intellectual, physical, social and emotional needs of those in our care. We uphold the highest ethical standards, along with affirming and protecting the rights, dignity, and integrity of each member of our CDC community...

We believe that “diversity, equity and inclusion are pre-requisites for learning” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014a). Thus, our program and practices reflect a steadfast commitment to social justice; namely through the celebration of all types of human differences, from those representative of the children and families in our care, to those that extend beyond the classroom walls. Experiences for young children seek to cultivate an appreciation for diversity and a sense of empathy for all members of our global community. Educators serve as role models in this regard, demonstrating a commitment to inclusion in its fullest form. They are, in effect, our ambassadors for social justice whose mission is to prepare young children for the diverse world in which we live.



Section C: Theoretical Framework



“Queer theory destabilizes fixed identities and normative assumptions, inviting us to think critically about how power shapes gender and sexuality.”

– Nikki Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*, 2003 –

Relevance to Early Childhood Education:
A Research-Based Argument for the Creation of Queer-Affirming Spaces

Objective of study:

In 2024, Dr. Danielle Pusateri and I (Ryan Gracie) undertook a research project that aimed to explore early childhood professionals’ attitudes toward queer-affirming curriculum, comprised of content that supports the inclusion of gender and sexual diversity in classroom spaces for children 0 to 12. This study was undertaken because little research has examined the inclusion of gender and sexuality in Canadian early childhood settings. This study thus aims to fill this research gap. Toronto was chosen because it is Canada’s largest city and is home to the majority of the queer population in this country (Statistics Canada, 2022a, 2021b). Early Childhood Educators working in this jurisdiction will undoubtedly encounter queer children and/or families at some point in their career. It was initially hypothesized that results would largely be in favour of including gender and sexual diversity in the early childhood classroom.

Relevance of study:

This project was conceptualized, in part, because of the current state of queer rights around the world and to ascertain whether or not another edition of *Building Bridges* (Janmohamed and Campbell, 2009) was necessary. Although some progress has been made since 2009, when the last version of *Building Bridges* (Janmohamed and Campbell, 2009) was released, a retrenchment in the acceptance of queer citizens in many places has occurred. In Canada, this is primarily seen in the war on gender and sexuality through which children’s usage of pronouns in schools is strictly policed (Ibrahim, 2023; Talati, 2023), in recent mass protests organized in response to Ontario’s sex education curriculum (Carter, 2023), in the ire that Drag Queen Story Hours have drawn from many parents (Zoledziowski & Sheldon, 2023), in the defamation of Pride flags on the properties of several elementary schools (Mandes, 2023; McGowan, 2023; Peesker, 2023; Sachdeva, 2023) and in the current campaign to ban queer-positive children’s books (Beattie, 2023; Froese, 2023; Wong, 2024).

Furthermore, this project came to fruition due to Canada’s legal stance on human rights, as entrenched in legislation, such as the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Government of Canada, 1982) and provincial human rights codes (ex. The Ontario Human Rights Code [Government of Ontario, 1990]), all of which prioritize the preservation of gender- and sexuality-based rights among others. From a professional standpoint, this study was conducted because it is relevant to Ontario’s early childhood sector through its resounding endorsement of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (DEIB) as a key consideration for the development of policies and practices (College of Early Childhood Educators, 2017; OMed, 2014a; OMed, 2014b). In this regard, RECEs are positioned as ambassadors for social justice and have a legal, professional and moral obligation to support all forms of human difference in their practice, including gender- and sexuality-based differences (Swindler-Boutte, 2008).

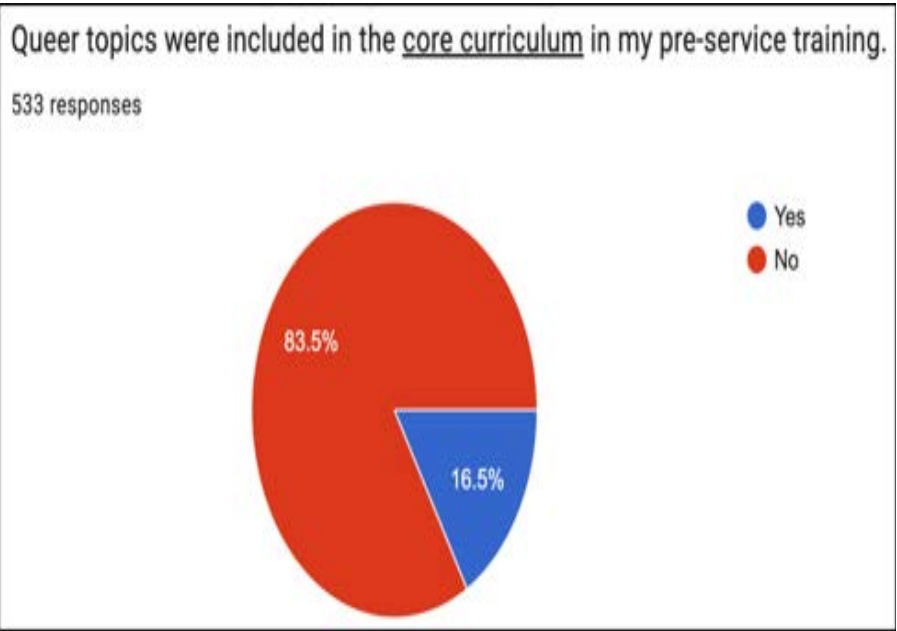
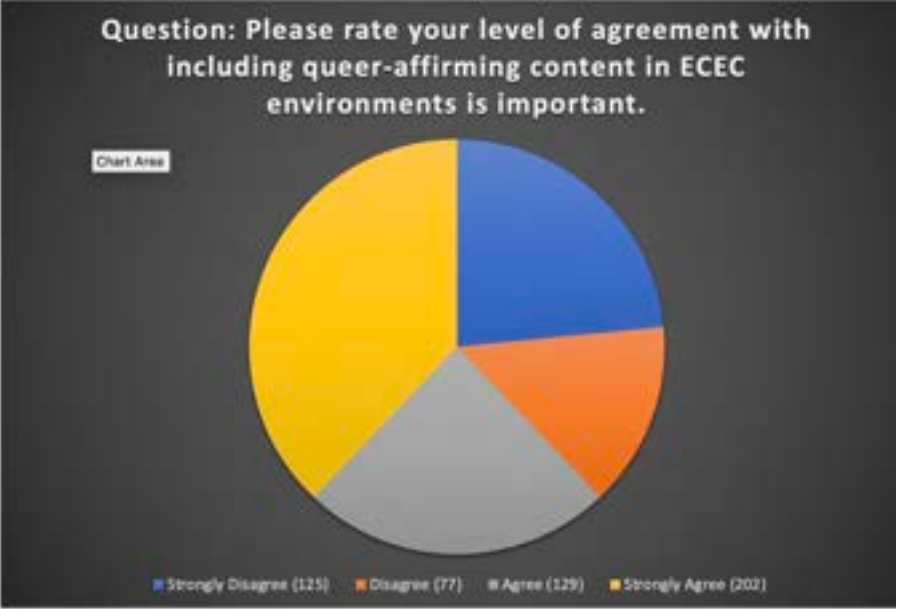


This just in! Queer rights in North America are under attack!

**Relevance to Early Childhood Education:
A Research-Based Argument for the Creation of Queer-Affirming Spaces
(cont'd)**

Results & Discussion:

Based on surveys completed by 533 Registered Early Childhood Educators in the GTA and 10 subsequent semi-structured virtual interviews, results were obtained that revealed mixed support for the inclusion of a queer-affirming curriculum in early childhood settings.



Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed that early childhood educators should integrate gender and sexual diversity into learning environments for young children. While a little more than half agreed or strongly agreed that this was important, 38% of participants strongly disagreed or disagreed. These results indicate that there is much work to be done to address the biases of educators, as studies consistently substantiate that their attitudes toward difference serve as the biggest barrier to the inclusion of queer-affirming content in ECEC environments. While Directors/Supervisors/Managers often rely on professional development to instigate changes in staff practice, we believe that something much more is needed; a systemic change to remedy the heteronormative constitution of the field itself. This includes, for example, the reconceptualization of pre-service training to be more inclusive of gender and sexual diversity so that ECEs graduates feeling adequately prepared to queer their classroom in support of those minoritized based on their gender and/or sexuality. And attention to queer-affirming topics should not be reserved for courses on inclusion alone. They should be woven throughout the curriculum, rather than being reduced to mere add-on topics that are only briefly discussed.

Another question asked participants about their pre-service training experience directly and, not surprisingly, we discovered that most post-secondary programs for ECEs in Ontario rarely discussed queer-affirming topics in class. Still, 78% of respondents indicated that they would be willing to learn how to meet the needs of queer people in their programs, be they children, families or colleagues. This result is promising as it speaks to the possibility that early childhood environments, through purposive intervention, may one day become safe spaces for all. We believe that government Ministries and regulatory bodies like the College of Early Childhood Educators in Ontario must play a direct role in transforming practice by mandating that support for gender and sexuality materialize in early learning and care settings. So, too, should curriculum frameworks used across the country be more explicit in their definitions of what constitutes diversity, as well be “queered” themselves so that they do not inadvertently reproduce heteronormative narratives so common in ECE. Such efforts would be an extension of legislation that already exists both nationally and provincially/territorially that prevents discrimination on the basis of gender and sexuality. For example, Bill C-13 (the Accepting Schools Act), which was enacted in Ontario schools in 2012, serves as a legislated effort to make schools safer and more inclusive spaces for all. The Act requires schools to prevent and address hate-motivated bullying and incorporate the creation of Gay-Straight Alliances into the school system, outlining a series of responsibilities that the Ministry of Education and individual school boards are obligated to fulfill. The ultimate goal is to foster positive school climates where all children feel accepted regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. To date, legislation of this kind does not exist for early childhood education.

Our position is that heteronormativity’s pervasiveness in the field is not so much the result of one person’s actions but endures as the result of its systemic nature. In other words, it is embedded in the very fabric of the institution of ECE. To remedy this, then, a response at the systems level is necessary, or the invisibilities of gender and sexual diversity will persist and remain unchallenged. With several studies substantiating that queer people are more likely to be the victims of violence and/or die by suicide, we simply cannot afford to do nothing. A radical transformation in practice necessary so that early childhood spaces are people-positive spaces, irrespective of one’s background.

Results & Discussion (cont'd):

Many of the arguments made for and against support for gender and sexual diversity that emerged in review of the interview transcripts were organized into themes, all of which are summarized below...

Theme	Evidence
1. Developmentally in appropriate practice: The idea that children are too young to know/understanding issues pertaining to gender and sexual diversity. Adults serve as gatekeepers to the access of bodies of knowledge (ex. censorship is regarded as an acceptable practice).	"People are leading kids down a path starting at three, where they're going to eventually cut off their penis. It's not good for people, the things that they have to go through and people end up de-transitioning" (Jill, 2025).
2. Children as asexual: The notion that young children do not have a sexual/gender identity until they are much older.	"They digest it at the age where, if it happened to them, they digest it later in their teenage years. Beyond middle school, I'm talking about. So I guess that would be a situation that would have to be dealt with in teen and young adult years, if that's how they feel, right?" (Jill, 2025).
3. Risk: The idea that including gender and sexuality diversity is risky business. Proponents of this view often cite parental recourse and lack of managerial support as reasons for their fears. Some also identify a fear of their support for queer issues in the early childhood classroom being thought to drive a personal agenda; that is, to recruit young children into an "alternative lifestyle" or to sexually exploit them.	"....there was still pushback from parents and from families. So even though I like to think that we are in this very inclusive city and practice, there's still a lot of pushback, and I can see it in my practice, and that can be a barrier for me to keep doing the work that I do" (Angel, 2025).
4. The same-sex family: A sole reliance on family diversity to address gender and sexual diversity with young children. This is problematic as it serves to sanitize sexual differences to make discussions more palatable to families. This, in turn, reproduces a homonormative narrative that queer people are only legitimate within the context of the family.	"I have a lot of affirming books with the kids, just about different kinds of families. It's really about conversation. It's about the language that the kids are using. We celebrate Mother's Day and Father's Day, but I don't generalize and call it Parents Day, but we it opens it up, so we can talk about families can have two moms, or they can have a grandparent living with them" (Kirsten, 2024).
5. HomoSEXuality: Involves the association of queer identities exclusively with the physical act of sex. According to this way of thinking, queer-affirming curriculum is analogous to sex education.	"I've heard them make comments about our school system and about this particular topic, and how they are uncomfortable. That they feel that this should not be something that is taught in school. And I thought, well, what do you think we're teaching? What do you think I'm teaching your child? If your child is gay, then they're gay. I'm not teaching them to be, but I feel like they have this fear that we're doing something more than what we've already been doing. We're teaching inclusiveness. We've always done that" (Marilyn, 2024).
6. Homophobia is merely the produce of 'innocent ignorance': This attitude downplays the role that social institutions (like ECE) play in indoctrination. It is a very deliberate act meant to 'Other' queer people, to make them feel less than those who identify as heterosexual.	"And I understand where that's coming from, and it's coming from a good place and out of, like, hate or fear." (Jessica, 2024)

"I would be livid if I found out my children's centre was putting this in their curriculum and I would be pulling them from that centre."

"IT SHOULD NOT BE BROUGHT NOR TAUGHT IN A CHILDCARE ENVIRONMENT! These children are too small and don't know left from right."

"'Queer' topics [are] not inclusive [of] all children and their family beliefs and values. 'Queer' topics DO NOT REPRESENT ALL PEOPLE."

"This is a very delicate topic that only the PARENTS of the child should have the right to teach their own CHILD about it, not a random educator."

"Stop sexualizing children. This is absolutely disgusting [...] we should be protecting children from pedophiles."

"I don't think teachers should be involved in these topics. It is a personal choice and should not be in the curriculum of children under the age of 12yrs."

"People are leading kids down a path starting at three, where they're going to eventually cut off their penis. It's not, it's not good for people, the things that they have to go through and people end up de-transitioning."

"I think as they become preschoolers [...] it would probably be a good thing, because, you know, every once in a while you come across that child who is different, and I don't think they even know how to express themselves properly, and so I think that would be a good thing."

"Why wouldn't we be inclusive of LGBTQ issues? It's our job! We wouldn't avoid conversations about different abilities or races [...] Why should this be any different?"

Recommendations for Practice:

The *Beyond Building Bridges: Transforming Practice* resource offers numerous strategies for queering the early childhood classroom, all of which are consistent with recommendations we made in response to our research results. Irrespective of the approach taken, Early Childhood Educators must fulfill their legal, professional and moral responsibility to cultivate classrooms that are safe spaces for all children and families. Lives literally depend on it!

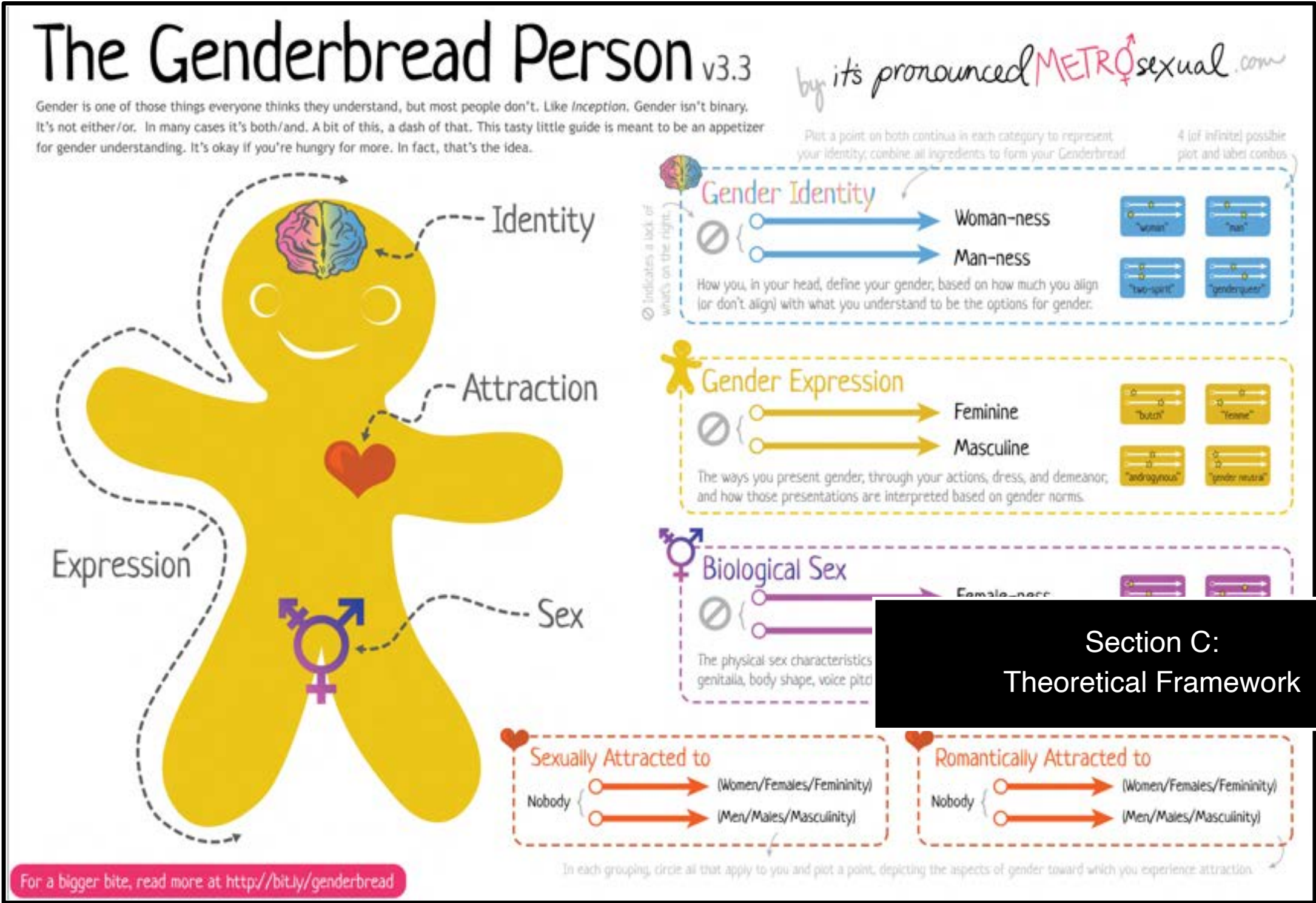
Differentiating Sex, Gender and Sexuality

Of all areas of identity, sex, gender and sexuality are said to share an especially indissoluble bond. In fact, their association in everyday thought and language is such that it is has become virtually impossible to consider one without automatically considering the others. It is no surprise, then, that the terms are often and wrongly used interchangeably in everyday conversations about them. Because of the pervasiveness of this sex-gender-sexuality triadic relationship, it is necessary to define what we mean when we refer to sex, gender and sexuality in the Building Bridges Resource.

The term sex refers to a set of biological attributes that mark individuals as male, female or intersexed, the latter “used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn’t seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male” (Intersex Society of North America, 2008). For example, a person might be born appearing to be female on the outside but having mostly male-typical anatomy on the inside. “[Sex], then, is primarily associated with physical and physiological features including chromosomes, genes, hormone levels and function and reproductive/sexual anatomy” (Canada Institute of Health Research, 2023, para. 1). One’s sex can generally be determined before birth by an ultrasound procedure. Once sex has been established, we are then assigned a corresponding gender by most expecting parents.

Gender encompasses an individual’s innermost sense of themselves as male, female, both or neither (Anzovino, Oresar & Boutilier, 2018). It is ultimately comprised of how an individual self-identifies (their gender orientation) and includes a spectrum of expressions, behaviours, activities and attributes marked as either masculine or feminine by a particular set of cultural norms (World Health Organization, n.d.). Although there are several gender identity categories currently used for self-identification purposes, the most widely used include: Cisgender, which is argued to describe the norm in Western societies like Canada, gender queer, gender non-conforming, genderfluid and transgender. Unlike sex, gender is socially constructed, meaning that what we know to be “true” about gender categories is not innately real but is, in fact, taught to us by various social institutions, beginning with the family.

Finally, sexuality refers to one’s erotic desires and affectional preferences. In other words, it is informed by who one is attracted to, both physically and emotionally (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.). Like gender, sexuality has an identity component (often referred to as one’s sexual orientation) and a behavioural component, which may or may not be aligned with how one self-identifies. For example, an individual may consider themselves to be a heterosexual male but engage nonetheless in sexual relations with another man. Although it is estimated that there are as many as 47 terms that describe sexual attraction, the most common categories of sexual identity include (but are not limited to): Gay, lesbian, bisexual, asexual, pansexual and queer.



This Thing Called ‘Queer’

Of all sex-, gender- and sexuality-based identity categories, queer remains the most contentious. This is because it is a term that has historically been used to injure or insult those who do not identify as cisgendered or heterosexual. In the 1980s, however, the term queer was reclaimed by some to rid it of its ability to denigrate sexual minorities. To that end, queer became a term of empowerment, an ‘umbrella’ term to represent an array of identities that ultimately challenge dominant constructions of sex, gender and sexuality. In other words, queer for some symbolizes an array of identities not explicitly captured by the more commonly used 2SLGBTQQ+ acronym (Janmohamed & Campbell, 2009).

Toward an Understanding of Heteronormativity

Heteronormativity refers to processes and mechanisms that reinforce heterosexuality as the superior form of sexual expression lending credibility to claims that everyone is, or at least should be, heterosexual (Gunn, 2011). Epstein and Johnson (1994) call this “the heterosexual presumption” (p. 281) and argue that this way of thinking operates powerfully in various contexts to impose heterosexual culture upon the masses. It is an institutional arrangement characterized by a systemic commitment to (hetero)norms, standards that uphold dominant readings of sex, gender and sexuality which then work in tandem to sustain heterosexuality as an unquestionable position. This process typically begins with one’s placement in a sex category, either male or female, which often occurs before one is even born. Once this determination has been made, we are (hetero)gendered according to our assumed sex. For instance, if we are to be born with a penis, we are assumed to be male and to identify as male and are thus socialized as such; that is, through rituals and practices that are highly gendered and that mark our masculinity (ex. through naming; nursery decorations; clothing in “appropriate” colours; etc.). As gender and sexuality are inextricably linked when they are thought about in traditional ways, assumptions about our gender frequently produce automatic assumptions about our sexuality. In this case, the child who is born male will often be thought to assume a male identity, to be masculine in their gender presentation and, of course, to be attracted to females. Conversely, a child born with female genitalia will be socialized to assume a female identity, be stereotypically feminized and thought to be attracted to males.

Viewed in this way, heteronormativity becomes an “insidious force” (Rosenfeld, 2009, p. 617), a fundamental organizing principle that yields real consequences for those who fail to uphold prescribed sex-, gender- and sexuality-based ideals (Robinson, 2005). While this often impacts minoritized bodies, Sedgwick (1990) reminds us that heteronormative systems place constraints on everyone, particularly when all are expected to navigate a world in which compulsory heterosexuality prevails. As this ideological framework is narrowly defined, so too are related conceptualizations of appropriate expressions of sex, gender and sexuality at its core, rendering all individuals susceptible to judgment and condemnation because of their actual or perceived sex-, gender- and sexuality-based identities. Of all institutions that socialize young children, the media (especially the Walt Disney company) is especially responsible for reinforcing heteronormative messages.



The Danger of Disney

The Walt Disney Company is a major agent of socialization, often teaching children what to think about the world around them. Despite recent efforts to embed diversity in its animated and live-action films, Disney continues to perpetuate gender- and sexuality-based stereotypes. Consider, for instance, the common narrative in which a helpless princess, a damsel in distress, so to speak, awaits saving by her valiant prince as she is too weak, too helpless, perhaps even too dim-witted to battle the throes of evil. Or the fact that female characters are almost always portrayed as domestic servants, caretakers, or inherently evil. Many are also seen as having to rely on their beauty to obtain their happily ever after. But it is Disney’s failure to depict even a single queer character in any one of its more than 60 feature-length animated films that is most glaring. In fact, not a single same sex relationship or queer family is shown thereby normalizing heterosexuality. Consequently, educators should rely on Disney-related learning materials with extreme caution as they are apt to produce pre-prejudice in young children, who are susceptible by the age of 2, related to gender and sexuality. Once formed, these attitudes are very difficult to change. Additionally, educators have a responsibility to challenge gender- and sexuality-based bias when it is encountered and teach children to think critically about that to which they are exposed, especially when it sends harmful messages about human differences.

The Heteronormative Construction of Early Childhood Education

It is argued that no single profession touches the lives of children more than early childhood education does (Swindler-Boutte, 2008). Unfortunately, as a primary agent of socialization, early childhood education has historically been heteronormative (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2013). For instance, since their inception, programs have been staffed predominantly by women, thereby reproducing the discourse that childcare is, in fact, women's work; a gendered assumption that remains intact even today (Friendly & Prentice, 2009; Murray, 1996).

Prevailing views of the child, which emphasize a veneer of innocence (Robinson, 2008; Robinson, 2013) and a vulnerability that must be protected at all costs (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2013) have long justified the exclusion of gender and sexuality from the early childhood classroom. This is because they operate in conjunction with the social construction of homosexuality, which pathologizes non-heterosexuality and assumes that any efforts toward supporting queer issues with children penetrate their innate innocence (Robinson, 2008; Robinson, 2013) and/or puts them at risk of sexual victimization (Robinson, 2008). So too do efforts at including gender and sexual diversity in early childhood curriculum give rise to the "grooming" argument, whereby it is falsely assumed that discussions of gender and sexuality are preparing children for a future in which they will inevitably question their own gender and sexuality and thus come to identify as queer themselves. Finally, the public/private debate that has gained momentum in recent years with the war on the use of children's preferred gender pronouns in schools tends to relegate discussions of gender and sexuality to the home sphere. To that end, it is assumed that it is the role of parents, not educators, to discuss issues related to gender and sexual diversity. This belief is fuelled, in large part, by an adult/child binary relationship, through which the mature adult is perceived as all-powerful, and critical in their thinking and thus position themselves as gate keepers to knowledge considered too contentious for children (Gittins, 1998 as cited by Robinson, 2002, p. 418).

Among the numerous barriers to the inclusion of gender and sexuality in the early childhood classroom, however, it is the inextricable link between the child and traditional notions of development that remains the most pervasive. It is a reality perhaps best captured by the field's commitment to so-called "developmentally appropriate practice," (Janmohamed, 2010) whereby early childhood educators are trained to observe, interpret and plan in support of 5 areas of development, including: Physical development; cognitive development; language development; social development and emotional development. Noticeably absent from this understanding of human growth is any mention of gender and sexuality. Children are correspondingly asexualized and degendered thereby lending support to the idea that gender and sexuality issues are irrelevant to them.

Thus, heteronormativity is woven into the very fabric of the field and informs widely accepted but traditionally constituted practices that are rarely, if ever, questioned. At an administrative level, this might include:

- Language used on written methods of communication, such as intake forms, which assume that all children are reared in heterosexual households, requiring registration from a mother and father (Fox, 2007);
- The absence of an explicit commitment to gender and sexual diversity in a centre's program philosophy or through the absence of a clause in operating policies that endeavour to protect children, families and staff from harassment and discrimination based on gender and/or sexual orientation (Janmohamed and Campbell, 2009);
- The failure to adopt and explicitly communicate an inclusive definition of the family that might, for instance, be expressed in a parent handbook (Janmohamed and Campbell, 2009);
- A reluctance to hire male staff, as well as through policies that prevent them from attending to the diapering needs of younger children (Murray, 1996).

- 21 -

But it is the persistent operation of heteronormativity at the program level that is particularly problematic as practices used in the early childhood classroom have the most direct influence on children's thinking about diversity (Swindler-Boutte, 2008); in this case, through the normalization of traditional views of gender and sexuality. Examples include:

- The failure to challenge play that normalizes traditional conceptions of gender and sexuality as seen, for example, through mock weddings and mother/father play in the dramatic centre or through kissing games and girlfriend/boyfriend activities (Fox, 2007);
- The consistent use of children's literature that reinforces a cisgendered or heterosexual narrative, as seen with most fairytales [Janmohamed and Campbell, 2009];
- Incorporating songs and fingerplays into the curriculum that insinuate that all children have a mother and father (ex. "Baby Shark;" "Wheels on the Bus");
- Lining children up according to their assumed gender;
- Not acknowledging children's preferred gender pronouns;
- Categorizing day care clothes by gender (i.e. clothing for boys and clothing for girls);
- Celebrating calendar events that are traditionally heteronormative, like Mother's Day and Father's Day or Valentine's Day (Campbell, 2007);
- Redirecting gendered play that is non-normative, as seen when boys are discouraged from wearing dresses in the dramatic area (Robinson, 2005b);
- The failure to challenge homophobic or heterosexist language used in the classroom or incidents of harassment, exclusion or teasing that originate from children in response to observed behaviours that stand in contrast to heterosexualized norms (Clarke et al, 2004; Renold, 2006).

It is not usually the case that educators set out to be explicitly heteronormative. Instead, it is the unconscious actions of well-intentioned adults that most often results in the perpetuation of traditional views of gender and sexuality. However, whether subtly or overtly conveyed, the reproduction of sex-, gender- and sexuality-based norms is dangerous as it yields the same devastating consequences – the normalization of cisgendered and heterosexual identities at the expense of those expressions that deviate from societal norms.

Responding to Heteronormativity in Early Childhood Education

Efforts aimed at being inclusive in the early childhood classroom have historically occurred under the guise of multicultural or anti-bias education. According to the National Association for Multicultural Education (2024), multiculturalism values equality and diversity (most often understood to be comprised solely of race, culture, ethnicity and language). To that end, practices enacted through a commitment to multiculturalism seek to ensure the preservation of distinct cultural identities and promote cross-cultural understanding in the interest of protecting individual rights and overcoming discrimination (Ozturgut, 2011). Although well intentioned, multiculturalism falls short of rendering visible any gender- and sexuality-based differences and thus contributes to the heteronormative constitution of the early childhood classroom.

A more promising approach to inclusion occurs in the field through a commitment to anti-bias instruction. An anti-bias orientation:

“is an approach to teaching and learning designed to increase understanding of differences and their value to a respectful and civil society and to actively challenge bias, stereotyping and all forms of discrimination in schools and communities. It incorporates inclusive curriculum that reflects diverse experiences and perspectives, instructional methods that advance all [childrens’] learning, and strategies to create and sustain safe, inclusive and respectful learning communities” (Anti-Defamation League, n.d., para. 1).

While anti-bias education assumes a broader understanding of diversity than does traditional multiculturalism, it is often criticized for its encouragement of siloed analyses of the various components that make us different. In so doing, it ignores the intersectional nature of our identities (i.e. that we are more than 1 thing at a time). This is problematic when focuses on gender and sexuality essentialize difference, giving the illusion that those minoritized in these categories are a homogenous group; that is, they all look the same and experience the same issues in the same way. In this case, an anti-bias lens can give rise to a homonormative view of gender and sexuality, whereby it is assumed that all queer people are White, male, middle class, cisgendered, etc. (Sykes, 2011). A second limitation of this approach is that it ignores the imbalance of power and privilege

From Traditional Multiculturalism to Queer Pedagogy

that is the root of all forms of oppression (Escayg, 2019). This, in turn, puts the blame on individual values, beliefs and attitudes as being the purveyor of heteronormative sentiment when, in fact, it operates systemically to skew our views on gender and sexual differences. In other words, it is embedded in the very institutions that socialize us.

In response to the limitations inherent in traditionally multicultural and anti-bias education, advocates for the inclusion of gender and sexual diversity in classroom spaces for young children propose that programs apply a “queering” lens to their practices. In this sense, the term queer takes on new meaning. In addition to referring to a state of being (or something someone *is*), it can also refer to something someone *does* – in this case, an act of deliberate disruption that dismantles longstanding beliefs about gender and sexuality and forces them to the point of collapse (Shlasko, 2005). Queer as it pertains to early childhood education, then, includes an early childhood educator’s efforts to counter heteronormative classroom practices through a commitment to the following presumptions: (1) Sex, gender and sexuality are socially constructed essences and binary identity categories (e.g. “male/female;” “masculine/feminine;” “heterosexual/homosexual”) that must be actively challenged; (2) Homophobia and heterosexism are acquired prejudices that are imparted through decades of heterosocialization, particularly through the institution of education; (3) Childhood innocence is a “veneer” that operates to deny children as sexual beings and to exclude issues of sex, gender and sexuality from the early childhood classroom; and (5) Queer families are as much a part of children’s realities as are other family configurations (Sears, 1999, pp. 4 – 12). Thus, early childhood educators who practice in accordance with these principals create “queer-affirming” curriculum experiences that celebrate diverse expressions of sexuality and gender. These efforts serve to naturalize the exploration of queer issues in the early childhood classroom while disrupting standard approaches to curriculum planning and implementation.

Doing Gender Justice in Early Childhood Education

What is gender?

Gender is a **social construct**, an idea created by people to help categorize and explain the world in which we live (Trevor Project, n.d.). It is comprised of 3 key components: our identity (how we feel or see ourselves - as male, female, both or neither) our behaviours (how we express ourselves - as masculine, feminine or some combination of both) and the roles we assume in our everyday lives (like mother, provider, protector, etc.). In many cultures, there is a false belief that gender is linked to our biological sex. They are, in fact, independent of each other. In other words our sex does not determine our gender any more than it does our sexual orientation. Rather, gender operates independently. Because there is an inextricable connection forged between sex and gender in Western societies like Canada, however, it is imperative that we look at this relationship in terms of identity. For example, people whose gender identity matches their sex at birth (i.e. are born male and identify as male or are born female and identify as female) are said to be **cisgender**. When this alignment does not exist (i.e. a person is born male but identifies as female or is born female but identifies as male), individuals may then be said to be **transgender**. It is important to remember that transgenderism is but one example of a gender diverse identity. In other words, not all people who fail to define themselves as cisgender will see themselves as transgender. In Canada, there are three recognized gender categories: male, female or **non-binary** (Statistics Canada, 2024). Non-binary is an umbrella term that is meant to refer to any gender identity considered outside the "norm." It is often used interchangeably with the term "gender diverse." Both will be engaged throughout this article to refer to gender identities that are neither cis male nor cis female. Regardless of how one chooses to identify, however, there is one truth that remains consistent: Gender is one of the most significant ways in which we organize our every day lives.

What is gender normativity?

Gender normativity is the tendency to reinforce the gender categories of male and female as "normal." This is problematic as, whenever we create normative categories, anything that does not fit into them is automatically considered "abnormal" (Gonzalez-Mena, 2008). This labelling often leads to the unfair treatment of people who situate themselves as non-binary (Anzovino, Oresar & Boutiller, 2021). For instance according to Egale (2024), there is a "growing reactionary movement threatening the safety, freedoms and rights of [...] trans, non-binary and other gender non-conforming individuals" (p. 1). In fact, between 2016 and 2023, hate crimes motivated by gender and sexual differences rose an astounding 388%, with incidents involving gender non-binary people being especially violent. Clearly, **transphobia** (or the unjustified fear/hatred of transgender people) is very much a reality in this country. It is so insidious that research estimates that around 41% of transgender students in Canada report significant depressive symptoms, 20% had attempted suicide in a single year, and 46% had engaged in self-injurious behaviour (Government of Alberta, 2013). Gender normativity is a definite problem that must be challenged if we are to protect our gender diverse children from this fate.

What does gender normativity look like in early childhood settings?

Gender normativity is embedded in the very fabric of our **social institutions** (or structures that teach us what to think and how to

- Acting in accordance with the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which asserts that children have a right to live a life free of discrimination; the right to an identity and the right to have their views respected.
- Supporting cross gender play when, for example, a boy wears a dress in the dramatic play area or a girl enjoys rough and tumble play with their male peers.

behave). Although the family is said to be a primary agent of socialization, early childhood education also factors prominently into shaping children into the adults they ultimately become. In fact, Swindler Boutte (2008) argues that "no single profession touches the lives of children [...] more than education does." Thus, that gender normativity is embedded in the everyday practices we widely assume to be in the best interests of children is concerning. In fact, Skelton (2022) contends that much effort is put into imposing and naturalizing the cisgender binary in early childhood/elementary school spaces. Problematic practices that are employed and rarely (if ever) questioned include:

- Lining children up according to their gender;
- Using songs, finger plays and storybooks that reinforce gender norms (ex. most fairytales);
- Dividing day care attire into 2 categories: Clothing for boys and clothing for girls;
- Using gendered language with children (ex. calling a girl "pretty" or a boy "handsome");
- Giving children regular reminders about how important it is that they be a boy or a girl;
- Greeting children as "boys" and "girls";
- Registration systems and developmental progress reports/report cards populated with "he" and "she" pronouns;
- The failure to honour children's preferences regarding their preferred pronouns;
- Pink- and blue-coded cubby/name tags;
- Having different expectations for children's behaviour, achievements and athletic abilities;
- Sex-specific activity prompts and requirements that children line up, sit or engage in other activities in boy-girl-boy-girl fashion;
- Sex-specific dress codes.

Approaches to the care and education of young children that is gendered in this manner usually occurs unconsciously, by well-intentioned early childhood educators who are often simply trying to support children's budding identities. In other words, it is not likely that someone deliberately perpetuates gender normativity. Whether conscious or unconscious, however, the lived effects are still the same - the reproduction of the cis gender binary that validates just two gender identities which in turn makes it increasingly difficult for children who breach normative boundaries.

How can I challenge gender normativity to create a space that promotes gender justice?

Gender justice refers to the equal treatment of all genders, ensured through the extension of access to the same rights, responsibilities and opportunities that individuals who identify as cis gender have by virtue of their construction as the dominant gender group (Strategic Advocacy for Human Rights, 2024). "It is a holistic approach that addresses the root causes of gender discrimination and ensures that [...] gender minorities are not excluded from the full enjoyment of their human rights" (Strategic Advocacy for Human Rights, 2024, para. 4). Gender justice is both a philosophy and a repertoire of strategies that seek to eradicate gender normativity and dismantle the cis gender binary that elevates men and women to the top of a gender hierarchy. Early Childhood Educators who are ambassadors for gender justice in the classroom, engage in practices that are inclusive of all expressions of gender, especially those that are diverse in nature. This may include (but is not limited to):

- Challenging genderist language and behaviours exhibited by children and adults alike, using these as teachable moments for expanding perceptions of what is possible regarding gender-related behaviours.
- Surveying the environment and materials for gender normative messages and providing alternatives that recognize multiple expressions of gender.

- Referring to children by their preferred gender pronouns.
- Advocating for access to appropriate supports and resources for all gender diverse children, especially those who self-identify as transgender.
- Infusing gender diversity throughout the curriculum, providing children with ample exposure to multiple gender identities.
- Rethinking traditional understandings of the "whole child" by recognizing and supporting important milestones pertaining to the development of gender awareness and gender identity.
- Avoiding the tokenist or tourist approach to including gender diversity in the curriculum by, for example, placing a single book on the bookshelf that challenges gender norms or posting photos of gender diverse people in the environment without making them meaningful in any way.
- Maintaining open and honest communication with families who convey a sense of discomfort with gender inclusivity all the while remaining committed to ensuring that all expressions of gender are celebrated in the classroom.

It takes unconditional care, compassion and commitment to create safe spaces for children who are gender diverse. It is no easy feat. But it is a mission that, when undertaken with unwavering resolve, has the potential to cultivate early childhood spaces that are sites of hope, harmony and humanity for all.



Two-Spiritedness: Historical and Contemporary Understandings

Defining Two-Spiritedness

To offer a precise, universally accepted definition of Two-Spiritedness is difficult, as it means different things to different people. It is generally used, however, to refer to members of Indigenous communities who are said to possess both a feminine and a masculine spirit (Picody, KaKeesheeway, Monkman & Gardipy, n.d.). It is as an umbrella term, meant to capture “a wide range of identities related to sexuality and spiritual and gender identity” (Picody, et al, n.d., p. 12). The concept was adopted in 1990 by Indigenous queer/non-heterosexual leaders “as an Indigenously-defined-pan-Native North American term that refers to the diversity of Indigenous identities as well as culturally specific, non-binary gender identities (Hunt, 2016, p. 7). The idea of Two-Spiritedness, however, predates the Europeans’ arrival on Turtle Island. In fact, it’s been argued that what is now known as Canada was once queer insofar as neither gender nor sexuality were viewed in “either/or” terms and Two-Spirited people were celebrated and revered (Thurston, n.d.). They were “often healers, medicine people and visionaries within their given communities and they were foundational members of their culture” (Thurston, n.d., para. 2). Although not all Indigenous communities were universally accepting of gender and sexual fluidity, Two-Spirited people garnered widespread respect, largely because they were regarded as doubly wise (Hunt, 2016). But then came the arrival of the Europeans, who forced the Christianization of Indigenous peoples, resulting, among other things, in the creation of a binary system of gender and sexuality that relegated those who were not heterosexual and/or cisgender to the fringes of society and made them vulnerable to violence (Picody et al, n.d.).

The impact of colonization on Indigenous gender and sexuality has been both profound and widespread. With the insistence upon assimilation marked, in part, by conformity to heteropatriarchal ideologies came increased discrimination against Two-Spirited individuals in many Indigenous communities (Hunt, 2016; McLeod, 2025). Today, acceptance of Two-Spiritedness is precarious. Due to the institutionalization of (hetero)norms across sociopolitical spheres, Two-Spirited people face discrimination from both mainstream society and within their own communities (Picody et al, n.d.; McLeod, 2025). Worse yet, the eventual transformation of Indigenous cultures into heteronormative ones and the intergenerational trauma that ensued has “led to suicides, suicidal ideations and self-destructive behaviours among Two-Spirit people” at rates that far exceed national averages (McLeod, 2025, para. 4). This is not to undermine their resilience and resolve, however, as there are movements and grassroots organizations in this country that advocate for Two-Spirited rights led by Two-Spirited individuals themselves. The shared goal of these organizations is to support the holistic health and wellbeing of Two-Spirited people and, in doing so, to dismantle the Eurocentric gender binary that binds us all while simultaneously interrogating the heteronormative institutions that insist upon hetero-conformity as a pre-requisite for full citizenship (The University of British Columbia, 2025; The University of Toronto Libraries, 2025). In this way, Two-Spirited people are hardly victims; instead, they give voice to their own issues and demonstrate agency and empowerment in the face of adversity.

Two-Spiritedness and (White) Heteronormativity

Heteronormativity, or the naturalization of heterosexual desires over all other expressions of human sexuality, has historically been pervasive (Nxumalo & Berman, 2016). In terms of its connections to Whiteness, Pereira (2019), contends that “[h]eteronormativity explores how colonialism has imposed a sex-gender system situated within European colonies that renders

White, heterosexual, Eurocentricity as universal” (as cited by Dénommé-Welch & Mizzi, 2023, p. 138). In other words, heteronormativity becomes a project of Whiteness that reflects how systems of power privilege heterosexuality and Whiteness simultaneously. The consequence of this reproduction of White heterosexuality is the demonization of racial, gender and sexual identities that transgress normative boundaries, as is the case with Two-Spirited individuals, who “challenge colonial binaries and hierarchies that rely on white heteronormativity to define citizenship, family, and belonging” (Wilson, 2008, p. 191).

White heteronormativity and the attempted expungement of non-Whiteness, gender and sexual diversity is evident in events that stand as testament to Canada’s historical mistreatment of Indigenous people (Dénommé-Welch & Mizzi, 2023). Consider, for instance, residential schools, which played an integral role in enforcing Whiteness, both as a preferred race and an institutional set of behaviours and societal norms. Children were forcibly removed from their homes and placed in institutions that upheld the colonial agenda to erase Indigenous ways of being, thinking and doing that were seen as a threat to Euro Canadian culture (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). Commenting on the connection to gender and sexuality, Korinek (2018) explains that the criminalization of homosexuality and transsexuality and their designation as mental illnesses during Britain’s reign over Canada, coupled with the forced Christianization of Indigenous children, led to the strict policing of expressions of gender and sexuality in residential schools. As such, “[t]he Christian religious dogma of residential schools erased a proud history of Two-Spirited people in most Indigenous nations where there had been room for alternative genders and sexual identities beyond that of the male/female gender binaries and heterosexual orientations” (Ristok, Zoccole, Passante & Potskin, 2019, p. 770).

The Sixties Scoop is another example of heteronormative ideologies rooted in Whiteness that sought to suppress non-dominant expressions of gender and sexuality to the ultimate disadvantage of Two-Spirited people. Occurring from the late 1950s to early 1980s, Indigenous children were once again apprehended and this time placed with White, nuclear families who were deemed culturally and morally superior (Hanson, 2008). In contrast, Indigenous families were not seen fit to rear their own children. The rupture of Indigenous families in this manner meant that the diverse gender roles and parenting practices in many Indigenous communities were eradicated. This disproportionately impacted Two-Spirited people who, once revered, were now the ‘Other’ because their sheer existence challenged Euro Western norms of race, gender and sexuality (Hanson, 2008). Finally, the placement of Indigenous children in White, nuclear families with Christian values ensured that the continued reproduction of Whiteness and heterosexuality endured, with any existence of gender and sexual diversity being effectively erased (Carrière & Richardson, 2009).

The Erasure of Two-Spiritedness from Early Childhood Curriculum

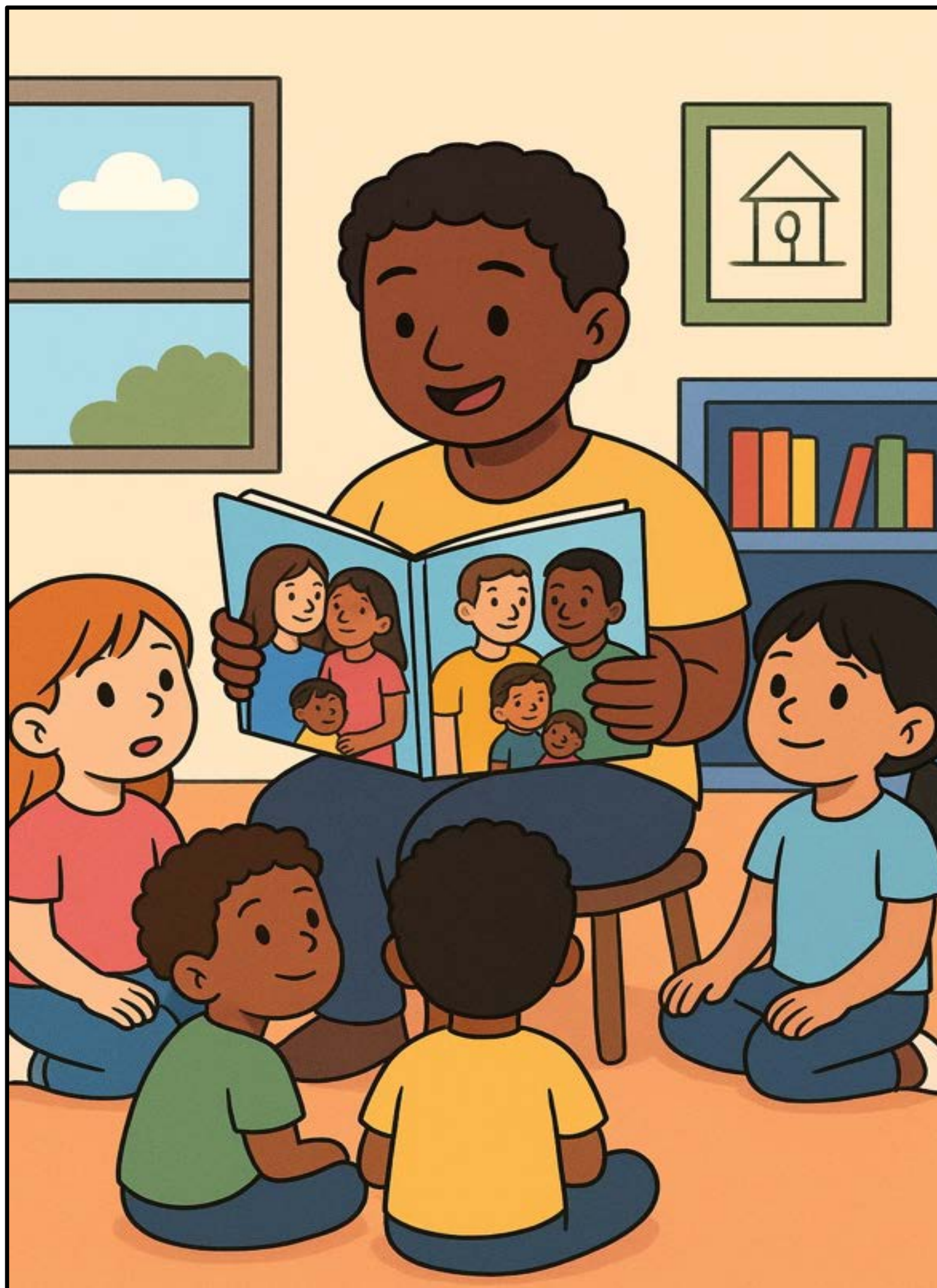
The heteronormative constitution of the early childhood classroom is well established (Nxumalo & Berman, 2016; Butler, 2021). So too is the omission of experiences of QOC, including Two-Spirited people, so that a narrative that overwhelmingly favours Whiteness reigns supreme (Nxumalo & Berman, 2016). According to Butler (2021), “white heteronormativity is pervasive in all aspects of the field of early childhood education. To that end, heteronormativity and Whiteness converge in early childhood settings to produce experiences that “exclude Indigenous and 2SLGBTQQ+ realities” (Nxumalo & Berman, 2016, p. 311). Early childhood spaces often normalize Whiteness and heteronormativity through a variety of widely accepted and rarely questioned practices that include, but are not limited to: The creation of family photo displays that depict predominantly White, traditional families;

storybooks with heteronormative and cisgendered narratives, including most fairytales; the uncritical celebration of holidays, like Black History Month and Indigenous History Month, that merely serve to reproduce stereotypes about non-White people and assure their otherwise limited visibility (Nxumalo & Berman, 2016); songs and fingerplays that celebrate Western conceptions of the White, nuclear family; the use of language that favours heterosexuality and cisgenderist behaviours; intake forms that assume all children have a mother and father and/or that reduce race to a few standard categories when demographic data is sought. Perhaps most glaring, however, is the exclusion of Indigenous knowledges and Two-Spiritedness from classroom spaces for young children. The result is experiences during the most formative years of a child's life that preclude any mention of subject matter that does not centre Whiteness and the gender binary while upholding a sexuality-based hierarchy. Hunt (2016) refers to this as a form of epistemic violence and asserts that strategies geared toward erasing Indigeneity altogether are merely tools for dispossession.

Further assurance of the erasure of Two-Spiritedness from early childhood curricula is directly related to the field leaning heavily toward developmentalism, marked by a deficit view of the child, thereby positioning the role of the educator as being one that must nurture growth across a broad set of domains that reflect European priorities for learning (Maistry & Petro du Preez, 2024). Missing from understandings of the whole child is any mention of the spiritual realm, not to mention the development of gender and sexuality, the combination of which further ensures the silencing of any perspective that does not align with a Western worldview. For example, *Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014a; 2014b; 2014c; 2018), which includes four resources RECEs are legislated to use in tandem, offers a very vague conception of diversity, reducing it to "cultural, linguistic and social perspectives," (p. 6) a position reiterated in the College of Early Childhood Educator's (2017) *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice* and the *Kindergarten Program* document (2019). And while some acknowledgement of the need for Indigenous knowledges is cited, inherently missing from this construction of difference are gender and sexuality, which are thus likely to be omitted from the early childhood classroom, yielding dire effects for those who transgress normative boundaries (Fryberg & Eason, 2024). Any mention of Two-Spiritedness is notable only for its absence, rendering Two-Spirited people invisible once again.



Section D: Practical Considerations



“There is no other profession in the world that directly or indirectly touches the lives of people at the same level as [educators] do.”

– Gloria Swindler-Boutte, *Beyond the Illusion of Diversity...*, 2008 –

“We wouldn’t hesitate to talk about the inclusion of people from different racial backgrounds or people with diverse needs and abilities with children, so why not do the same with various genders and sexualities?”

– Ryan Gracie & Danielle Pusateri, 2024 –

The Role of the Early Childhood Educator

The role of an educator is infused with the responsibility of providing a holistic, emotionally supportive environment for young children. Often, educators take on a “parenting role” giving children a foundation in morals and values through discussions with children or by modelling appropriate behaviour. Educators have the capacity to play an influential role in the development of young children, yet public policy makers and governments undermine the significance of the early educator’s position in young children’s lives.

In the process of establishing relationships with children, early educators can boost or crush a child’s self-esteem depending on their ability to encourage, interact and support a child’s development. The role of an educator involves a complexity of responsibilities. They need to ensure that children are safe and have their primary needs cared for. They are also responsible for providing an environment that is intellectually stimulating and emotionally nurturing.

Educators are expected to build positive relationships with children, integrating a respectful approach based on the child’s ability without shaming or demeaning children. Educators should promote learning by creating experiences within a cultural context. Although early childhood education work is challenging, the desire to make a difference in the lives of children and families is cited as a primary motivator for early childhood educators (Beach, 1998).

The relationship between educator, child and parent is encouraged and rewarded. The success of developing their relationship is dependent on the educator’s ability to effectively integrate the

family and cultural background in the program curriculum, while maintaining an integrated approach to anti-discriminatory education practices (Janmohamed, 2005).

The next section of *Building Bridges* offers suggestions on how to embed queer representation into early childhood environments and curriculum. It also provides an overview of what queer parents experience in early learning environments.

Early Childhood Educators are expected to demonstrate skills established by the Program Outcomes for Early Childhood Education established by the government of Ontario. Within the context of understanding and integrating different perspectives on diversity, early childhood educators need to develop a better understanding of what queer parents would like to see as part of the early childhood program and making an effort to include all the families you work with that will improve program quality, the foundation of the children’s development and the early childhood educators capacity to demonstrate professional skills.

While a self-regulatory body like the College of ECEs is exclusive to Ontario, most other jurisdictions across the country provide clear expectations for practice. For example, the Early Childhood Educators of British Columbia (ECEBC) developed a Code of Ethics, which “represents the collective beliefs, values and ethics that early childhood educators in British Columbia share” (ECEBC, n.d., para 1). It outlines a number of principles that guide daily practices with children, families and other early childhood professionals.



Inclusion:
Whose Responsibility is it Anyway?

At a basic level, ECE's must comply with laws in which human rights are enshrined, so that their approach to inclusion considers gender and sexuality. And while the legal argument may appease some parents who initially challenge your efforts to queer your classroom, it is only a superficial commitment. Similarly, field-specific documents, like a Code of Ethics, curriculum framework or quality assurance tool may be what instigates a transformation in your practice. Although this may ensure you are ultimately responsive to all areas of diversity, it still suggests a sense of tolerance whereby you are simply being inclusive because you are mandated to. It is our hope that *Beyond Building Bridges* will compel you to be altruistically inclusive; that you choose to honour gender and sexuality in celebration of their place on the diversity spectrum and because, quite simply, you know it's the right thing to do.



- Personal (Moral Self)**
- Motivated by personal values, beliefs, attitudes.
 - *"It's the right thing to do!"*
- Professional (Vocational Self)**
- Motivated by employment policies; external regulations; quality assurance criteria; professional standards of practice; etc..
 - *"It's my job!"*
 - Examples: CECE Code & Standards of Practice; A.Q.I.; ON Pedagogy for the Early Years
- Legal (Lawful Self)**
- Motivated by provisions enshrined in laws.
 - *"It's the law!"*
 - Examples: Charter of Rights; HRA; OHRC; CCEYA

(Gracie, 2023)



Inclusive Practices in the Early Childhood Classroom

According to the Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning (2006), “demonstration of respect for diversity, equity and inclusion are pre-requisites for optimal development and early learning” (p. 5). This positions a commitment to inclusion as one of the foremost attitudes an Early Childhood Educator must possess. And while the term ‘inclusion’ has generally been reserved by some for talking about children with diverse abilities, it is used in this resource to refer to the support of all forms of human differences. Unfortunately, this commitment often stops short at the inclusion of gender and sexuality, both of which are viewed by some as more contentious and controversial. This tendency means that teaching practices need to reflect an even more concerted effort to be responsive to gender- and sexuality-based differences in the programs they create. To aid you in this significant undertaking, the following have been developed as a general set of inclusive practices that, when employed, can help transform learning spaces for young children into sites of health, hope, happiness and harmony for all.

1. **Engage in self-reflection to uncover and address personal biases and fears** as they pertain to diversity. Ask yourself: “Which areas of difference make me uncomfortable?” “Where do these feelings come from?” “How can I work through this discomfort so that I am inclusive of all children and families?” (Campbell, 2007). Boyd (1999) posits that educators often feel torn between their personal beliefs and the expectation that they support all forms of difference in their practice (as cited by Wilson, 2001). Consequently, it is argued that ongoing professional development is necessary because educators must work through the uneasiness they feel toward certain areas of difference and because they can’t expect to be experts in all diversity-related matters (Campbell, 2007).
2. **Educate yourself and model an openness to all forms of diversity**, especially those most often excluded from the early childhood classroom (for example, gender and sexuality). Children quickly absorb both subtle and overt messages about difference that are conveyed to them by others, especially those with whom they come into regular contact, such as family members and educators (Campbell, 2007; Janmohamed & Campbell, 2009).
3. **Take advantage of daily teachable moments.** According to Campbell (2007), “[e]ducators have an obligation to address [children’s questions about diversity] immediately and with sensitivity both out of respect for the child’s natural curiosity and because [any] expression of interest indicates that a prime opportunity for learning has surfaced” (p. 28). Derman-Sparks & Edwards (2009) assert that responses to children’s queries must involve: (i) Listening actively and without assumptions or judgment; (ii) figuring out what the child really wants to know; (iii) determining if questions reflect mere curiosity or a level of discomfort/fear; (iv) answering questions matter-of-factly, simply and consistently and (v) following up with relevant diverse-related experiences when necessary.
4. **Embed diversity throughout the curriculum** as an ongoing commitment to creating socially just classrooms that are sites of hope and harmony for all. “Sometimes daily teachable moments are not a sufficient means by which to ensure that [diversity issues] are adequately addressed” (Campbell, 2007, p. 28). Consequently, early childhood educators must be deliberate and strategic in their efforts to honour all forms of difference in learning spaces for young children. Remember – there is no hierarchy of importance where diversity is concerned. all differences are equally significant and should, therefore, be valued and respected.
5. **“ Use caution when exposing children to various forms of mainstream media ”** (Campbell, 2007, p. 28). As an agent of socialization, mass media in various forms (ex. television, video games, children’s toys, etc.) often send stereotypical messages about various differences and/or invisibilize them altogether. Disney, for example, is an especially powerful agent of socialization that produces products designed for mass appeal. In doing so, they uphold an array of Eurocentric norms related to, for example, race, size, gender and sexuality, all of which work in tandem to ‘Other’, in particular, those who fail conform to the status quo.
6. **Use children’s literature that reflects prosocial values and attitudes** to encourage dialogue about diversity issues. According to Campbell (2007), “[c]hildren’s literature is often one of the best ways with which to give rise to discussions that address issues relevant to the experiences of children in a particular program, as well as the world outside the classroom. In addition, quality works can prove useful in helping answer some of the more difficult questions children ask in relation to [various forms of difference” (p. 29). For example, a book like “Daddy’s Roomate” (Willhoite, 1991) can be used to explain what it means to be gay. To that end, the text asserts that “being gay is just another kind of love. And love is the best kind of happiness” (Willhoite, 1991, p. 12). Picture books for infants and toddlers, on the other hand, can be used to incite early conversations about race, especially by educators who point to and label the various skin shades depicted in illustrations.
7. **Examine materials available to children for biases.** Campbell (2007) suggests that, to counter stereotypes often conveyed by products marketed to young children, early childhood educators should create teacher-made materials that counter these harmful messages. After all, the reproduction of inclusive messages about diversity is essential to nurturing a child’s burgeoning sense of self, especially when deemed “different” for one reason or another. According to Derman-Sparks (1989), the inclusion of materials that reflect all forms of difference is imperative because “what is in the environment alerts children to what the [educator] considers is important or not important” (p. 11). As children are as vulnerable to omissions as they are to inaccurate depictions of diversity, educators must continuously survey their environment to ensure that all forms of difference are represented.

8. **“Avoid tokenism, or the tourist approach [when educating about diversity]”** (Campbell, 2007, p. 30). It is recommended practice in early childhood education that professionals working directly with young children NOT use a holiday or special calendar event to introduce a diversity issue and that these occasions should not be the only time a particular group of people is discussed (Boyd, 1999; Campbell, 2007; Janmohamed and Campbell, 2009; Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2009). The danger with this tendency is the reproduction of the very stereotypes that educators hope to counter. Instead, it is advised that diversity issues be integrated in all facets of a program and at all times of the year. For example, June is widely known in North America as “Gay Pride Month.” During this time, opportunities are often provided for children to engage with curriculum content that reflects Canada’s 2SLGBTQQ+ community. Janmohamed and Campbell (2009) are critical of this approach and insist that educators must acquaint children with various aspects of queer culture throughout the year in a meaningful and authentic manner.
9. **Encourage people from diverse backgrounds to participate in early learning and care programs for young children** (Campbell, 2007). It is argued that the best way to promote acceptance of individuals from marginalized groups is through direct experience (Asana, 2022). Inviting members of your community into your program who reflect the diverse demographic that characterizes contemporary Canadian society can help prevent the development of bias, whether implicit (i.e. unconscious/unintentional) or explicit (i.e. known/intentional) and/or dismantle damaging stereotypes directed at a particular person or group of people.
10. **Gain familiarity with community agencies whose mandate it is to support children and families who are marginalized** (Janmohamed & Campbell, 2009). They say it takes a village to raise a child and that effective partnerships with communities are essential (Best Start Expert Panel, 2007; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). In other words, early childhood educators should not bear sole responsibility for the care and education of young children or for the support of families in need. Instead, they should become knowledgeable about various resources available to children and families who might be experiencing a social justice issue and make referrals when appropriate/necessary.
11. **Rely on legislation, policies and standards that require that educators are inclusive** in all areas of their practice (Janmohamed & Campbell, 2009). In Ontario, the protection of human rights and support for diversity in its fullest form is enshrined in legal doctrines (ex. the Charter of Rights and Freedoms; the Human Rights Code), which then informs early learning and care policies and standards of practice (ex. CECE Code of Ethics & Standards of Practice; early learning and care program statements). To that end, support for diversity is not a matter of personal choice...it is the law! In the face of criticism or objection, educators who remain committed to including all forms of difference in their classrooms can cite, at the very least, their legal obligation to practice inclusivity without exceptions.
12. **Cultivate “brave spaces”, rather than “safe spaces”** that welcome all forms of diversity. According to Stubbs (n.d.) safe spaces are a good place to start as they are essential for building trust and establishing a sense of community. Educators must go further, however, and create environments “where [all] individuals feel encouraged to speak up and share their perspectives, even when they might be outside the norm, uncomfortable or challenging” (para. 3). In a brave space, people are expected to speak freely, confront biases, challenge their assumptions and engage in constructive dialogue, leaving all parties with a sense of empowerment to take risks and to learn from others (Stubbs, n.d.).
13. **Respond immediately to prejudiced and discriminatory behaviour** (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2009). Research has proven that children by the age of 2 are at risk of developing pre-prejudice, especially as it relates to areas of difference that are immediately observable (ex. race, gender, ability) [Swindler-Boutte, 2008]. It is essential that educators not dismiss this behaviour because pre-prejudice, if left unchallenged, can develop into real prejudice that is then difficult to undo without purposive intervention. According to Hoffman (1999), handling incidents of pre-prejudice in children requires that educators: (i) Stay calm; (ii) state what was observed; (iii) set clear and firm limits that denounce any behaviour that shames or hurts others; (iv) provide emotional support that nurtures the injured child’s sense of self and that problematizes the behaviour, not the rejecting child; (v) try to figure out the reason that underlies any inappropriate behaviour and (vi) take action that is individually appropriate and that creates opportunities for engagement in concrete experiences (as cited by Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2009).
14. **Engage in family-centred practices.** Ensure that families from all walks of life feel welcome and comfortable. A sense of true belonging for families can be cultivated in a variety of ways. Derman-Sparks and Edwards (2009) recommend the following: Having a parent handbook with a clearly stated policy regarding a program’s commitment to inclusion; doing intake interviews during which time educators can learn more about the children and families with whom they will work; ensuring that various forms of communication with families are inclusive (ex. available in a variety of languages; use gender neutral pronouns; integrate people first language; etc.); creating lending libraries with resources and learning materials that meet the needs of the community that is served; making the classroom physically accessible and creating comfortable spaces conducive to conversation.
15. **Acknowledge individual power and privilege.** Educators must acknowledge the power and privilege they possess, especially when working with children and families who are marginalized. For many families, educators are considered “experts” that children must “obey” at all costs. Oftentimes, this mentality serves as a barrier to the creation and maintenance of brave spaces. According to Derman Sparks and Edwards (2009), some families wouldn’t consider even raising issues of concern, much less challenge a centre’s policy or an educator’s practice. This is problematic, particularly when establishing environments that welcome diverse viewpoints and that seek to ensure that all individuals are heard and respected.

16. **Acknowledge that observing and responding to children’s strengths and needs across the developmental continuum with full objectivity is not wholly possible as bias is inherent in all that we do.** Still, it is important to use what we think we see and hear to respond to children’s perceived interests, strengths and needs (if/when necessary). As part of this process, educators should always be cognizant to focus on what children CAN do as a priority consideration and provide experiences that celebrate who they are in the here and now. In cases where developmental differences demand closer consideration, ensure that flagged opportunities for growth are individually and culturally relevant and align with parental priorities. Since no two children are alike, it is also crucial that educators scaffold skills using strategies that have proven effective over time and resist the urge to assume a “one size fits all” orientation to supporting children’s learning.
17. **Use labels with extreme caution.** While labels in the form of official diagnoses have limited value (i.e. they help assure the provision of specialized services for children with diverse needs), they more often than not yield numerous disadvantages, the most serious of which is that any label assigned may ultimately become a part of a child’s identity and have an enduring impact on how they think of themselves (Kim & Petermeier, 2019). Labels are also problematic as they are often the product of an educator’s biased thinking. For example, this may be seen when there is temperament mismatch between the educator and a child in their care. An educator who has a preference for children who are quiet and docile may characterize a child who is not as “behavioural,” a label that is all-too-commonly applied to children whether it is true or not. Regardless of its validity, labeling a child as challenging can influence the manner in which they are treated for the duration of their educational experiences. It is a label that, once applied, is extremely difficult to shed.

Ideas for the Inclusion of Queer-Affirming Topics in the Early Childhood Classroom

One of the ways to ensure you are including queer-affirming topics in your program is to actually embed experiences into the curriculum that are 2SLGBTQQ+-positive. A challenge to this often cited by early childhood educators is that they simply don't know where to start these discussions, nor how to include them in meaningful and authentic ways. Fortunately, much of this work has already been done! The following is a list of resources that provide queer curriculum ideas so that you can begin an exploration of sex, gender and sexual diversity in your classroom. Remember, as a famous Chinese philosopher once said, "the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step"! In other words, while the intent to queer your classroom may at first seem like a daunting task, every effort to make sex-, gender- and sexuality-based diversity visible in your program helps to ensure that queer classrooms for all children ultimately materialize and these become sites of hope, happiness and harmony for all.

1. [Lesson Plans to Create LGBTQ+ Inclusive Classrooms and Schools](#) (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.)
2. [Lesson Plans to Create Gender Expansive Classrooms and Support Transgender and Non-Binary Students](#) (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.)
3. [Education Resources for Teachers to Include 2SLGBTQ+ Topics](#) (The Canadian Pride Historical Society, 2023)
4. [LGBTQ Curriculum, Grades K - 2](#) (Kiddom Inc, 2024)
5. [Ready, Set, Respect! Elementary Toolkit](#) (GSLEN, 2016)
6. [LGBTQIA+ Inclusive Educator Resources and Lesson Plans](#) (Share My Lesson, n.d.)
7. [Activities for LGBTQ+, Sexuality, Gender & Facilitation](#) (The Safe Zone Project, n.d.)



Integrating Queer Families into the Curriculum

When developing a framework for including diversity in early learning programs, it is often easier to address differences of race and gender. According to Bernhard et al (1998), under the present global migration pattern, we can expect the racial, cultural and linguistic diversity of the North American population to continue to increase. In fact, the changes in population patterns in the urban communities of Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver are particularly prone to new immigrants. In the city of Toronto, for example, almost 50% of the total population is comprised of individuals born outside Canada.

However, unlike differences based on race, children growing up with queer parents are often considered to be “invisible” minorities, although statistics indicate that their numbers are growing and they warrant care, consideration and sensitivity. According to Census Canada, the rate of same sex couples having children has increased significantly. The census results only report same-sex couples living together that are raising children and do not include queer individuals who are not cohabitating with a partner but could be raising children alone. Nor does the census contain any information on transgender or transsexual parented families. According to Caspar (2003), in early childhood settings, as in other educational contexts, dealing with queer social justice issues often finds resistance from educators and parents who are located in homophobic and heterosexist discourses, which can be strongly linked to religious, moral and cultural beliefs about same-sex relationships. Further, sexuality is largely considered to be a private matter that should remain within the privacy of the family, or within adults’ private lives, and not the responsibility of early childhood educators (Robinson, 2002). But, in fact, if early childhood educators believe they have a critical role to play in the education of young children, this role needs to be integrated within a social justice context that enables children not only to accept difference, but also to integrate their knowledge in the way they live and play. During focus group discussions with lesbian and gay parents in Toronto, Janmohamed (2014) found that the parents had experienced both positive and negative situations in their child’s centre, but many of their concerns were linked to the lack of capacity amongst educators to support difference and diversity.

Queer Parents Speak Up!

Reflection # 1:

“Daddy, daddy, daddy” gushes my two-year-old at me when I walk in the room. While some parents might rejoice at hearing this, I’m a little perplexed. Our daughter has two moms – no dad.

As I was describing this interchange with a friend of mine who is also a lesbian parent, she recalled a similar experience with her son when he was about two, of his asking why he did not have a daddy. As a single parent, her son has one mother and grandmother as central family figures. The feeling of déjà vu went full circle as I remembered that my first daughter also went through a period at about two of calling me daddy. In our respective circles of family and friends, our children are surrounded by diverse family forms with many queer parents. So where does this heterosexual framing of family come from?

Our children were in childcare centres with kids that live in diverse families – single parents, divorced parents, queer parents and heterosexual two-parent families. Despite having open queer-positive staff at child care centres, the heterosexual family normative framework is pervasive, especially at the younger ages in centres. As such, children of queer families and non-two-parent families are left at a very early age to try and understand their family within the heterosexual

normative framework that shapes social spaces, such as childcare centres.”

Through much discussion at home and in our community of friends and families, our children are able to understand their families in relation to two-parent heterosexual families. But to build an inclusive system of early childhood development, it would be important to critically examine how family is communicated starting in the youngest age groups and to develop strategies of inclusive family forms.

Generally speaking, the parents felt they were accepted and valued within the child care centres, but that view also conflicts with the feeling that queer parents are more closely scrutinized. Parents indicated they had experienced parental pressure to justify what seemed to be “normal” behaviour in their child’s development. The parents also agreed that many of the challenges began during the preschool and kindergarten years, when there was an increased focus on gender and identity amongst the children. Common to children in preschool programs is a growing interest in how families operate, often played out during dramatic play experiences.

Parents overheard children discussing family composition engaged in play where the conversation centred on which child could be a parent based on gender. Yet, the staff made no effort to challenge the children’s heterosexist assumptions. The parents felt somewhat uncomfortable raising these issues due to perceived homophobia. Examples include limited dialogue with parents regarding their family composition, while more attention was given to the birth parent and a consistent pattern of encouraging gendered play (Collison, 2005).

Reflection # 2:

My experiences within early childhood education institutions were mixed. My son was in ECE programs from the age of 1.5 years until 4 years old, so what I am about to discuss is based on 2.5 years of direct experience.

As a gay man raising a young child, I had a lot of sensitivity about what would be taught to my son, especially considering he is living in an untraditional household. While I would say his experiences overall were positive, and he got those basic skills of learning how to socialize with others and developed relationship building, some aspects made me, and thus the family overall, less included.

One incident which has never left my mind was when my son came home one day, and he mentioned that a family is a mom and a dad. Naturally, I inquired more, and he was able to explain they were reading books at school that reinforced this, and an actual ECA said this to the kids in the program.

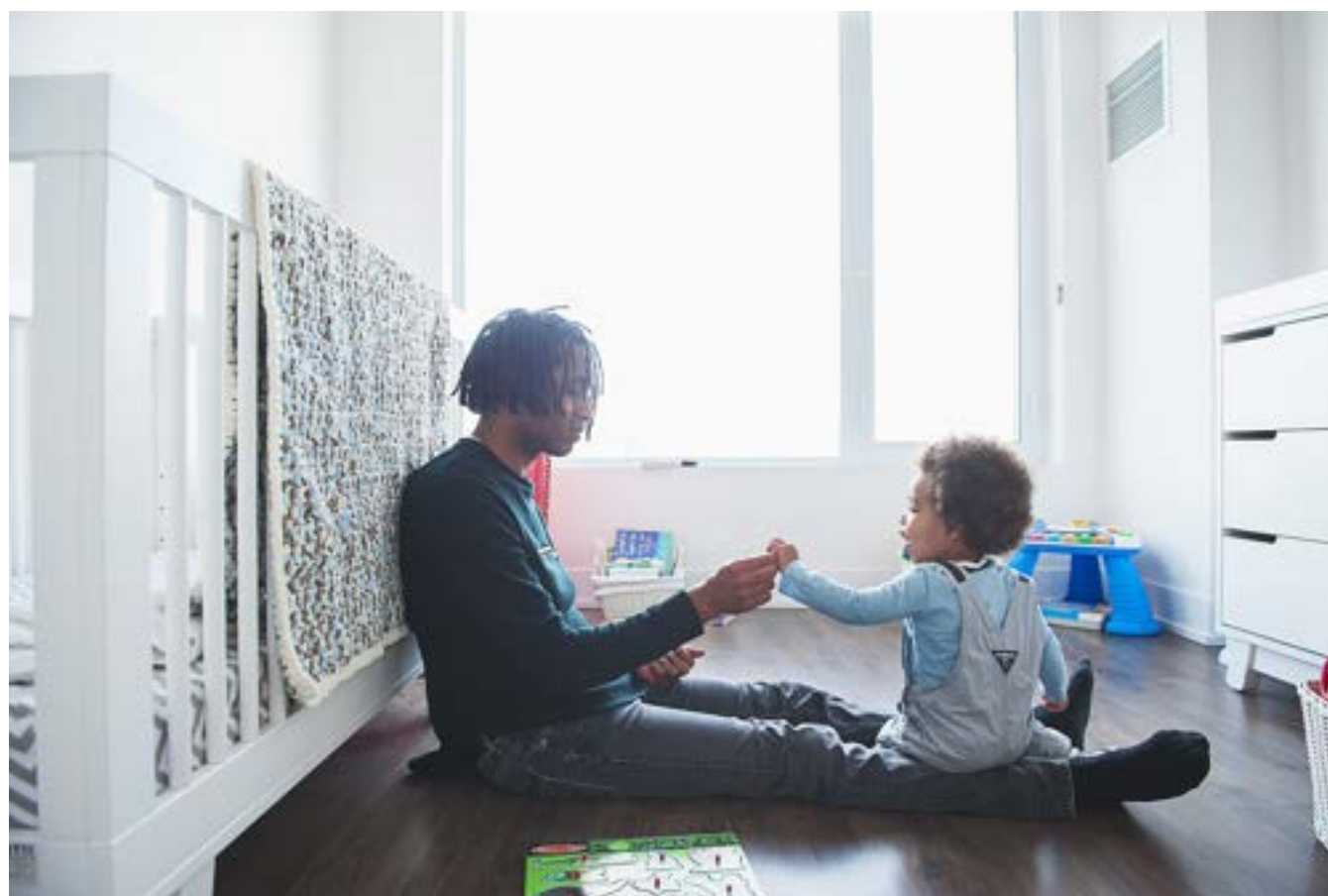
As you can imagine, this left my son hurt and confused (fortunately, I was able to clear this up with him, that it is not true for every family). These things that seem trivial on the surface can have such a deep impact. It is the reading of heteronormative stories, the discussion of heteronormative ideals, etc., that impact kids at an early age, and I believe that some ECE programs that are not sensitive to this are reproducing bigotry into these kids and thus the broader society. And it also makes work much harder for teachers in grade schools to create an environment welcoming for all children when they are dealing with the bigotry instilled by many ECEs.

The Isolation Queer Parents Experience

According to Ochner (2000), by locating the gender discourses (discussion) and practices in kindergarten classrooms, the gendering process begins to reveal how femininity and masculinity are socially constructed and how heterosexuality regulates the gendered social order of the classroom. For example, ECE staff sometimes engage in a process where children are “coupled” based on the cuteness factor. If opposite sex children play together often, they may be labelled as “boyfriend” and “girlfriend”; this is not done to create harm, but it does demonstrate the practice of encouraging gendered approaches to play and relationships based on heterosexist assumptions. When was the last time anyone in ECE said of two boys playing

together, “Oh, don’t they make a cute couple together?” Supporting heterosexist assumptions in early childhood education fails to recognize how children’s identities are constructed and how their gendered and sexualized identities play a significant role in social justice (Blaise, 2005). It takes time to realize how heterosexism plays out in relationships with children, and discomfort is common before early childhood educators can gain enough confidence to establish

new ways of interacting with children. *“Coming out was an isolating process for me, particularly since my kids were in a childcare program that did not recognize diverse families in any way. I had been an active single parent on the board of the centre, volunteering for field trips and special events and helping out in the different rooms.”* – C.G. (Toronto, ON)



Queer Parent Case Scenarios

Scenario 1:

A parent whose child you care for and educate (named Toby) has called a meeting to discuss a matter of concern. On several occasions this week, Toby was picked up wearing a dress, high heel shoes and matching jewellery made available in the dramatic play area. In Toby's words, the pieces they so carefully selected made them "feel beautiful...just like mommy." The parent insisted after the first incident that their son not be permitted to play with these materials as "they were clearly designed for girls, not boys". Still, it was the case that nearly every day last week, when Toby was picked up, they were wearing the same dress, high heel shoes and matching jewellery and dancing around the dramatic play area exuberantly and with clear confidence. The parent in question seemed angry when requesting the meeting, likely in light of your teaching team's failure to honour their initial request. As they explained to you at that time, Toby's behaviour violates their cultural norms and could be punishable by death in their home country, which they continue to visit yearly. You've agreed to a meeting to discuss the parent's concerns as you acknowledge how clearly distressing this situation is for them and want to ensure your practice is inevitably responsive and inclusive. There is clearly a need for you negotiate the tension between the child's right to self-expression, your commitment to curriculum centred on children's interests and the cultural norms Toby's parents spoke of. Still, you are left with a number of questions about what to do about the situation:

- How would you respond to Toby's interest in dressing up during program hours? Why would you respond in this manner?
- How would you respond to Toby's mother's request that they not be permitted to wear a dress: In the moment and in the days, weeks, months to follow? Why would you respond in this manner?
- What would you do if your room partner is not on the same page and insists you act contrary to your instincts?

Scenario 2:

A parent approaches you about a situation that occurred at home that was a special milestone for their 12-year-old. The evening prior, the tween claimed with pride that they identified as gay and went on to explain that being gay is when a boy likes boys the way boys like girls or girls like boys. The parent's reasons for connecting with you about this event are twofold. Firstly, they want to make sure that your program is committed to queer-affirming curriculum; that it celebrates the 2SLGBTQQ+ community in the same manner that other diverse groups are celebrated. The second and more serious concern is for their child's safety. To that end, they worry what the other children in the program will say and do once they discover their son's secret-no-more. You've agreed to a meeting to discuss the parent's concerns, acknowledging that you it is your professional obligation to support families, particularly in times of need.

- What might you do/say to alleviate the parent's fear that their child might become a target of bullying? Why would you respond in this manner?
- What would you do to support the 12-year-old? Why would you respond in this manner?
- What would you do to ensure that your curriculum is queer affirming (i.e. celebrates the 2SLGBTQQ+ community)?
- What might some barriers be to your approach? What solutions would you propose to overcome those barriers?

Scenario 3:

You work in a Full Day Early Learning-Kindergarten Program for the Toronto District School Board. The school in which your program is situated accommodates children up to and including grade 8. Consequently, the 4- and 5-year-olds that you are responsible for often share common spaces with children as old as 14, including the lunchroom, the gymnasium (especially during school assemblies) and the schoolyard. One day, while helping the kindergarten children dress for outdoor play, you witness an altercation between Shaquil and Devante, who appear to be arguing over who will carry the soccer ball outside. During their heated exchange, Shaquil shouts, "Stop being such a faggot, Devante! I had the ball first!" Devante shouts back, "I'm not a faggot! You're a faggot!" Conceding the ball to Shaquil, Devante then drops to the floor and begins to cry.

- How would you respond in the moment to the children's use of the word "faggot" during their exchange? Why would you respond in this manner?
- How would you respond over time to the children's use of the word "faggot" during their exchange? Why would you respond in this manner?
- Do you think you have an obligation to meet with the teachers of the older children to discuss the incident you observed? Why or why not



One small way to create a welcoming environment for all families is to display images in your setting that are reflective of diversity. While it is always best to start with images that represent the actual children and families in your care, we cannot stop there. We are part of a global community and must therefore make a concerted effort to ensure that our spaces honour and celebrate the full scope of human diversity that characterizes contemporary Canadian society.

The “Who’s in Your Family Tree?” poster is but one example of the kinds of visual elements that can help you to communicate your support for gender- and sexuality-based differences. Posters are available in English and French through Rainbow Health Ontario (<https://www.rainbowhealthontario.ca/product/queering-the-family-tree-english-french/>) for a small cost of \$2.00 for two posters (11 X 17).

Overcoming Judgement and Homophobia

According to Casper (2003), “although the phenomenon of lesbian- and gay-headed families appear to have come to pass over the last decade, there is evidence that adults whom we would call gay or bisexual have been raising children since at least the early Middle Ages (Boswell, 1980), if not earlier. Nevertheless, the gay baby boom has to be seen in the context of the Gay Rights Movement of the past 30 years, which resulted in a combination of increased visibility and increased numbers of gay- and lesbian-headed families. During this period, through television, film, and fashion, gay culture has become increasingly assimilated (in fits and starts) into American culture.” In the last couple of decades, more lesbians and gay men have been having children and, as a result, are entering early childhood and education settings. Although in Canada basic human rights are extended to queer people, there is still resistance to the idea that gay families exist and their interests and needs may be somewhat different from those of other “marginalized groups”.

In trying to understand the needs of queer-parented families, ECE staff must recognize the multiplicity of identities connected to individual children and families. Whether queer or straight, individuals can identify themselves based on gender, race, class, ability, sexual orientation, family creation, urban or rural. The cross-section of various points of identity individualizes people within a cultural group. Similarly, children in queer families also have a cross-section of identity. Children may be adopted, may have been created with a known or unknown donor, have more than two parents, surrogacy, may have been part of a previous heterosexual relationship and may be living with parents who are not publicly “out” for a variety of reasons. There are a number of queer community members active in various faith communities, including the Metropolitan United Church and Salaam, a group for queer identified Muslims.

Early Childhood educators play a central role in providing resources to families. Some families may appreciate ECE efforts and seek community groups on their behalf. In addition, they may have more than two parents, surrogacy, may have been part of a previous heterosexual relationship and may be living with parents who are not publicly “out” for a variety of reasons. In addition, they may be from English-speaking families, may be working class or upper class. Like all children, their family units are distinctive and have differing needs. For example, lesbian and gay men in low income or working class situations may be at higher risk of harassment in the workplace if their sexual orientation is made public (G.A., Toronto). A college professor is unlikely to experience overt homophobia compared to someone who may be employed in a factory, where employment policies and

practices do not include human rights legislation; although prejudice and discrimination do exist in all settings, including community colleges.

Similarly, someone who is a practicing Muslim or Jewish may find it more challenging to live openly as a queer individual if their family background is more conservative. Therefore, the responsibility of educating oneself and maintaining confidentiality remains critical in the ECE profession. Similar to learning more about other forms of diversity, ECE staff need to learn more about queer families and should be integrating knowledge into the program, whether or not there are queer families enrolled in the centre.

We don’t limit ourselves to raising children’s consciousness about racial discrimination if everyone is of the same race. We still talk about poverty with children, even if none of the children live in apparent poverty. In the same manner, it is incumbent to include depictions of queer families within program policies and practices in order to provide a more inclusive approach for all families. The Toronto District School Board (TDSB) has an equity policy in place that is built upon the tenets of the Canadian Constitution within the Canadian Charter of Rights. Although there are challenges within the TDSB, the Board does make an attempt to ensure that all students have the right to be educated in a safe environment that respects each child’s background, whilst adhering to the Charter of Rights. Research on and media depictions of gay-headed families have focused almost exclusively on the white, middle-class individuals (Casper & Schultz, 2000), which often leads to presumptions about queer people, with children being limited to the dominant group when in fact, like all families, queer families also come from a variety of socioeconomic, racial and cultural backgrounds. This is not a phenomenon limited to a few privileged people. Queer families cross all boundaries and come in all shapes and forms, some of which are active in their faith communities.

According to one gay dad in Toronto, going to Church every Sunday with his children was central to their approach to raising two young sons. There are a number of queer community members active in various faith communities, including the United Church of Canada, Salaam Canada, which is an organization dedicated to the Muslim queer community and the Metropolitan Community Church of Toronto. Early Childhood educators play a central role in providing resources to families. Some families may appreciate ECE efforts and seek community groups on their behalf.



A Personal Reflection on Homophobic Harassment in the Early Years

Ryan’s Journey...

The road for my journey begins in the latter half of 1983, a time most would regard as the onset of my formal education. It’s identified here for quite a different reason, however, as it was during this time that my sexual orientation emerged as a source of peer scrutiny and I, in turn, became a popular target for homophobic bullying.

In the few short years leading up to what would eventually become a routine experience of harassment, I recall making friends quite easily. As they were almost always girls, and because I had a younger sister with whom I shared a close relationship, I frequently sought out opportunities in Kindergarten to play with dolls or, in an effort to inhabit the role of “mother” or “big sister”, adorn the jewellery and clothing provided in the dramatic center. These play preferences never posed a problem at home, but I eventually became cognizant of efforts by teachers to redirect my attention to materials like trucks or blocks, all of which proved futile.

As I continue to consider my elementary school years with a critical eye, it is difficult to say for certain that any one instance of bullying carries more significance than another. In fact, it is a culmination of a series of events that spanned the better part of a decade that continues to fuel my moment of regression. It’s a return to my educational past that first elicits immediate thoughts of hiding during recess to avoid another painful punch to the stomach. It’s a window offering a candid glimpse into “what was” through which I can be seen traversing the school’s hallways dejectedly, desperate to go unnoticed to evade the inevitable repertoire of insults my sheer presence elicited. As I consider the verbal assaults that came to be routine I also envision the feigned helplessness and looks of pity that bystanders offered in place of a single effort to halt the series of slurs themselves, launched at me like missiles, through which I was humiliatingly branded “gay boy,” “faggot,” and “queer bait”.

I give pause to consider these events and cannot help but question the extent to which the combined lack of adult support (in this case, from teachers) and blatant omission of the queer experience from the curriculum content to which we were exposed, worked to create the perfect conditions for homophobic sentiment to endure. Still, how could my pain and suffering go unnoticed for so long – especially when the persecution that I was subjected to was often brazen? And how could children, barely 5 or 6 themselves), have such a fixed sense of “normal” and a commitment to upholding these standards that they were motivated to torment me into conformity?”

Ryan Gracie, 2025



Pink Shirt Day occurs the last Wednesday of every February and is about cultivating a community of kindness. It is an effort to raise awareness about bullying, recognizing that it is a major problem in schools. The day originated in support of a grade 9 student who was bullied because he wore a pink shirt to school. It was initially a student-lead initiative, which has now grown to be a nation-wide commemorative event. For more information on Pink Shirt Day, or to order your pink shirt, please visit: <https://www.pinkshirtday.ca/>

Did you know...?

- Children develop pre=prejudice by the age of 2. Once formed, these attitudes become very difficult to undo (Centre for Education and Youth, 2017).
- Young children are apt to develop prejudice against areas of diversity that are obvious/visual, including differences in expression of gender and sexuality (Centre for Children and Youth, 2017).

According to a 2021 study by Egale of children in grades 8 to 12:

- 64% reported hearing homophobic comments daily or weekly at school.
- 30% of queer students had been the victims of cyberbullying, compared to 8% of cisgender heterosexual respondents.
- 57% of trans respondents had been targets of mean rumours or lies.
- 79% of trans students who had been the victims of physical harassment reported that teachers and staff were ineffective in addressing transphobic harassment.
- 35% of students who attend Catholic schools reported experiencing harassment based on their perceived sexual orientation.
- 2x 2SLGBTQ Indigenous students were twice as likely (35%) to experience harassment based on their racialized identity than cisgender heterosexual Indigenous students (14%).
- 77% of 2SLGBTQ Indigenous students had been harassed at school in the year leading up to the survey, the highest percentage of any group.
- 62% of 2SLGBTQ respondents feel unsafe at school, compared to 11% of cisgender heterosexual students.
- 11% of cisgender heterosexual respondents reported languishing mental health, compared to 20% of GBQ boys, 25% of LGBQ girls, and a full 40% of trans respondents.

Homophobia hurts everyone! Here’s how...

Homophobia...

1. locks all people into rigid gender roles that inhibit creativity and self-expression.
2. compromises the integrity of heterosexual people by pressuring them to treat others badly, actions that go against our basic humanity.
3. limits our ability to form close, intimate relationships with members of one’s own sex.
4. generally limits communications with a significant portion of the population and, more specifically, limits family relationships.
5. prevents some [queer] people from developing an honest self-identity, and adds to the pressure to marry and/or have children, which places undue stress on themselves and their families.
6. is one cause of premature sexual activity, which increases the changes of pregnancy and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Young people, of all sexual identities, are often pressured to become heterosexually active to prove that they are “normal.”
7. results in the elimination of any discussion of the lives and sexuality of queer people in the curriculum, keeping important information from all students.
8. can be used to stigmatize, silence and, on occasion, target people who are perceived or defined by other as [queer], but who are, in actuality, heterosexual.
9. prevent heterosexuals from accepting the benefits and gifts offered by queer people: theoretical insights, social and spiritual visions, contributions in the arts and culture, to religion, to family life, indeed, to all parts of society.
10. along with racism, classism, etc., inhibits a unified and effective governmental and societal response to AIDS.
11. takes energy away from more positive activities.
12. inhibits appreciation of other types of diversity, making it unsafe for everyone because each person has unique traits not considered mainstream or dominant. Therefore, we are all hurt when any one of us is disrespected.

Warren J Blumenfeld

(retrieved from ok2beme.ca/wp-content/uploads/How-Does-Homophobia-Hurt-Us-All.pdf)

Strategies for Challenging Homophobia

When you hear children using names like "gay", "lesbian", "fag", "dyke" or "queer" as putdowns, challenge their use of inappropriate language.

As in any other situation involving putdowns be clear and firm that name-calling is not acceptable and will not be tolerated. Start with an exploration of their understanding of the words being used. Teach what the words mean if they don't know. Use the incident as an opportunity to teach children how hurtful words can be.

When you hear adults making offensive or malicious comments or jokes about bisexual, gay, lesbian, or transgender people, let them know their comments are offensive and discriminatory.

It is important to respond. Depending on the situation, privately or publicly tell the person how such comments or jokes make you or others feel. Be clear that such language unacceptable, particularly in an educational context. Suggest that you might talk about this sometime if the other person is open to dialogue.

Never laugh along with people making homophobic or heterosexist comments or jokes.

We know what it feels like to be the brunt of someone's joke. When we laugh along with the crowd, we reinforce homophobic and heterosexist attitudes and discrimination.

The constant assumption of heterosexuality renders bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgender people invisible. Use inclusive language, such as partner instead of wife or husband. Be inclusive in the curriculum. Make sure same-sex couples and bisexual, gay, lesbian, or transgender people are represented.

The Learning Process in Young Children

It is often assumed that children do not begin to learn until the formal school years. Parents are fascinated by their babies' ability to say "mama" or "ball", easily "communicating" with their babbling young toddlers. However, they are often resistant to accept the tremendous amount of learning that takes place in the first three years of life. Although in these early years, children learn thousands of words, understand the difference between trusted adults and strangers, learn how to self-regulate and demonstrate long attention spans if interested in their surroundings and interactions, there is general resistance by the public to acknowledge the importance of the childhood years. The early years are critical in the development of intelligence, personality and social behaviour, and the effects of early neglect can be cumulative. There are critical points in children's development where it is important to ensure that children have experiences that support their growth and development.. New research in brain development shows that "much of the brain is already formed at birth and during the first two years of life most of the growth of brain cells occurs. In the preschool years, most of the structuring of neural connections are made and have the most significant impact on the child's learning ability. Clearly research supports the assertion it is also important to ensure that the caregivers are supportive of healthy emotional and physical development" (Evans, 2000).

There are common characteristics in how children develop although children vary in when they reach developmental milestones. There is also significant research that demonstrates the value of play in learning, although the definition of play varies depending on the perspective of the researcher, theorist or participant (Dietze and Kashin, 2018). The very idea of children learning through play is a foreign concept to many parents as they recall their own experiences of schooling as being formal with children sitting behind rows of desks. The provision of care is an interactive relationship between parent and caregiver, yet this fundamental principle is rarely explained to parents in the introductory orientation sessions organized for families considering group-based childcare. Taking the time to talk more with parents about the value of play in the process of learning can strengthen relationships with families and broaden their understanding of early child development. Interestingly, the parents who attended the focus groups wanted to be more involved in the curriculum development of the program. Toddlers, of course, do not learn about lesbian- and gay-headed families from research literature. They learn about families from their daily lives. For toddlers in lesbian and gay-headed families, it is the "traditional" families who are "different" (Casper, 2003). After the pediatrician, the next professional a lesbian or gay-headed family is likely to meet will be a child care provider, an educator, or an early interventionist.

When and how do children learn prejudice?

In countless studies, children have been seen to demonstrate prejudice related to differences, especially those that are observable. For example, in 2012 researchers found that children exhibited racial bias and that these attitudes were strikingly similar to the racially negative attitudes that some adults possess (Mulcahy, 2017). This suggests that, once formed, prejudicial thinking in young children is difficult to undo. This is because they are constantly bombarded with messages about difference from various institutions of socialization, like peers, the media and,

most influentially, from the family. It is already well-established that the mere idea of gender and sexual diversity leaves many parents and educators fraught with anxiety (Robinson, 2013). This is due, in large part, to views about children as innately innocent (Robinson, 2002), in need of protection and immature, incapable of understanding 'adult issues' (Janmohamed, 2011). Some parents and educators often regard any reference to gender and sexual diversity as developmentally inappropriate. But we know for certain that children understand gender and sexually differences, whether they are explicitly discussed or not.

What do children already know about gender and sexuality?

It is often assumed that children are asexual and know very little about sexuality and/or gender in general, let alone about their identities. But the development of their gender and sexual identity is marked by distinct milestones that occur from the time they are infants. For example, by the age of two, children begin to understand differences that are gender-related, especially those that are outwardly obvious. Coinciding with this realization are efforts to police the gender of others to ensure that coincide with cultural norms. By the age of three they have a sense of their own gender and may, in fact, begin to express discomfort should their assigned sex at birth not align with their perceived gender. By four years of age, children know gender to be constant. By six or seven, efforts to conform to norms is likely and anxiety often emerges in those who do not display what is deemed appropriate gender behaviour. By the age of eight, stereotypical gender behaviour continues and an increased awareness of any misalignment between their sex and gender identity is more pronounced. At this point, children can often definitively identify whether or not they may be trans.

In addition to gendered beings, children are also sexual ones. In fact, children begin showing sexual behaviour and interest in their sexual functioning in their infant/toddler years (0 – 3 years), beginning with genital stimulation. By preschool (4 years), occasional masturbation may occur, as might playful exploration of children who are the same age. At this stage, children may also demonstrate curiosity about adults' bodies, have no inhibitions related to nudity and use slang terms for body parts. From kindergarten to middle school (5 – 8 years), there is a continued use of slang terms and "potty humour" or jokes to describe body parts and functions is common. There is a deepened understanding of norms related to sexual exploration with same- and opposite-sexed peers and masturbatory behaviour is common. In late childhood (9 – 12 years), an increased need for independence and privacy emerges, interest in romantic relationships occurs, curiosities about adult bodies strengthens and masturbation becomes a private matter.

Adapted from:
Trying Together
(<https://tryingtogether.org/dap/developmentally-appropriate-parenting-series-part-x/>)

&

Planned Parenthood
(https://www.plannedparenthood.org/uploads/filer_public/80/f7/80f7ae70-4e3b-4e21-9c0a-482d44fd076f/handout_1_eng_child_sexual_development_-_copy.pdf)

Additional References

What does gay mean to children?

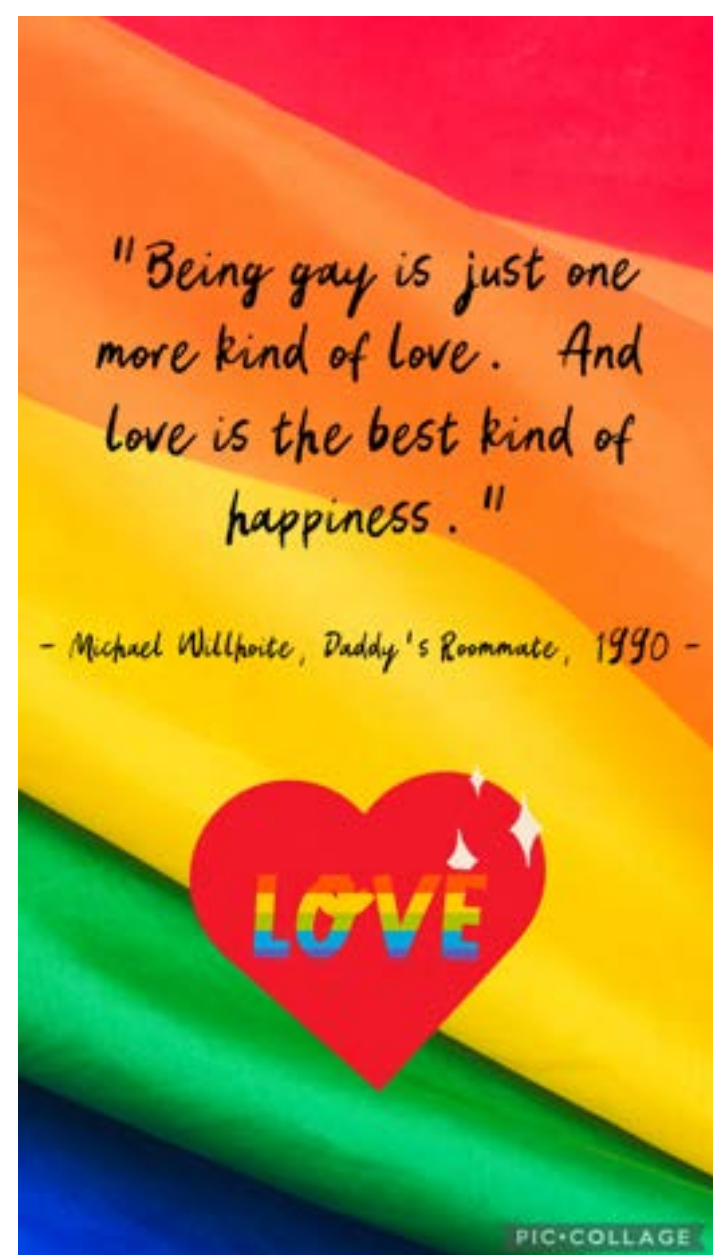
As Ashley skipped passed her friends in the Kindergarten room, she pointed her finger at each one of them and joyfully said, You re gay! You re gay! You re gay! Her peers looked up, watched her skipped away and continued to play. Ashley skipped through a second time pointed to two different children and again said, You re gay! You re gay! There was no reaction from any of the children she pointed to, but from the other side of the room at the sink, I could see Danny s brow furrow and he watched her intensely as she moved away. Danny turned and looked at me when I met his eyes questioningly, he returned to washing his paint pot in the sink. Ashley came around again, this time stopping to point her finger at Danny. You re gay! she sang. Danny immediately threw his pot into the sink turned towards her and screamed back, No I m not! I am not gay . Surprised, Ashley took a few steps back, and they studied each other. As I was moving towards them, Ashley whispered, You re gay . Danny shouted after her, I am not! I placed my hand on Danny s shoulder and asked, Why are you so angry that Ashley said you are gay? Danny, sighed deeply but did not respond. I then asked, Do you know what gay means? Danny responded, No but its a bad word. When my brother says it, he doesn t say it in a nice way. I reiterated his statement then added, I wondered what gay meant to Ashley. Danny shrugged his shoulders. I turned to her and said, Ashley I watched you skipping to your friends, and calling them gay. What does gay mean? Ashley looked up with a huge smile, and said, It means happy. All my friends are happy. I said, I see. It means happy for you, but for Danny it meant something completely different. I remember thinking to myself, what I should say next, I was afraid of making a mistake. After what seemed to be minutes of deliberation, I finally said, Danny, sometimes, people use the word gay in a hurtful way, but it is not a bad word. It means when a boy loves a boy or a girl loves a girl in the same way your mom and dad love each other . In the next few days, I added books and puzzles that included same sex families (L.H., Toronto).

How do I talk to children about sexual orientation and gender identity with children?

1. Eight is too late! Begin discussions about sexual orientation and gender identity early. Ask children what they already know or what they've heard. Be sure to dispel myths and/or correct inaccuracies and misconceptions with sensitivity.
2. Encourage them to ask questions, all of which are valid.
3. Reassure children you are always there for them. This is especially important of those who may be questioning their gender identity and/or sexual orientation or who already identify as queer.
4. Use learning materials that discuss various gender identities and/or sexual orientations. This may include books (such as those recommended in this manual), movies, music, etc.
5. Capitalize on teachable moments. For example, if you hear a child use the phrase, "That's so gay," you might take this opportunity to educate the child on the hurt and harm this phrase may cause others.

6. Demonstrate an openness to and respect for various gender and sexual identities. Be sure to talk about them often and talk about them positively.
7. Use inclusive language. For example, say "person who identifies as gay, lesbian, queer, etc.," not "gay person." Putting the person before the label avoids sending the message that an individual is only one thing at a time. Additionally, use "parent" in place of "mom" or "dad."
8. Don't make assumptions about someone's gender or sexual orientation or how they choose to identify. Allow them to disclose this information at their own discretion. Revelations of this nature often require responsive, trusting relationships to first be in place.
9. Remain open to/model lifelong learning. You won't always have the answers and that's okay! When asked a question by a child that you don't quite know how to respond to, indicate that the question is a good one, that you don't immediately know the answer but will that you will conduct some research and provide the information sought in the not-so-distant future. Better yet, involve the child(ren) in this process!
10. Encourage individuals who identify as queer to participate in your program, perhaps even leading discussions about gender- and/or sexuality-related topics. This exposes children to differences, which reduces fear and ensures that authentic, embodied knowledge is being conveyed.

Adapted from:
<https://schools.healthiertogether.ca/media/articles%20for%20families/healthy-children-04-2022.pdf>



**What Does Gay Mean?
An ECE Reflection**

Child 1: “Why are those two men holding hands?”

Child 2: “They’re probably gay.”

Child 1: “What does gay mean?”

The above scenario occurred on a neighbourhood walk at a time when Toronto was celebrating its Lesbian and Gay Pride Week.. Men and women from all over the world were descending upon one of Canada’s most diverse cities to partake in an array of festivities planned to commemorate the occasion. Our childcare centre happens to be situated in close proximity to one of Toronto’s most densely populated queer neighbourhoods. Consequently, displays of affection between same sex couples were commonplace. Still, the children’s curiosity surprised me, as they had never before made this kind of inquiry. I knew, however, that I was obligated to take advantage of this prime teachable moment. As a queer early childhood educator it was a challenge in which I had personal investment to undertake.

During this time, I worked as a preschool teacher in a program with children four- and five-years-of- age. Admittedly, I had long wondered how to introduce queer-themed experiences into the curriculum. Our centre, after all, operated according to the guiding principles of emergent curriculum, which requires that an educator programs in response to observed individual and classroom interests. Clearly, the children’s questions surrounding the meaning of the term “gay” met this criterion and served as a catalyst in which a more concerted effort was made to delve into the topic in greater depth.

Fortunately, as a queer early childhood educator, I had collected a wealth of resources (images, picture books, pamphlets, etc.) that encouraged queer representation in terms that children and their families could relate to. Our classroom’s book shelf, for instance, was well-stocked with stories about diverse family forms or tales whose primary characters were gay or lesbian themselves. Of these titles, I used a classroom favourite (“Daddy’s Roommate”) to offer an age-appropriate definition of ‘gay.’ According to one of the story’s main characters, “Gay is another kind of love. And love is the best kind of happiness.” To elaborate further on this definition, it was explained to the children that gay is when a man loves a man or a woman loves a woman. Opportunities for further questions were offered but this experience ultimately seemed to resolve the initial curiosity expressed on the neighbourhood walk. - Anonymous

Pause and Reflect...

1. How would you respond to the question, “What Does Gay Mean?” in the moment?
2. How would you further support children’s interest in this topic in the days, weeks and months to follow?
3. What barriers might you face in response to your efforts to queer your curriculum?
4. What potential solutions might help to alleviate these challenges?



How Do I Feel About People Who Identify as Queer?

HOW DO I FEEL ABOUT LGBTQ PEOPLE?

Clarifying our attitudes helps us to become more conscious of how we feel. The purpose in responding to the following statements is not to try to change your attitudes, but to bring them forward for examination. There are no right or wrong answers. The important thing is to understand what you actually feel; not how you think you should feel.

Read each statement below and circle the number that best represents your opinion with

1 – strongly agree 5 – strongly disagree.

I would feel comfortable if an LGBTQ person with a young child participated in a FRP/daycare where I work

I am comfortable around LGBTQ people unless they flaunt their lifestyle.

1 2 3 4 5

I am comfortable around transsexual or transgendered people as long as they pass as either male or female.

1 2 3 4 5

I can accept gays or lesbians, but bisexuals just can't make their minds up. I can't understand that.

1 2 3 4 5

Rebecca Gower 2005 Adapted from material in Opening Doors to Understanding and Acceptance, published in 1990 by the Campaign to End Homophobia.

LGBTQ folks are freaks and will probably go to hell.

1 2 3 4 5

I would feel uncomfortable if my boss were LGBTQ.

1 2 3 4 5

I would feel comfortable if I learned that my child's teacher was LGBTQ.

1 2 3 4 5

I would feel uncomfortable if LGBTQ issues were being taught to my child as part of the school curriculum.

LGBTQ people who have "come out" should not be teachers.

1 2 3 4 5

If my child were LGBTQ, I would feel I had failed as a parent.

1 2 3 4 5

I'm uncomfortable around people who don't conform to stereotypical masculine/feminine gender roles (in dress, appearance, etc).

1 2 3 4 5

All LGBTQ people are white, of European background and are from the middle or upper socio-economic class.

1 2 3 4 5

Coming to Terms with Your Own Biases
(Excerpt from ‘Around the Rainbow’)

As an educator, we face the challenge of coming to terms with both our personal stereotypes about LGBTQ individuals and our assumptions about the definition of the family. We may also face the need to review new resources and curriculum to ensure that we understand how to be open and inclusive. An honest assessment of our views regarding queer issues and queer parents may be our first step. The following will help identify some of the subtle ways in which we may unintentionally express anti-queer bias:

1. Do I believe that LGBTQ people can influence others to change their sexual orientation or gender identity? Do I think someone could influence me to change my sexual and affectional preference [orientation]?
2. As a parent, how would I feel about having a LGBTQ child?
3. How do I think I would feel if I discovered that one of my parents, or a brother or sister, were LGBTQ?
4. How would I feel if they chose to create and/or raise a family?
5. What are my stereotypes about LGBTQ people? Where did these come from?
6. Are there any jobs, positions or professions that I think should be barred to LGBTQ people? If yes, why?
7. Would I go to a physician whom I knew or believed to be LGBTQ? What if they were of the same gender as me? Would that bother me? Why or why not?
8. If someone I care about were to say, “I think I am gay,” would I suggest that the person see a therapist? What if they said, “I think I am trans?”
9. Have I ever been to a LGBTQ-organized social event, march, or worship service? If not, why?
10. Can I think of three positive aspects about being LGBTQ?
11. Have I ever laughed at a “queer” joke? Have I ever said, “That’s so gay!”
12. Have I ever changed my own behavior out of fear that someone might think or comment that I am LGBTQ?
13. Have I ever discouraged a particular behavior in a child by saying, “That’s not ladylike” or “Boys don’t wear that” or something similar?
- 14.. Would I ever consider wearing a button that says, “How dare you presume I’m heterosexual”? Why or why not?

Key Principles that Help Promote Anti-Discriminatory Policies and Practices in ECE

Early Childhood Educators have the capacity to be agents of social change, but the scope of diversity or anti-bias strategies still seem limited to ethno cultural and racial differences. Similar to other “caring” professions, the ECE workforce is comprised predominantly of women and a growing number of individuals who identify as immigrants or from a variety of racial groups. Like any profession, early childhood education also attracts a diversity of students and staff that identify as straight or queer. The dominant difference is that there remains an ongoing discomfort around “being out” unless you work in a progressive early childhood program that is open and supportive with queer friendly policies and practices.

ECE Coming Out Stories

1: Although I had been out for six years with my friends and siblings, I was very apprehensive about coming out at my workplace. Having been with this organization for the past five years, I was subjected to silly gay jokes and many heterosexist comments. I remember a discussion I had with one colleague, who after viewing a biased program on same sex families, felt the two moms were completely culpable in creating a “disturbed teenager”. I left this site, entrusting only two people with my lesbianism. One was my room partner, the other another gay colleague. Starting my new site, I found myself being even more cautious, as I recognized there were two individuals with strong religious beliefs. Initially I isolated myself, taking lunches away from the centre, or spending my time on the telephone. Eventually I spent more time in the staff room and when I was asked about my weekend; I was vague never detailing who I spent my time with, and often referring to my nameless friend as “they”.

After a few sessions of this, one colleague pointed out that I was just like another teacher, who had worked there previously. When I asked her to elaborate she stated neither of us identified our friends, or places that we would frequent. I remember thinking that’s because we’re both gay. After a year, and much deliberation, I came out to my room partner. We had many heartfelt discussions and I knew I could trust her implicitly. I realized it was my issues with Catholicism that assumed my room partner would judge me. After I met my new partner, I knew I was at a different place in my life and in my relationship with my colleagues. Although I had grown to trust most of my colleagues, there continued to be difficult moments like the continual disappearing rainbow stickers from the front door but I had grown to trust most of them. - Anonymous

2: Prior to entering the field of early childhood education in 2001, I was out as a gay man for seven years. I was proud of who I was and, thus, it never occurred to me that I’d ever be placed in a position in which my sexuality might best be rendered a secret. I was admittedly not prepared for all that working with young children in a professional context entailed – not the daily duties themselves – but the attitudes I might confront in the event I chose to disclose my sexual orientation. And so I initially decided not to say anything at all and let people – families and colleagues alike – simply come to their own conclusions about who I was in terms of my sexual identity. It didn’t take long for coworkers, in particular, to guess I was gay, as I’d often be accompanied to work by my partner at that time, who was usually given the responsibility of helping me carry the truckload of resources I insisted on bringing to work each day. Most were accepting of my identity with the exception of one colleague who was deeply religious and often made comments under her breath, which later found their way back to me, about the sinful nature of my so-called “lifestyle choices.”

Parents discovered I was gay in a whole different manner, many coming to that conclusion in light of my commitment to infusing gender and sexual diversity in the experiences I planned for their children. I recall the first time this connection was brought to my attention, following a display of children’s artwork that I put up that showcased their exploration and understanding of rainbows. We had seen one that very day and so decided, among other projects, to collaborate on a large, mural-sized pride flag to hang in our room. As the children worked in earnest to decorate the flag with materials in reds, oranges, yellows, greens, blues and purples, I read a story about the origins of the gay pride flag aloud and talked about what each colour symbolized. A parent, who witnessed part of this experience, approached me during pick-up time elated that I had introduced her daughter to this topic, claiming her lifelong best friends identified as lesbian and that it was important to her that her children developed accepting attitudes of sexuality-based differences. To say that she was grateful was an understatement. She gave me a hug and whispered something in my ear I will never forget: “It takes real courage to be yourself in a world where it is not always okay to be different. You are precisely the model for my children I had hoped for. Thank you.” Leaving me speechless, she turned on her heel and exited the classroom, a lightness in her step that was undeniable.

Despite this exchange, parents were not always so grateful for my presence or for my attempts to queer our curriculum. In fact, one reported to our supervisor in 2015 (following the legalization of same sex marriage in Canada) that she was dismayed that I told the children in my care that men could marry men and women could marry women. My supervisor’s response was simple and matter-of-fact: “Well they most certainly can,” she said, “and now the law supports it.” The same parent then insisted that her child not be exposed to any classroom content that addressed sexuality in any manner, citing her religious views as rationale. Of course, censorship of this kind went directly against everything our centre stood for. Our centre philosophy was explicit in its commitment to the inclusion of diversity in the broadest possible sense. When this request was respectfully denied, the incensed parent then added to her initial request, insisting that I not be permitted to tend to the toileting or dressing needs of her child. She had clearly bought into the idea that gay men were predatory and that their interest in young children was nefarious. Once again, she was instructed to review our centre’s philosophy statement and reminded that all staff were issued and passed vulnerable sector checks. When the parent persisted, she was politely told that we were not the right centre for her and that she was welcome to investigate alternatives that might be more aligned with her personal views. – R.G (Toronto)



What the ECE Staff and Students Said...

- Symbols like the rainbow flag are important messages to make lesbian and gay people feel welcome.
- Teacher training programs have to talk about gender identity in children's development. I was about five years old when I started to feel different from other kids.
- It makes a difference if employment policies are reflective of same sex relationships. I want to feel safe in my workplace, if I need to take time out to care for my partner.
- Just like racism is not okay, neither should homophobia be amongst teachers.
- ECE training programs have to be the first place to discuss the presence of queer families and staff.
- Queer issues related to court challenges, same sex marriage rights was not encouraged in training programs – more of a superficial reference to accepting diversity including a focus on cultural diversity.
- Although homophobia is not always overt, assuming everyone is being treated equally is not recognizing challenges queer staff experience.
- Trans identified child care staff person was terminated during the transition process.
- Before we can normalize queer families, staff and parents need to become more comfortable.
- Program directors and supervisors have to become accustomed to having queer staff and show leadership to create centre safety and policy that is anti-oppressive.
- Encourage the integration of queer stories into curriculum.
- Personal life is often silenced due to fear of homophobia – remaining closeted creates a sense of low morale and stress.
- Managers need to create a more welcoming environment by establishing progressive anti- harassment policies and practice – for example, we don't make fun of Black people yet we continue to make fun of gay people.

How Can You Be Supportive of Transgender/Transsexual People?

There are many ways to support the transsexual or transgender friends, family and community members. Use the new name and pronouns they ask us to use. If you make a mistake with the name or pronoun, just say you're sorry. Treat them like they're just a regular person, just like they were before. Don't tell anyone else about this person's transsexual or transgender identity unless he or she has asked you to do it. If you hear someone making fun of a transsexual or transgender person, tell them to stop and let them know it's not funny. Respect their right to be in gender-specific spaces, like women's washrooms and women's shelters.

Be respectful of that person in all the ways you would want respect shown to you. Do the homework, or in other words begin researching the subject so that the person you are supposed to be supporting doesn't have to do all the work educating you. At the same time, when unsure, ask. No one likes people to just assume something, and you won't know until you actually ask it. Asking allows that person to know you care. Remember that the person may be in the process of coming out or may not be as familiar with the terms, phrases and resources used by the larger queer community. As an early childhood professional, you may be able to access more queer resources on behalf of the parent than they may be aware of, much like other parents who may seek your help with accessing community services.

Remember, this is not about you. As in any situation where hate speech is being spoken, don't be a silent witness to the event. Inform the person that their comments are unwelcome. You can't change others, but if you remain quiet you are silently agreeing with their comments or jokes. Let people know that trans people are protected in Canada under each Human Rights Commission, provincially and federally, under the heading of "sex" (R.F., Toronto).

Although the civil rights struggle regarding the rights of transsexual/transgender (ts/tg) people are being waged worldwide, there is still a lot of discomfort with ts/tg people generally and particularly as parents. Canadian courts have ruled in favour of transsexual parental rights recently. Transsexual/transgender parents, like most parents, love and want the best for their children. They struggle with the same issues all parents struggle with. Early childhood educators can be supportive of transsexual and transgender families by creating an environment that is accepting and respectful.

Adapted from:
Transsexual/Transgender (ts/tg) Parenting: Queer Parenting Info
Brochure by Family Service Association/Sherbourne Health
Centre.

A Trans ECE Student Reflection

“Life as a transsexual male ECE student has been interesting to say the least. Just getting into college was a complicated process. All my transcripts were in a female name and a different last name and my high school transcript came from an all girls’ school. I had to provide proof of name change and medical/surgical certificates to prove who I really am. After being accepted into college, the complications continued. In order to apply for a course exemption I had to again provide transcripts and course descriptions but this time directly to my department’s office (think small where everybody knows everybody). I decided that it was too risky and seriously considered just taking the course. After much deliberation I chose to risk telling my section advisor. Much to my relief she was very understanding and amazing.

She took all the documents and provided the office with only the pertinent information and I wasn’t “outed” but I realized the college registration process is not very confidential and I was worried about how the administrative staff would react.

In my classes, no time has been devoted to transsexual families although they do exist (especially here in Toronto). In my sociology class another student did a presentation about a local women’s shelter that provides services to both biological and trans women. When I put up my hand and asked what a trans woman is she couldn’t provide an explanation but she had used the term in her presentation. Another student put up his hand and gave a fairly accurate definition. In my course related to working with families, we were asked to name different family compositions. One student mentioned transsexual/transgender families because he had read Building Bridges. This surprised me but I was obviously pleased that he discussed it even though the teacher didn’t say anything more about it.

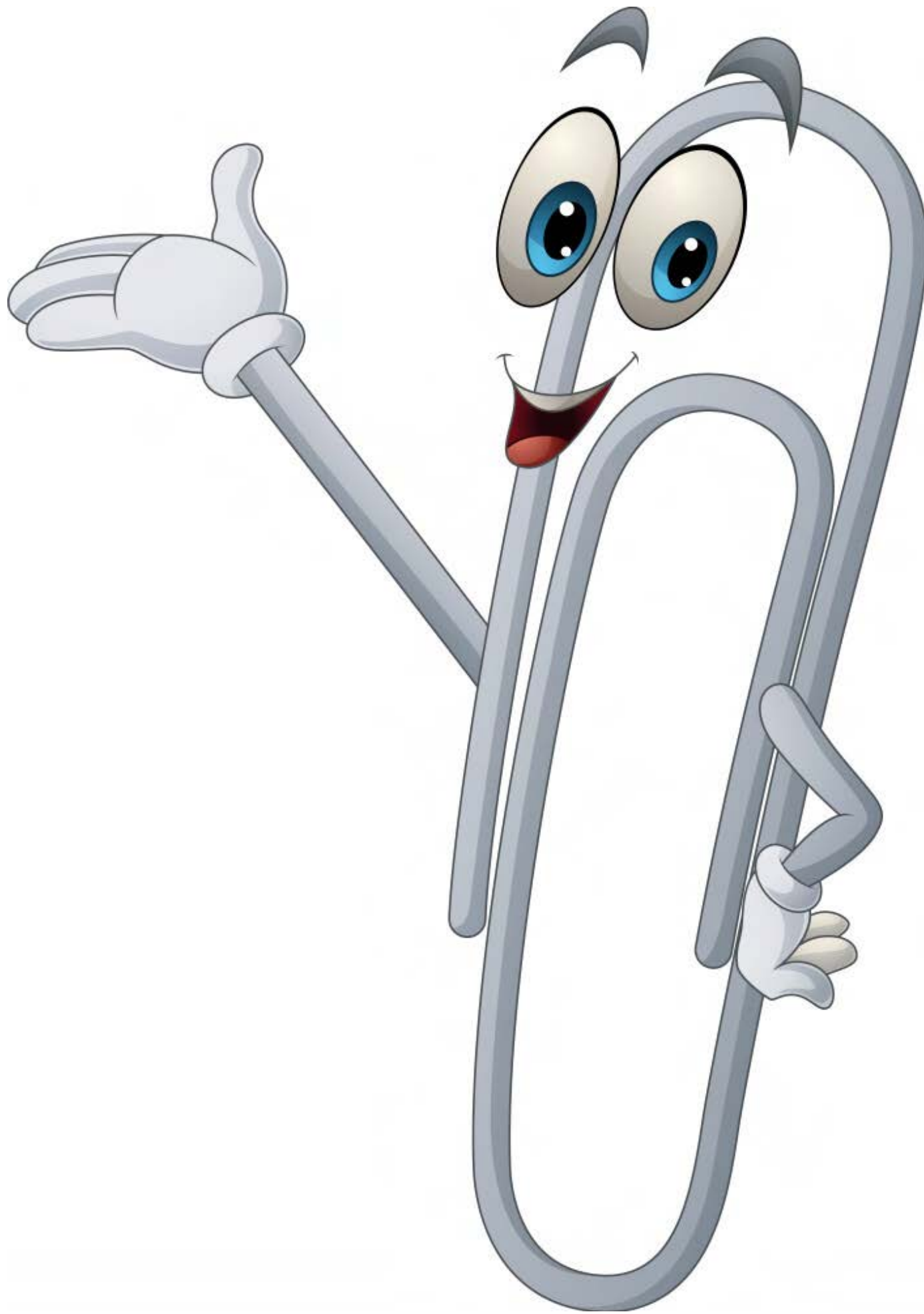
There have been a few instances of homophobia in my classes that I have spoken out against. I have been upset to discover that some teachers (though not all) let these kinds of incidents pass by. I have also faced homophobia in placement and at work where I have felt I was being scrutinized more carefully. In fact, I have been terminated from my job as a childcare provider when I let my employer know, I was planning on undergoing a transition. Similarly, in my college classes I have spoken up and been disappointed with teachers’ reactions. I have had discussions regarding sexual orientation and gender identity with school-aged children. It’s a conversation that is neither easy nor comfortable and I have noticed that the early childhood teachers don’t really know how to talk about this, especially when the children are making homophobic comments like “that’s so gay”. Last year I chose to remove a poster from the college bulletin board that had a homophobic comment written across it and again I was disappointed that it was there in the first place and no one had noticed or chosen to do anything about it.

Every day I face some kind of challenge to do with being trans. Mainly I worry about how I would be treated or would I be fired if other students, co-workers or parents found out. I feel that I am respected for my skills both at school and at work but there is always a major part of me that is hiding.” - Anonymous

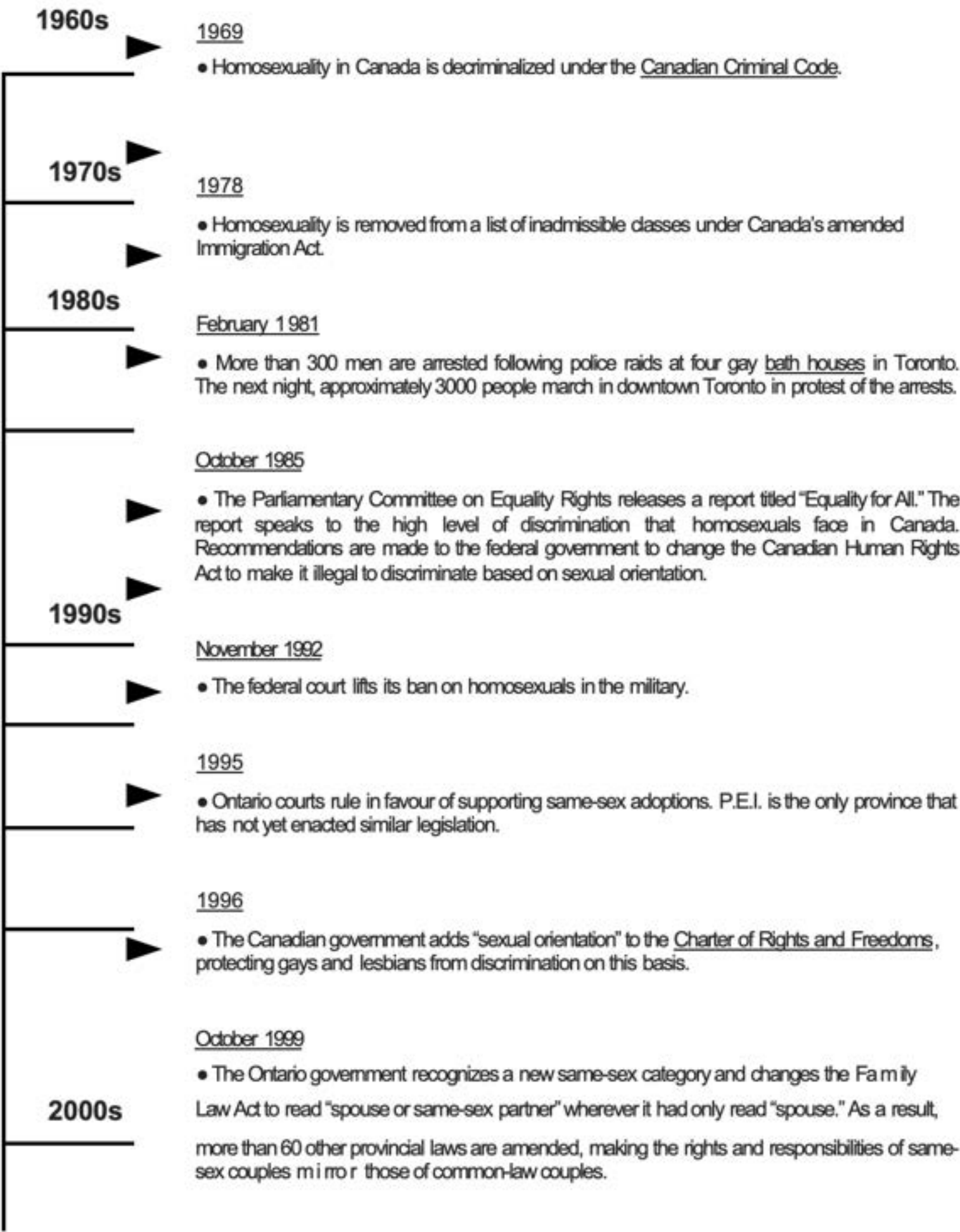


**8 IS TOO LATE
TO START
TALKING ABOUT
GENDER &
SEXUAL
DIVERSITY...**

Section E: Appendices



Appendix A:
A Timeline of Queer Rights in Canada



2000s

July 2000

- The City of Toronto becomes Canada's first city to seek guidance from the courts on whether Canada's ban on same-sex marriages is constitutional.

January 2001

- Ontario's first same-sex couples are married. Its government insists that the marriages will not be legally recognized.

July 2002

- The Ontario Superior Court becomes the first Canadian court to rule that prohibiting same-sex couples from marrying is unconstitutional and violates the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Ontario is given 2 years to extend marriage rights to gays and lesbians.

June 2003

- In Ontario, the definition of common-law marriages is changed to include same-sex couples.

June 2005

- Canada legalizes same-sex marriages.

2006

- Ontario's birth registry is challenged, enabling the names of 2 same-sex parents to appear on a child's birth certificate.

December 2006

- A motion tabled by the ruling Conservatives to re-open the same-sex marriage debate is defeated in the House of Commons by a vote of 173 – 125.

January 2007

- Two lesbian mothers and the biological father of a 5-year-old boy are accorded equal rights and obligations as parents by the Ontario Court of Appeal. The case is officially known as AA vs. BB.

Jurisdiction; Year	Milestone	Reference
Alberta; 2009	The Government of Alberta enacts an amendment to the province’s human rights statute, which requires schools to notify parents when sexual orientation, sexuality or religion are taught and to allow parents to withdraw their children from such classes.	Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario, 2016: https://www.etfo.ca/getmedia/6b2ffdb4-6dac-4a3e-8464-3092e9526bda/200909_LGBTQEdTimeline.pdf
Alberta; 2012	Central Alberta Pride Society was founded in 2012 to bring LGBTQ2S+ awareness and community to Red Deer and surrounding areas.	Central Alberta Pride Society, 2024: https://www.centralalbertapride.ca/
Alberta; 2015	In 2015 Dr. James Makokis and Ryan Buffalo established 2SYEG (short for 2 Spirit Edmonton).	Edmonton 2 Spirit Society, 2024: https://e2s.ca/
Alberta; 2015	Estefan Cortes-Vargas was elected to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta becoming the first out non-binary politician.	Queer Events, 2023: https://www.queerevents.ca/queer-history/canadian-history-timeline
Alberta; 2016	The Alberta Ministry of Education produces its Guidelines for Best Practices: Creating Learning Environments that Respect Diverse Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities and Gender Expressions.	Elementary Teacher’s Federation of Ontario, 2016: https://www.etfo.ca/getmedia/6b2ffdb4-6dac-4a3e-8464-3092e9526bda/200909_LGBTQEdTimeline.pdf
Alberta; 2016	Alberta is introducing legislation that will allow people who don’t identify as either male or female to put an X on government documents like marriage certificates.	Global News, 2016: https://globalnews.ca/news/3054573/alberta-to-make-changes-to-gender-identification-on-government-documents/
Alberta; 2021	Blake Desjarlais was elected to the Canadian House of Commons in the 2021 Federal Election as MP for Edmonton-Griesbach, becoming the first openly Two-Spirit Member of Parliament elected to office.	Queer Events, 2023 https://www.queerevents.ca/queer-history/canadian-history-timeline
Alberta; 2024	Alberta to require parental consent for name, pronoun changes at school.	CTV News, 2024: https://edmonton.ctvnews.ca/alberta-to-require-parental-consent-for-name-pronoun-changes-at-school-1.6750498
British Columbia 2007	Kimberly Nixon a transgender woman who filed a human rights complaint against Vancouver Rape Relief & Women’s Shelter Society (VRRS) for discrimination won the Human Rights Tribunal on the grounds that the society discriminated against her. However, through appeals it was decided that the VRRS was not guilty of discrimination based on the group’s right of freedom of association. On February 1, 2007, the Supreme Court of Canada dismissed Nixon’s request to appeal the decision.	Queer Events, 2023: https://www.queerevents.ca/queer-history/canadian-history-timeline
British Columbia; 2010	When British Columbia hosted the Olympics, a Pride House for LGBTQ athletes was included for the first time.	Pride House International, 2024: https://www.pridehouseinternational.org/history/

British Columbia; 2011	The Transgender Archives were established at the University of Victoria. It is believed that this is the largest Transgender Archive in the world.	University of Victoria, 2024: https://www.uvic.ca/transgenderarchives/index.php
British Columbia; 2020	British Columbia rules on rights to treatment for Gender Dysphoria.	Queer Events, 2023: https://www.queerevents.ca/queer-history/canadian-history-timeline
British Columbia; 2022	The Government of British Columbia proposed amendments to the Vital Statistics Act. The two amendments are: First for people 12 and older to change their gender markers on their birth certificates without a physician's or psychologist's confirmation. The second amendment will change the requirements in the act for information that must be included on a birth certificate, allowing individuals to request a birth certificate without a gender marker.	Government of BC, 2022: https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2023HLTH0017-000294#:~:text=The%20Province%20has%20introduced%20amendments,a%20physician's%20or%20psychologist's%20confirmation.
Canada; 2011	Egale Canada launched its final report, Every Class in Every School: Final Report on the First National Climate Survey on Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia in Canadian Schools. This study outlines the devastating effects of discrimination on LGBTQ+ students and those with LGBTQ+ families.	Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, 2016: https://www.etfo.ca/getmedia/6b2ffdb4-6dac-4a3e-8464-3092e9526bda/200909_LGBTQEdTimeline.pdf
Canada; 2013	The House of Commons passed Bill C-279, officially extending human rights protections to transgender and transsexual people in Canada.	Nelligan Law, 2021: https://nelliganlaw.ca/blog/a-legal-timeline-of-2slgbtq-rights-in-canada/
Canada; 2017	Bill C-16 was amended to the Canadian Human Rights Act to add gender identity and gender expression to the list of prohibited grounds of discrimination is passed.	Government of Ontario, 2022: https://www.ontario.ca/page/key-dates-lgbtq-rights-ontario-and-canada
Canada; 2019	Gender X becomes an option on official Canadian documents.	Government of Canada, 2024: https://www.ontario.ca/page/changing-your-sex-designation-your-birth-registration-and-birth-certificate
Canada; 2021	Only three provinces have legislated the assisted reproductive laws regulating posthumously conceived children.	Cárdenas, 2021
Canada; 2023	The Conservative Party of Canada voted to adopt discriminatory gender policies. The policies include: A policy to prohibit persons under 18 years of age from receiving gender-affirming care. Along with a policy to demand single-sex spaces that are only open to women, which the party now defines as a "female person" with the adoption of the policy.	Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2023: https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/conservative-policy-convention-transgender-1.6961991
Manitoba; 2012	Manitoba passed the Human Rights Code Amendment Act, which protected transgender and other gender-diverse persons from discrimination based on gender identity.	The Canadian Encyclopedia: https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/timeline/lgbtq2

Manitoba; 2012	Reaching Out Winnipeg was created in 2012 to help our sisters and brothers from other countries who face serious persecution and intense discrimination, based on sexual orientation or gender identity.	Reaching Out Winnipeg, 2024: https://reachingoutwinnipeg.org/
Manitoba; 2013	In 2013, the Board of the Lambda Business and Professional Association of Manitoba decided to form the Manitoba LGBT* Chamber of Commerce in order to more clearly articulate a vision and mandate.	The Manitoba LGBT* Chamber of Commerce, 2024: https://mb-lgbt.biz/about/history/
Manitoba; 2017	Kael McKenzie was appointed to the Provincial Court of Manitoba making him the first transgender person appointed as a judge in Canada.	University of Manitoba, 2017: https://news.umanitoba.ca/warrior-of-change/
Manitoba; 2019	The University of Winnipeg, launched the first Two-Spirit archives in Canada.	University of Winnipeg, 2019: https://cdm15931.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/two-spirit/search
New Brunswick; 2010	Fredericton held its first official Pride celebration.	Queer Events, 2023: https://www.queerevents.ca/queer-history/canadian-history-timeline
New Brunswick; 2016	The Queer Heritage Initiative of New Brunswick (QHINB) is established. QHINB seeks to archive materials such as newsletters, event posters, photographs, organizational documents, correspondence, and oral histories from queer communities in New Brunswick.	The Queer Heritage Initiative of New Brunswick (QHINB), 2024: https://www.queerhistoriesmatter.org/qhinb
New Brunswick; 2023	The Education Minister of New Brunswick, Bill Hogan amended policy 713 (the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Policy). The amendments included removing explicit mention for allowing students to participate in extracurricular activities that reflect their gender identity. The amendments also made it mandatory for school staff to deny students' request to informally change pronouns if they're under 16 and their parents don't consent.	The Washington Post, 2023: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/06/28/canada-deadnaming-blaine-higgs/
New Brunswick; 2024	The Fierté Fredericton Pride Festival decided to cancel the celebration. This was due to the harassment board members were receiving, which included individuals posing as board members on social media and implicating workplaces of the festival organisers, along with negatively impacting the wellbeing and livelihoods of the festival organizers. The difficult decision to cancel the festival was made in order to ensure safety of the board members, performers, and volunteers.	Fierté Fredericton Pride, 2024: https://frederictonpride.com/2024/07/12/update-regarding-the-2024-festival/
Newfoundland and Labrador; 2015	The first Trans march was held in Newfoundland and Labrador.	Queer Events, 2023: https://www.queerevents.ca/queer-history/canadian-history-timeline

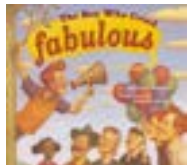
Newfoundland and Labrador; 2016	The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Newfoundland and Labrador. launch the Guidelines for LGBTQ Inclusive Practices	Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2016: https://www.gov.nl.ca/education/files/k12_safeandcaring_pdf_guidelines_lgbtq_incl_prac.pdf
Newfoundland and Labrador; 2021	Newfoundland and Labrador announced the option to obtain gender-neutral and non-binary birth certificates.	Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2021: https://www.gov.nl.ca/releases/2021/dgsnl/0617n07/
Newfoundland and Labrador; 2023	The Newfoundland and Labrador Queer Research Initiative launched a collection of rare documents and photographs detailing the province's LGBTQ past, and it's the first of its kind in Newfoundland and Labrador.	The Newfoundland and Labrador Queer Research Initiative, 2024: https://www.nlqueerresearch.com/
Newfoundland and Labrador; 2023	Protests erupted over LGBTQ content in Newfoundland schools.	CBC, 2023: https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/nl-lgbtq-curriculum-reality-1.7002960
Northwest Territories; 2012	The first Pride March was held.	Queer Events, 2023: https://www.queerevents.ca/queer-history/canadian-history-timeline
Northwest Territories; 2017	The Northwest Territories introduced changes to the Vital Statistics Act. The changes to the <i>Vital Statistics Act</i> are: the ability to use single names based on traditional culture and changing the sex designation on a birth certificate to better reflect gender identity.	Government of Northwest Territories, 2024: https://www.gov.nt.ca/newsroom/news/news-release-gnwt-introduces-changes-vital-statistics-act
Northwest Territories; 2017	The first ever NWT Rainbow Youth Conference, held March 6-10, 2017 in Yellowknife, gathered 2SLGBTQIA+ and ally students from every region of the NWT to develop music, visual art, spoken word poetry and video which expressed a message of support and inclusion.	Northwest Territories, 2024: https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/en/resources-current-education-staff/lgbtq2s-equity-safety-and-inclusion
Nunavut; 2014	The first Pride festival was held in Iqaluit, Nunavut.	Queer Events, 2023: https://www.queerevents.ca/queer-history/canadian-history-timeline
Nunavut; 2019	Positive Space Nunavut now provides 2SLGBTQIA+ resources to Nunavut schools, and organizes inclusive community initiatives in Iqaluit.	Positive Space Nunavut, 2024: https://www.positivespacenu.ca/about
Ontario: 2009	June 2009 was Toronto's first trans march.	Queer Events, 2023: https://www.queerevents.ca/queer-history/canadian-history-timeline

Ontario; 2011	The Government of Ontario passed the Accepting Schools Act (Bill 13).	Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, 2016: https://www.etfo.ca/getmedia/6b2ffdb4-6dac-4a3e-8464-3092e9526bda/200909_LGBTQEdTimeline.pdf
Ontario; 2012	Gender identity and gender expression were added as grounds of discrimination in the Ontario Human Rights Code.	Government of Ontario, 2022: https://www.ontario.ca/page/key-dates-lgbtq-rights-ontario-and-canada
Ontario; 2012	The Legislative Assembly of Ontario passed the Anti-Bullying Act which imposed stiffer penalties for bullying in schools.	Nelligan Law, 2021: https://nelliganlaw.ca/blog/a-legal-timeline-of-2slgbtq-rights-in-canada/
Ontario; 2013	Kathleen Wynne became both Ontario's first female Premier and Canada's first openly LGBTQ Premier.	Queer Events, 2023: https://www.queerevents.ca/queer-history/canadian-history-timeline
Ontario; 2014	The Pride flag was raised at Queen's Park for the first time.	Government of Ontario, 2022: https://www.ontario.ca/page/key-dates-lgbtq-rights-ontario-and-canada
Ontario; 2015	The first official Indigenous Pride event in Canada was held at the Six Nations of the Grand River First Nation in Ontario.	The Canadian Encyclopedia, 2024: https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/timeline/lgbtq2
Ontario; 2016	For the first time a pride flag was raised on Parliament Hill in Ottawa.	Queer Events, 2023: https://www.queerevents.ca/queer-history/canadian-history-timeline
Ontario; 2016	Ontario passed the All Families Are Equal Act, ensuring kids are treated fairly by recognizing LGBTQ+ parents, and others who use assisted reproduction, as soon as kids are born.	Government of Ontario, 2022: https://www.ontario.ca/page/key-dates-lgbtq-rights-ontario-and-canada
Ontario; 2016	Ontario issued non-gendered identification. Anyone with an Ontario birth registration may apply to change their sex designation on their birth registration so it matches with their gender identity. With supporting documents, you may request a change to your sex designation to F (female), M (male), or X (non-binary). You may also request a birth certificate that displays your updated sex designation (F, M, or X).	Government of Ontario, 2024: https://www.ontario.ca/page/changing-your-sex-designation-your-birth-registration-and-birth-certificate
Ontario; 2017	On November 20th, 2017, the Ontario Government marked Bill 74 the official Trans Day of Remembrance.	Queer Events, 2023: https://www.queerevents.ca/queer-history/canadian-history-timeline

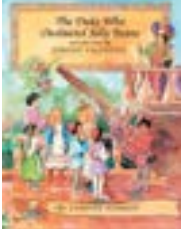
Ontario; 2018	The Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) filed a notice of intervention with the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario (HRTO) in the case of <i>AB v Ministry of Education</i> , involving recent changes to Ontario's education curriculum. The OHRC will argue that the interim curriculum discriminates based on sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.	Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2018: https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/news_centre/ohrc-intervenes-education-curriculum-case-human-rights-tribunal-ontario
Ontario; 2019	The Ontario Ministry of Education released a revised elementary Health and Physical Education (HPE) curriculum.	Government of Ontario, 2021: https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1000346/ontario-supporting-2slgbtqi-students
Quebec; 2007	Fierté Montréal was established.	Fierté Montréal, 2024: https://fiertemontreal.com/en/news/communiqué-de-presse-16-aout-2024
Quebec; 2010	The first Trans protest was held in Quebec, organised by PolitiQ-queer solidaire.	Queer Events, 2023: https://www.queerevents.ca/queer-history/canadian-history-timeline
Quebec; 2017	Julie Lemieux was elected as mayor in the Montérégie region of Quebec. This marked the first time a transgender person was elected as mayor in any municipality across Canada and the first female mayor in the history of Très-Saint-Rédempteur.	Queer Events, 2023: https://www.queerevents.ca/queer-history/canadian-history-timeline
Quebec; 2017	Fierté Canada Pride, the first pan-Canadian Pride celebrations, welcoming 96 Pride organizations from across Canada to Montréal as the city and nation celebrated their 375th and 150th anniversaries respectively.	Tourisme Montréal, 2024: https://www.mtl.org/en/experience/historic-montreal-lgbtq-milestones
Quebec; 2021	The Superior Court of Quebec declared six (6) provisions of the province's Civil Code unconstitutional. The Court deemed unconstitutional the requirement that people can only be designated as either male or female. It also declared that trans parents have a right to change their designation on their children's birth certificate and to be recognized as "parent" and not just "mother" or "father". It struck down the requirement to be a Canadian citizen in order to change one's name or gender. The Court also struck down the requirement for a medical evaluation for trans youth.	Queer Events, 2023: https://www.queerevents.ca/queer-history/canadian-history-timeline
Saskatchewan; 2011	Saskatchewan courts reinforced LGBTQ rights. The Saskatchewan court of appeal ruled that marriage officers can't refuse permits to same-sex couples on religious grounds.	Queer Events, 2023: https://www.queerevents.ca/queer-history/canadian-history-timeline
Saskatchewan; 2016	In 2016 the Beardy's and Okemasis Cree Nation held their first Two-Spirit Pride celebration, marking the first time a First Nation held a Two-Spirit Pride celebration in Saskatchewan.	Diefenbaker Canada Centre, 2024: https://diefenbaker.usask.ca/exhibits/online-exhibits-content/pride-on-the-prairies.php

Saskatchewan; 2017	OUTSaskatoon opened Pride Home in January 2017 in order to provide a place for 2SLGBTQ youth to live open and free lives.	OUTSaskatoon, 2024: https://www.outsaskatoon.ca/pride-home/#:~:text=OUTSaskatoon%20opened%20Pride%20Home%20in,live%20open%20and%20free%20lives.
Saskatchewan; 2018	Saskatchewan Court allows removal of gender from birth certificates.	Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, 2024: https://saskatchewanhumanrights.ca/saskatchewan-court-allows-removal-of-gender-from-birth-certificates/
Saskatchewan; 2023	Education Minister of Saskatchewan, Dustin Duncan introduced a policy that limits Trans rights in schools. The limits include: 1. Schools must seek parent/guardian permission when changing the preferred name and pronouns used by students under the age of 16 in the school. 2. Parents/guardians must be informed about the sexual health education curriculum and have the option to decline their children's participation. 3. Boards of education must immediately pause involvement with any third-party organization, such as ARC Foundation and the SOGI 1 2 3 Program, connected to sexual health education as the ministry undertakes review of educational resources to ensure alignment with curriculum outcomes. Only teachers, not outside third parties, will be able to present sexual education materials in the classroom. This directive does not include professionals employed by government ministries or the Saskatchewan Health Authority.	Government of Saskatchewan, 2023: https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2023/august/22/education-minister-announces-new-parental-inclusion-and-consent-policies#:~:text=E2%80%A6
Yukon; 2012	The first Pride March was held.	Queer Events, 2023: https://www.queerevents.ca/queer-history/canadian-history-timeline
Yukon; 2014	Yukon began to recognize same-sex parents on birth certificates.	Queer Yukon, 2024: https://www.queeryukon.com/our-history#:~:text=In%202011%2C%20Queer%20Yukon%20is,to%20host%20festivals%20and%20events.
Yukon; 2019	Yukon LGBTQ students prepare petition and successfully lobby for a ban on conversion therapy in the territory.	Queer Yukon, 204: https://www.queeryukon.com/our-history#:~:text=In%202011%2C%20Queer%20Yukon%20is,to%20host%20festivals%20and%20events.
Yukon; 2020	Queer Yukon Society became a year-round organization.	Queer Yukon, 2024: https://www.queeryukon.com/about
Yukon; 2021	LGBTQ2S+ Inclusion Action Plan is launched.	Government of Yukon, 2024: https://yukon.ca/en/your-government/find-out-what-government-doing/lgbtq2s-action-plan

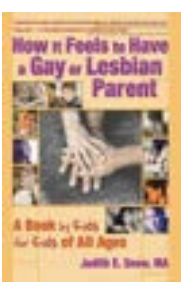
Appendix B:
Queer Inclusive Children’s Booklist

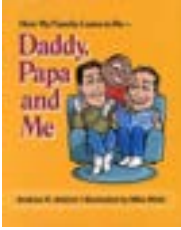
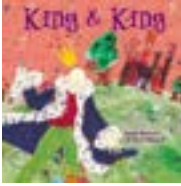
Book	Title	Author	Description	Age group	Link to buy
	123 A Family Counting Book	B. Combs	Fun with moms, dads, pets! Celebrate alternative families and teach numbers to young children. Lovely illustrations and great for young children with same-sex parents.	Any age	https://www.amazon.ca/Family-Counting-Book-Bobbie-Combs/dp/0967446805
	ABC A Family Alphabet Book	B. Combs	Have fun with the kids, moms, dads and pets in this delightful book that celebrates LGBTQ families as it teaches young children the alphabet.	Any age	https://www.amazon.ca/Family-Alphabet-Book-Bobbie-Combs/dp/0967446813
	Best Colors/Los Mejores Colores	E. Hoffman (ed.), E. Henriquez	This bilingual children’s book, in both English and Spanish, tells the story of how a group of children deal with a hate crime that occurs in their own neighborhood	All ages	https://www.amazon.ca/Best-Colors-Los-Mejores-Colores/dp/1884834698
	Box Girl	S. Withrow	Gwen’s father is gay and her mother left years ago. Despite her struggles at school and with friends, her father and his boyfriend Leon provide Sarah with love and hope	9-12	https://www.amazon.ca/Box-girl-S-Withrow/dp/0888994362
	The Boy Who Cried Fabulous	L. Newman	This rhymed book tells the story of a young boy who marvels at everything around him and is constantly late, upsetting his parents until they realize how truly fabulous their son is.	5-8	https://www.amazon.com/Boy-Who-Cried-Fabulous/dp/1582462240

Section E:
Appendix B - Booklist

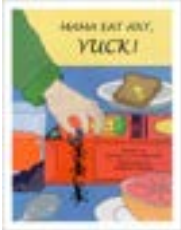
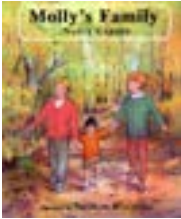
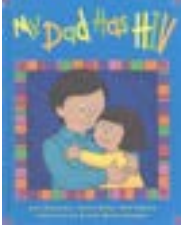
	The Case of the Stolen Scarab (Candlestone Inn Mystery # 1)	N.Garden	When the Taylor-Michaelson family - Nikki and Travis and their two moms - buy an old inn in Vermont, they don't expect their first visitor to be the local sheriff with news of a robbery - and their second to be a bedraggled hiker with amnesia! Soon Nikki and Travis find themselves trying to solve a mystery that steadily grows more complicated - and perhaps dangerous as well.	8-12	https://www.amazon.com/Stolen-Scarab-Candlestone-Mystery-Mysteries/dp/0967446872
	A Clear Spring (Girls First!)	B.Wilson	During her stay with Aunt Ceci and her partner, Janie, who is a naturalist, Willa learns about environmentalism, gets to know more about her family, and solves a mystery	7-12	https://www.amazon.com/Clear-Spring-Girls-First/dp/1558612777
	Daddy's Roommate	M. Wilhoite	This story's narrator begins with his parent's divorce and continues with the arrival of "someone new at Daddy's house." The new arrival is male. This new concept is explained to the child as "just one more kind of love." The text is suitably straightforward, and the format--single lines of copy beneath full-page illustrations--easily accessible to the intended audience.	2-9	https://www.amazon.ca/Daddys-Roommate-Michael-Willhoite/dp/1555831184
	The Dragon and the Doctor	B.Danish	This appealing story, with full-color illustrations, tells of a dragon who has a sore tail. When she goes to Dr. Judy and Nurse Benjamin for help, they discover all kinds of treasures zipped into the tail. Cured, the dragon takes Doctor Judy and Nurse Benjamin to meet her friends – an ostrich, a hippopotamus, a turtle, and a little creature who has two mothers.	3-7	https://www.amazon.ca/Dragon-Doctor-Danish-B/dp/0912670002
	The Duke Who Outlawed Jelly Beans and Other Stories.	J. Valentine	This is a collection of five original fairy tales: The Frog Prince, The Eagle Rider, The Dragon Sense, The Ogre's Boots and The Duke Who Outlawed Jelly Beans. Embedded within the stories are a cast of characters who are gay and lesbian.	6-10	https://www.amazon.ca/Outlawed-Jelly-Beans-Other-Stories/dp/1555838472
	Else-Marie and her Seven Little Daddies	G. Charbonnet	Else-Marie has seven little daddies instead of one big one, and she worries how the other children will react when her daddies come to pick her up at afternoon playgroup.	4-7	https://www.amazon.ca/Else-Marie-Her-Seven-Little-Daddies/dp/0805017526

Section E:
Appendix B - Booklist

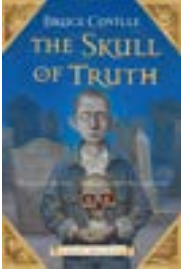
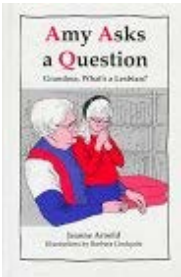
	Emma and Meesha My Boy: A Two Mom Story	K. Considine	This is a delightful story of a little girl with two moms as she learns how to be nice to her cat. Follow along as Emma gets in trouble trying to play with Meesha Kitty and cheer as she learns to treat him with care.	2-7	https://www.amazon.ca/Emma-Meesha-My-Boy-Story/dp/1413416004
	Families: A Celebration of Diversity, Commitment and Love	A. Jenness	The true stories of seventeen kids and their families, accompanied by photographs. This book rejoices in the endless possibilities of the composition of a “family.”	9-12	https://www.amazon.com/Families-Celebration-Diversity-Commitment-Love/dp/0395669529
	The Family Book	T.Parr	A book celebrating all kinds of families, including ours: "Some families have two moms or two dads..." His bold, simple drawings of people and animals are just perfect for kids!	4-8	https://www.amazon.ca/Family-Book-Todd-Parr/dp/0316070408
	Felicia's Favourite Story	L.Newman	This book tells Felicia's favorite bedtime story of how Mama Nessa and Mama Linda adopted her, with a readalong style and charming watercolor illustrations	4-7	https://www.amazon.ca/Felicias-Favorite-Story-Leslea-Newman/dp/0967446856
	Heather Has Two Mommies	L.Newman	Heather's favorite number is two. She has two arms, two legs, two pets—and two mommies. When Heather goes to school for the first time, someone asks her about her daddy, but Heather doesn't have a daddy. Then something interesting happens. When Heather and her classmates all draw pictures of their families, not one drawing is the same.	4-7	https://www.amazon.ca/Heather-Has-Mommies-Leslea-Newman/dp/0763690422
	How it Feels to Have a Gay or Lesbian Parent: A Book by Kids for Kids of All Ages	J.Snow	First-person accounts by children of parents who are gay or lesbian, ranging in age from 7 to 31	All Ages	https://www.amazon.ca/How-Feels-Have-Lesbian-Parent/dp/1560234202
	Holly's Secret	N.Garden	When Holly's family moves to a new town, she decides to take on a new identity at her new middle school and lies about her two moms, hoping that she'll fit in. She learns that her true friends will stand by her and that love is the most important thing	7-12	https://www.amazon.com/Hollys-Secret-Nancy-Garden/dp/0374332738

	How My Family Came to Be – Daddy, Papa and Me	A. Aldrich	The story of a young boy's adoption by his Daddy and Papa, with the message that families are made up of people who love each other. Simple sentences and big, bold playful illustrations	4-8	https://www.amazon.com/How-My-Family-Came-Be/dp/0974200808
	King and King	L. de Haan, S. Nijland	A prince who is reluctant to marry any of the princesses his mother invites to the castle finally finds love with another prince in this charming, colorful and exuberantly collaged story	7-10	https://www.amazon.ca/King-Linda-Haan/dp/1582460612
	King and King and family	L. de Haan, S. Nijland	In this sequel to King & King, the two kings go on a honeymoon trip to the jungle, where they see lots of animal families and return home with a surprise of their own.	7-10	https://www.amazon.ca/King-Family-Linda-Haan/dp/1582461139
	Losing Uncle Tim	M.Jordan	When his beloved Uncle Tim dies of AIDS, Daniel struggles to find reassurance and understanding and finds that his favorite grown-up has left him a legacy of joy and courage.	6-12	https://www.amazon.ca/Losing-Uncle-Tim-Jordan/dp/0807547565
	Love Makes a Family: Portraits of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Parents and their Families	G. Kaeser, P. Gillespie	A beautiful book filled with photographs and interviews with LGBTQ families.	All ages	https://www.amazon.com/Love-Makes-Family-Portraits-Transgendered/dp/1558491619
	Lucy Goes To The Country	J. Kennedy, J. Canemaker (Il)	Madcap adventures ensue when a gay couple and their cat spend the weekend in the country.	5-7	https://www.amazon.com/Lucy-Goes-Country-Alyson-Wonderland/dp/1555834280

Section E:
Appendix B - Booklist

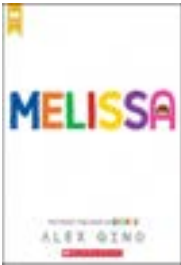
	Mama Eat Ant, Yuck	B.L. Edmonds, M. Danielle	This book uses simple rhyming text to tell a funny story in the family life of one-year-old Emma, her Mama and Mommy, and her siblings. The large colorful illustrations enchant children as well as adults. The child-friendly title is repeated throughout the book, especially delightful for two-year-olds who love to shout out a beloved phrase and are proud of knowing the appropriate moments.	4-8	https://www.amazon.ca/Mama-Yuck-Barbara-Lynn-Edmonds/dp/0965670023
	Molly's Family	N. Gardner	The members of Ms. Marston's kindergarten class are cleaning and decorating their room for the upcoming Open School Night. Molly and Tommy work on drawing pictures to put on the walls. Molly draws her family: Mommy, Mama Lu, and her puppy, Sam. But when Tommy looks at her picture, he tells her it's not of a family. "You can't have a mommy and a mama," he says. Molly doesn't know what to think; no one else in her class has two mothers. She isn't sure she wants her picture to be on the wall for Open School Night. Molly's dilemma, sensitively explored in words and art, shows readers that even if a family is different from others, it can still be happy, loving, and <i>real</i>.	4-7	https://www.amazon.ca/Mollys-Family-Nancy-Garden/dp/0374350027
	Morning light	M. Merrifield	The story of a family whose mother has AIDS and eventually dies. The story is intended to help children and their families face serious illness and death in a straightforward manner, instead of hiding or denying feelings.	6+	https://www.amazon.ca/Morning-Light-Educational-Storybook-Caregivers/dp/077375704X
	My Dad Has HIV	E. Alexander, S. Rubin, P. Sejkora	Seven-year-old Lindsey learns to cope with her father living with HIV.	5-8	https://www.amazon.ca/Dad-Has-HIV-Earl-Alexander/dp/0925190993
	My Two Uncles	J. Vigna	Elly is upset when her grandfather refuses to invite her uncle and his partner to a family party.	4-7	https://www.amazon.ca/My-Two-Uncles-Vigna/dp/080755507X
	Saturday is Pattyday	L. Newman	Frankie used to live with his two moms, Allie and Patty, but they have separated. Frankie brings Doris Delores Brontausaurus to visit Allie in her new apartment and learns that Allie will always be part of his life.	4-9	https://www.amazon.com/Saturday-Pattyday-Lesi%C3%A9-Newman/dp/0934678510

Section E:
Appendix B - Booklist

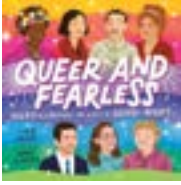
	The Skull of Truth: A Magic Shop Book	B.Coville	A boy who is forced through magic to tell the truth faces issues of his uncle's homosexuality and friend's cancer. Especially appealing to reluctant readers	9-12	https://www.amazon.ca/Skull-Truth-Magic-Shop-Book/dp/0152060847
	Too Far Away to Touch	L.Newman	This is the story of Zoë and her relationship with her uncle as he grows sick from AIDS. Zoë's uncle explains to her that when he dies he won't be close enough to touch but, like the stars, close enough to see.	6-12	https://www.amazon.ca/Too-Far-Away-Touch-Newman/dp/0395689686
	Zack's Story	K.Greenberg	A photo-story about an eleven-year-old boy who describes life as part of a family made up of himself, his mother, her lesbian partner, and his younger sister	All ages	https://www.amazon.ca/Zacks-Story-Same-Sex-Parents/dp/082252581X
	Amy Asks a Question	J.Arnold	Amy asks, "Grandma, what's a lesbian?" A beautiful conversation between Amy and her lesbian grandmother ensues.	8-13	https://www.amazon.com/Amy-Asks-Question-Grandma-Lesbian/dp/0941300285
	Anna Day and the O-Ring	E. Wickens	A day in the life of a boy with two moms, told through photographs	6+	https://www.amazon.ca/Anna-Day-Ring-Elaine-Wickens/dp/1555832520
	Belinda's Bouquet	L.Newman	Belinda and her friend Daniel discover that it's okay to be different.	2-7	https://www.amazon.ca/Belindas-Bouquet-Leslea-Newman/dp/1555831540

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Appendix B - Booklist

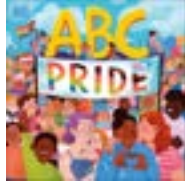
	The Daddy Machine	J. Valentine	Two children with lesbian mothers wonder what it would be like to have a father, so they make themselves a daddy machine, turn it on, and a dad pops out. Then comes another, and another, and another.	4-8	https://www.amazon.ca/Daddy-Machine-Johnny-Valentine/dp/1555838464
	The Day They Put a Tax on Rainbows and Other Stories	J. Valentine	Three original fairy tales featuring main characters who just happen to have gay parents. These children, along with dragons, mermaids and elves, are depicted in detailed watercolor drawings.	2-9	https://www.amazon.ca/Day-They-Put-Tax-Rainbows/dp/1555832016
	Generous Jefferson Bartleby Jones	F. Brown	A story of a boy with two dads who can always loan out one Dad because he's got another...until the weekend he loans them both out by mistake.	3-8	https://www.amazon.com/Generous-Jefferson-Bartleby-Wonderland-1991-11-04/dp/B01FIWM1BA
	How Would You Feel If Your Dad Was Gay?	A. Heron & M. Maran	When Jasmine announces in class that her dad is gay, her brother complains that she had no right to reveal a fact that he wanted to keep secret.	3-9	https://www.amazon.com/How-Would-You-Feel-Your/dp/1555831885
	Jenny Lives With Eric And Martin	S. Bosche	A photo story about the day-to-day life of a young Danish girl living with her two dads. A candid and realistic portrayal of a gay family.	6-12	https://www.amazon.ca/Jenny-Lives-Martin-Susanne-Bosche/dp/0907040225
	One Dad, Two Dads, Brown Dad, Blue Dad	J. Valentine	Lou and a friend compare notes on their families in this breezy book about parents who seem different.	4-7	https://www.amazon.ca/One-Dad-Dads-Brown-Blue/dp/1555838480

	And Tango Makes Three	P. Parnell & J. Richardson	This tale is based on a true story about the only baby penguin in a New York City Zoo with 2 daddies!	3-6	https://www.amazon.ca/Tango-Makes-Three-Justin-Richardson/dp/0689878451
	Hurricane Child	K. Callender	Caroline Murphy is a Hurricane Child. Caroline has had her share of bad luck lately. She's hated and bullied by everyone in her small school and -- worst of all -- Caroline's mother left home one day and never came back. But when a new student named Kalinda arrives, Caroline's luck begins to turn around. Kalinda, becomes Caroline's first and only friend -- and the person for whom Caroline has begun to develop a crush.	8-12	https://www.amazon.ca/Hurricane-Child-Kheryn-Callender/dp/1338129309
	Ivy Aberdeen's Letter to the World	A. Herring Blake	In the wake of a destructive tornado, Ivy Aberdeen develops feelings for another girl in this stunning, tender novel about emerging identity, perfect for fans of <i>The Thing About Jellyfish</i> .	8-12	https://www.amazon.ca/Aberdeens-Letter-World-Ashley-Herring/dp/0316515469
	Melissa	A. Gino	When people look at Melissa, they think they see a boy named George. But she knows she's not a boy. She knows she's a girl.	8-12	https://www.amazon.ca/Melissa-formerly-published-as-GEORGE/dp/1338843419
	Love makes a family	S. Beer	In this exuberant board book, many different families are shown in happy activity, from an early-morning wake-up to a kiss before bed. Whether a child has two moms, two dads, one parent, or one of each, this simple preschool read-aloud demonstrates that what's most important in each family's life is the love the family members share.	Up to 3	https://www.amazon.ca/Love-Makes-Family-Sophie-Beer/dp/052555422X
	Téo's Tutu	M. Jacob Macias	Téo loves to dance, whether it's the cumbia with Papí, the bhangra with Amma, or ballet class with Miss Lila. He also loves the way his tutu makes him feel, inside and out. But when it comes time to decide which outfit to wear in the big dance recital--a sparkly tutu or shimmering silver pants--Téo wonders if being his most authentic self on stage will put him too much in the spotlight.	3-5	https://www.amazon.ca/T%C3%A9o-s-Tutu-Maryann-Jacob-Macias-ebook/dp/B08RJ92MD2

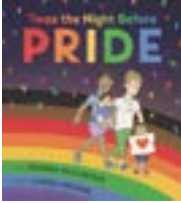
Section E:
Appendix B - Booklist

	Queer and Fearless: Poems Celebrating the Lives of LGBTQ+ Heroes	R. Sanders	Learn about the lives of some of the most important LGBTQ+ heroes in this unique picture book that combines poetry and biographical information to honor those at the forefront of LGBTQ+ history.	6-9	https://www.amazon.com/Queer-Fearless-Poems-Celebrating-Heroes/dp/0593523695
	Pink, Blue, and You!: Questions for Kids about Gender Stereotypes	E. Graves	Simple, accessible, and direct, this picture book is perfect for kids and parents or teachers to read together, opening the door to conversations about gender stereotypes and everyone's right to be their true selves.	4-8	https://www.amazon.ca/Pink-Blue-You-Questions-Stereotypes/dp/0593178637
	Families Belong	D. Saka	A rhyming, light-hearted celebration of families being - and belonging - together.	1-3	https://www.amazon.ca/Families-Belong-Dan-Saks/dp/0593222768
	My Two Moms and Me	M. Joosten	Celebrate Pride every day with this adorable board book for the babies and toddlers of lesbian mothers, featuring a variety of diverse, loving families with two moms.	Up to 3	https://www.amazon.ca/My-Two-Moms-Michael-Joosten/dp/0525580123
	Daddy, Papa, and Me	L. Newman	A heartwarming board book about gay parents! A great purchase for new parents and new babies alike, and the perfect gift to show your love for daddy, pappa and more!	Up to 3	https://www.amazon.ca/Daddy-Papa-Me-Leslea-Newman/dp/1582462623
	Patience, Patches!	C. Mihaly	Patches the puppy is very good at waiting--or at least that's what he thinks. But his patience is put to the test when his two moms arrive home with an unexpected bundle. Is it a new toy? No! It's a new baby. Suddenly, everything Patches wants to do takes a little bit longer. But patience, it turns out, is a lesson worth learning.	2-5	https://www.amazon.com/Patience-Patches-Christy-Mihaly/dp/0593108299
	I Think We Can!	G. M. King	The Little Engine is on her way to join the Pride Parade! But when her wheel breaks, she's not sure if she'll make it. Will the Little Engine arrive at the parade on time? Read along and find out!	2-5	https://www.amazon.ca/Think-We-Can-Visit-Parade/dp/059365949X

Section E:
Appendix B - Booklist

	ABC Pride	L Stowell and E Barnes	ABC Pride introduces young readers to the alphabet through the colourful world of Pride. Children can discover letters and words in a fun and engaging way, while also learning more about the LGBTQIA+ community and how to be inclusive.	3-5	https://www.amazon.ca/ABC-Pride-Louie-Stowell/dp/0744063175
	Tuesday Is Daddy's Day	E. Krelloff	A charming look at the many forms a happy family can take—whether she's with Mommy at her house, or with Daddy and his partner Harry at their apartment, this little girl always knows she's loved.	3-7	https://www.amazon.ca/Tuesday-Daddys-Day-Elliot-Krelloff/dp/0823448916
	Mama and Mommy and Me in the Middle	N LaCour	A little girl stays home with Mama when Mommy goes off on a work trip in this tender, inviting story that will resonate with every child who has missed a parent.	3-7	https://www.amazon.ca/Mama-Mommy-Middle-Nina-LaCour/dp/1536211516
	Family is Family	M. Marr	Celebrate the many wonderful ways families are unique and chickens are adorable!	3-7	https://www.amazon.ca/Family-Melissa-Marr/dp/0593462513
	Honey & Leon Take the High Road	A. Cumming	When Honey falls in love with a handsome Scottish pup, will Leon be able to protect their dads on his own?	3-7	https://www.amazon.ca/Honey-Leon-Take-High-Road/dp/0399558004
	Born Ready	J Patterson	Penelope knows that he's a boy. (And a ninja.) The problem is getting everyone else to realize it.	4-8	https://www.amazon.ca/Born-Ready-Story-Named-Penelope/dp/0593123638

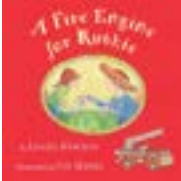
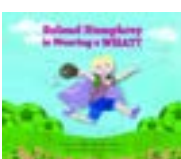
Section E:
Appendix B - Booklist

	Julián Is a Mermaid	J Love	Julián, a child coming to understand their gender nonconformity after a joyful encounter with three women dressed as shimmering mermaids. Julián fantasizes about dressing up like a mermaid too, and wonders what his Abuela will make of it in this celebration of self-love and individuality.	4-8	https://www.amazon.ca/Juli%C3%A1n-Mermaid-Jessica-Love/dp/0763690457
	Kapaemahu	H.Wong-Kalu, D. Hamer, and J. Wilson	An Indigenous legend about how four extraordinary individuals of dual male and female spirit, or Mahu, brought healing arts from Tahiti to Hawaii, based on the Academy Award–contending short film.	4-8	https://www.amazon.ca/Kapaemahu-Hinaleimoana-Wong-Kalu/dp/0593530063
	Our Subway Baby	P. Mercurio	Danny, found a baby tucked away in the corner of a subway station on his way home from work one day. Pete and Danny ended up adopting the baby together. Although neither of them had prepared for the prospect of parenthood, they are reminded, "Where there is love, anything is possible."	4-8	https://www.amazon.ca/Our-Subway-Baby-Peter-Mercurio/dp/0525427546
	My Rainbow	D. Neal and T. Neal	A dedicated mom puts love into action as she creates the perfect rainbow-colored wig for her transgender daughter, based on the real-life experience of mother-daughter advocate duo Trinity and DeShanna Neal.	4-8	https://www.amazon.ca/My-Rainbow-DeShanna-Neal/dp/1984814605
	Twas the Night Before Pride	J. McClintick	A glittering celebration of queer families puts Pride gently in perspective—honoring those in the LGBTQ+ community who fought against injustice and inequality.	4-8	https://www.amazon.ca/Night-Before-Pride-Joanna-McClintick/dp/1536213438
	Who You Will Be	T. Rouanzion	A rhyming picture book about gender expression featuring parents as they dream about who their child will be.	4-8	https://www.amazon.ca/Who-You-Will-Taylor-Rouanzion/dp/0593623134
	I Am Jazz	J.Herthel and J. Jennings	The story of a transgender child based on the real-life experience of Jazz Jennings, who has become a spokesperson for transkids everywhere	4-8	https://www.amazon.ca/I-Am-Jazz-Jessica-Herthel/dp/0803741073

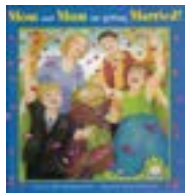
Section E:
Appendix B - Booklist

	Gorgeously Me!	J. Van Ness	A celebration of all the things that make you extraordinary, unique, and gorgeously YOU	4-8	https://www.amazon.ca/Gorgeously-Me-Jonathan-Van-Ness/dp/0593622847
	Leo and the Pink Marker	M. Foster	It's fun to color outside the lines in this playful celebration of family, creativity, and the color pink!	4-8	https://www.amazon.ca/Leo-Pink-Marker-Mariyka-Foster/dp/1682636909
	Olivette Is You	N. Tortorella	Meet Olivette, who wants kids to know that "all of it is YOU!" and to embrace every part of themselves.	4-8	https://www.amazon.ca/Olivette-You-Nico-Tortorella/dp/059338153X
	I am Billie Jean King	B. Meltzer	Billie Jean King is one of the greatest tennis players of all time. Read about this amazing woman athlete,	5-9	https://www.amazon.ca/I-am-Billie-Jean-King/dp/0735228744
	Pride: The Story of Harvey Milk and the Rainbow Flag	R. Sanders	In this deeply moving and empowering true story, young readers will trace the life of the Gay Pride Flag, from its beginnings in 1978 with social activist Harvey Milk and designer Gilbert Baker to its spanning of the globe and its role in today's world.	5-8	https://www.amazon.ca/Pride-Story-Harvey-Milk-Rainbow/dp/0399555315
	Stonewall: A Building, an Uprising, a Revolution	R. Sanders	Celebrate Pride every day with the very first picture book to tell of its historic and inspiring role in the gay civil rights movement	5-8	https://www.amazon.ca/Stonewall-Building-Revolution-Rob-Sanders/dp/1524719528
	A Kids Book About Gender	D. Mueller	This book is meant to help kids and grownups understand gender and create an open and safe environment for kids to question, experiment, and discover their authentic selves.	5-9	https://www.amazon.com/Kids-Book-About-Gender/dp/1951253671

Section E:
Appendix B - Booklist

	10,000 Dresses	M. Ewert	This gorgeous picture book—a modern fairy tale about becoming the person you feel you are inside—will delight people of all ages.	5-9	https://www.amazon.ca/10-000-Dresses-Marcus-Ewert/dp/1583228500
	It's Okay to Be Different	T. Parr	Targeted to young children first beginning to read, this book will inspire kids to celebrate their individuality through acceptance of others and self-confidence.	3-6	https://www.amazon.ca/Its-Okay-Different-Todd-Parr/dp/0316043478
	My Princess Boy	C. Kilodavis	Inspired by the author's son, and by her own initial struggles to understand, this heartwarming book is a call for tolerance and an end to bullying and judgments. The world is a brighter place when we accept everyone for who they are.	4-8	https://www.amazon.ca/My-Princess-Boy-Cheryl-Kilodavis/dp/1442429887
	A Fire Engine for Ruthie	L. Newman	Ruthie loves to visit Nana, but they don't always like to play with the same things. Ruthie loves fire engines and motorcycles, while Nana loves dolls and dress-up clothes. Nana's neighbor, Brian, gets to play with fire engines and motorcycles. So why doesn't Ruthie?	4-7	https://www.amazon.ca/Fire-Engine-Ruthie-Leslea-Newman/dp/0618159894
	Jacob's New Dress	S. Hoffman and I. Hoffman	Jacob loves playing dress-up, when he can be anything he wants to be. Some kids at school say he can't wear "girl" clothes, but Jacob wants to wear a dress to school. Can he convince his parents to let him wear what he wants? This heartwarming story speaks to the unique challenges faced by boys who don't identify with traditional gender roles.	4-8	https://www.amazon.ca/Jacobs-New-Dress-Sarah-Hoffman/dp/0807563730
	Roland Humphrey Is Wearing a WHAT?	E. Kiernan-Johnson	The story of a little boy's quest to be his authentic self, dressed in pink and festooned with sparkles, in a world that frowns upon boys who like "girly" things. Roland sees girls at his school dress in a rainbow of hues and is confused by the "rules" limiting what boys can choose; he doesn't understand why girls can like sports and ballet, but for boys there's just one way. Written in verse, Roland Humphrey is Wearing a WHAT? playfully raises important questions about gender norms, acceptance, and friendship.	4-8	https://www.amazon.ca/Roland-Humphrey-Wearing-WHAT/dp/0615666558
	Backwards Day	S. Bear Bergman	Backwards Day, set on the planet Tenalp, introduces us to a world where there are seventeen seasons, including one where bubblegum falls from the sky for three days and a single day when everything—everything everywhere—is backwards. Andrea looks eagerly forward to Backwards Day every year, so she can turn into a boy for the day. But one year she	6-8	https://www.amazon.ca/Backwards-Day-S-Bear-Bergman/dp/1999156234 https://www.flamingorampant.com/books/back

Section E:
Appendix B - Booklist

			doesn't turn along with everyone else. She's miserable. The very next day, however, she turns into a boy—and stays that way! He's delighted, but his parents are distressed, and take him to the big city to consult with Backwardsologists. When they finally figure out what's happened, the miracles of Backwards Day are fully revealed.		wards-day
	Mom and Mum are Getting Married!	K.Setterington	Rosie is surprised to find her Mom dancing alone in the living room, but when Mom announces, “Your Mum and I are getting married!” they can’t wait to start planning the big day. Friends and family come together for a celebration of love.	5-8	https://www.amazon.ca/Mom-Mum-are-Getting-Married/dp/1896764843
	Asha’s Mums	R. Elwin	When Asha's lesbian mums become an issue for the teacher and the curiosity of classmates, Asha responds that having two mums is not a big deal. They are a family.	5-8	https://www.amazon.ca/Ashas-Mums-Rosamund-Elwin/dp/0889611432
	M Is For Mustache	C. Hernandez	It's Pride and it's time for a everyone to get ready for the march. Join her and her beloved chosen family members as they dress up and get down to celebrate their beautiful love. Told in an ABC format, tiny readers will delight in all the sparkles, noisemakers and mustaches as this unique family takes to the streets in joyful jubilee.	3-5	https://www.amazon.ca/M-Mustache-Catherine-Hernandez/dp/0987976346
	It's A Hit,	A Barth and M Barth	Wil never expected to end up at baseball camp instead of his beloved theater camp with all his nerdy friends. When he came out as trans, his well-meaning father was so excited to share his own boyhood love of baseball that Wil didn’t have the heart to say no. Taylor looks forward to camp every summer, eager to get on the pitching mound and be immersed in his favorite sport. He feels a disconnect between his flamboyant, queer family and the sporty community he thrives in. During camp, Wil and Taylor connect over family, growing up, and geeking out about the things they enjoy. Together, they realize that they can define their masculinity on their own terms and find ways to connect with their families while still being themselves.	9-12	https://www.amazon.ca/Its-Hit-Arin-Cole-Barth/dp/1999156293 https://www.flamingorampant.com/books/pre-order-its-a-hit-by-arin-marika-barth
	The Great Space Adventure	R. Aoki	The planets are all unique, and never feel embarrassed or self-conscious about their differences. Join nande in their out-of-this-world journey of exploration, and learn with them about all the special and awe-inspiring parts of our solar system as they find they have a family they never knew about – in space!	6-8	https://www.amazon.ca/Great-Space-Adventure-Ryka-Aoki/dp/1999156218 https://www.flamingorampant.com/books/the-great-space-adventure-by-ryka-aoki-illustrated-by-cai-l-steele

Section E:
Appendix B - Booklist

	Metatron's Children	C Ryan Spain	Meet Yren: a 12 year-old Black, non-binary kid growing up in the safety of The Village during the time After the Fall. Yren never wanted to be special, but the Universe had other plans. Together with their sibling Augi, Yren navigates the development of their unusual extra-sensory abilities and their feelings of grief and guilt following a tragic accident that takes their parents. Exploring these strange and exciting new powers will take Yren outside the safety of the life they've known and into a perilous adventure.	9-12	https://www.amazon.ca/Metatrons-Children-Chy-Ryan-Spain/dp/1999156277 https://www.flamingorampant.com/books/metatrons-children-book-1-by-chy-ryan-spain-with-illustrations-by-sydney-kuhne
	The Light of You	T Reese and B Chaplow	A new baby is joining the family, and the whole community joins in the celebrate! Bringing gifts to celebrate the baby with art, music, jokes, cuddles and delicious food, they also bring their love and support for the pregnant transgender dad who will give birth to the baby soon!	3-5	https://www.amazon.ca/Light-You-Trystan-Reese/dp/1999156269 https://www.flamingorampant.com/books/357si8ri9zwbggkhl9nlk9pfl7gl3
	Bell's Knock Knock Birthday!	G. Parker	Bell is having a birthday, and all their friends and family are coming to celebrate! A simple counting book with lots of noises to make alone or together as guest after guest arrived with gifts and treats for beautiful birthday Bell.	3-5	https://www.amazon.ca/Bells-Knock-Birthday-George-Parker/dp/1775084027 https://www.flamingorampant.com/books/bells-knock-knock-birthday-by-george-parker-illustrated-by-sam-orchard
	47,000 Beads	K. Adeyoha and A. Adeyoha	Peyton loves to dance, and especially at Pow Wow, but her Auntie notices that she's been dancing less and less. When Peyton shares that she isn't comfortable wearing a dress anymore, Auntie Eyota asks some friends for help to get Peyton what she needs.	6-8	https://www.amazon.com/47-000-Beads-Koja-Adeyoha/dp/0987976389 https://www.flamingorampant.com/books/47000-beads-by-koja-and-angel-adeyoha-illustrated-by-holly-mcgillis
	The Last Place You Look	J. Wallace Skelton	Bubbie Rose and Bubbie Ida Flora love hosting their entire extended family for Passover. The table is laden with food, the apartment is bursting with people and love. But, the Seder can't end without the afikomen (the last piece of matzah) and nobody knows where it is. The children search high and low, in places likely and unlikely, in smelly places and tasty ones. They find many other missing things, but not the afikomen. Working together, and a willingness to laugh at ourselves will help us find the things we could not find alone.	6-8	https://www.amazon.ca/Last-Place-You-Look/dp/1775084019 https://www.flamingorampant.com/books/the-last-place-you-look

Section E:
Appendix B - Booklist

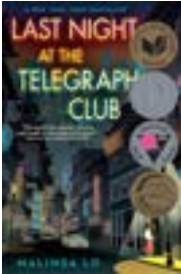
	Moondragon in the Mosque Garden	E. Khaji and T. Jackson	The adults are being so boring—Tajalli, Mujtaba, and Aasiya just want a break. They disappear from the rest of the families to explore the old garden in their new Mosque—and meet a magical creature! Moondragon appears in the old garden’s fountain and surprises the children with wonderful, engaging lessons about how to care for the earth.	6-8	https://www.amazon.ca/Moondragon-Mosque-Garden-El-Farouk-Khaki/dp/1775084035 https://www.flamingorampant.com/books/moondragon-in-the-mosque-garden
	The Newspaper Pirates	J. Wallace Skelton	One of Anthony Bartholomew’s dads loves the morning paper, but some mornings it’s stolen from outside their front door. Anthony overhears something about “newspaper pirates” and wanting to protect their newspaper, sets out to search for clues. Anthony turns up a sword in the building recycling room, but the laundry room is a dead end. The pirates don’t fall for the trap, and fingerprints turn out not to be so useful. Sometimes, when you can’t beat them, you instead become their king. Anthony becomes the King of the Newspaper Pirates and keeps the newspapers safe.	6-8	https://www.amazon.ca/Newspaper-Pirates-J-Wallace-Skelton/dp/098797632X https://www.flamingorampant.com/books/the-newspaper-pirates-by-j-wallace-skelton-illustrated-by-ketch-wehr
	Super Power Baby Shower	T. Hill-Meyer and F. Onyx	Roark flies, Nova can make fire and Victoria can talk with her mind. Now, they’re also having a baby! Their wonderful, super-power guests arrive to celebrate and bring their superfamilies in tow. As soon as the celebration begins, an urgent call comes for Granny Awesome to help at the wolf sanctuary. The guests fly off to give their assistance and return to a wonderful surprise—the new super baby has arrived!	6-8	https://www.amazon.ca/Super-Power-Baby-Shower-Hill-Meyer/dp/1775084000 https://www.flamingorampant.com/books/super-power-baby-shower-by-tobi-hill-meyer-and-fay-onyx-illustrated-by-janine-carrington
	Rachel's Christmas Boat	S. Labelle	When Lulu’s Dad tells Lulu that she’s going to change her name to Rachel and be a lady now, Lulu has a major worry: what if Santa doesn’t find out in time to fix all the tags on Rachel’s presents? Lulu decides to take matters into her own hands and make sure her Dad gets the lovely Christmas she deserves for being a most excellent parent.	6-8	https://www.amazon.ca/Rachels-Christmas-Boat-Sophie-LaBelle/dp/0987976397 https://www.flamingorampant.com/books/rachels-christmas-boat-written-and-illustrated-by-sophie-labelle
	Love is in the Hair	S. Marcus Ware	Carter's up in the middle of the night, too excited to sleep: her baby sister is being born! She asks her Uncle Marcus to tell her stories about the beautiful things in his dreadlocks so she can relax and rest. He tells her about the day she was born, how he met his partner Uncle Jeff and much more.	3-5	https://www.amazon.ca/Love-Hair-Syrus-Marcus-Ware/dp/0987976370 https://www.flamingorampant.com/books/love-is-in-the-hair-written-and-illustrated-by-syrus-marcus-ware

Section E:
Appendix B - Booklist

	The Zero Dads Club	A. Adeyoha	All the kids in Ms May's classroom are making cards for Father's Day. What are the kids with no dads supposed to do? Akilah has a great idea – with her friend Kai, she creates a club for the kids with families that don't include dads.	6-8	https://www.amazon.ca/Zero-Dads-Club-Angel-Adeyoha/dp/0987976362 https://www.flamingorampant.com/books/the-zero-dads-club-by-angel-adeyoha-illustrated-by-aubrey-williams
	Is That for a Boy or for a Girl?	S. Bear Bergman	It's a real bummer when the world judges you for having a big gender vocabulary. Meet some awesome kids who have gotten pretty tired of being told some things are for girls and others are for boys. See how they mix and match everything they like to get what suits them best!	6-8	https://www.amazon.ca/That-Boy-Girl-Bear-Bergman/dp/B01LVWLK00 https://www.flamingorampant.com/books/is-that-for-a-boy-or-for-a-girl-by-s-bear-bergman-illustrated-by-rachel-dougherty
	A Princess of Great Daring	T.Hill-Meyer	When Jamie is ready to tell people that she's really a girl inside, she becomes a princess of great daring in a game she plays with her best friends to gather her courage. She's pleased (but not surprised) that her questing friends turn out to be just as loyal and true as any princess could want.	6-8	https://www.amazon.com/Princess-Great-Daring-Tobi-Hill-Meyer/dp/0987976354 https://www.flamingorampant.com/books/a-princess-of-great-daring-by-tobi-hill-meyer-illustrated-by-elenore-toczynski
	The Adventures of Tulip. Birthday Wish Fairy	S. Bear Bergman	Have you ever wondered what happens to your birthday wishes? Funny or serious, sad or wonderful, every wish gets read by a Birthday Wish Fairy. This year, David wishes for something his Wish Fairy has never heard of before – to turn into a girl.	6-8	https://www.amazon.ca/Adventures-Tulip-Birthday-Wish-Fairy/dp/1999156226 https://www.flamingorampant.com/books/the-adventures-of-tulip-birthday-wish-fairy-by-s-bear-bergman-illustrated-by-suzy-q-malik
	Colors of Aloha	K. Kau Arteaga	The world is bursting full of beautiful colors, from the blue of the fish to the green of the leaves! Even more wondrous are the many names the different peoples of the world have for them. Join these Hawai'ian kids, their older brother and his boyfriend as they adventure around their island to learn their colours – and a little about love along the way.	3-5	https://www.amazon.ca/Colors-Aloha-Kanoa-Kau-Arteaga/dp/1775084086 https://www.flamingorampant.com/books/colors-of-aloha-by-kanoa-kau-arteaga-illustrated-by-jr-keaolani-bogac-moore
	It's A Wild World	S. Bear Bergman	The other animals of the earth are SO interesting—thankfully, we have Derrick, Izzy and Abby to take us on a trip through the zoo and teach us some fauna-tactic facts! We aren't the only creatures on this planet to love others of the same sex, change our genders or have complex family	6-8	https://www.amazon.ca/Its-Wild-World-Bear-Bergman/dp/177508406X

			structures. Come along with these kids and learn a bit about the queerness of nature.		https://www.flamingorampant.com/books/its-a-wild-world-by-s-bear-bergman-illustrated-by-kd-diamond
	Bridge of Flowers	L. Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha	There are many ways for a family to be: spread out, packed together, close, far or always moving. This family lives in two houses connected by a bridge of flowers. When the bridge falls apart one stressful day, Mona and her sibling Kumar make magic to restore it—with a surprising result! It's a good thing that everyone had a little magic inside, especially when they're trying to care for the people they love.	6-8	https://www.amazon.ca/Bridge-Flowers-Leah-Lakshmi-Piepzna-Samarasinha/dp/1775084094 https://www.flamingorampant.com/books/bridge-of-flowers-by-leah-lakshmi-piepzna-samarasinha-illustrated-by-syrus-marcus-ware
	Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress	C. Baldacchino	Morris is a little boy who loves using his imagination. But most of all, Morris loves his classroom's dress-up center and its tangerine dress.	4-7	https://www.amazon.ca/Morris-Micklewhite-Tangerine-Christine-Baldacchino/dp/1554983479
	Rain Boy	D. Glynn	A heartfelt picture book about differences, acceptance, and loving yourself for who you are.	3-5	https://www.amazon.ca/Rain-Boy-Kindness-Inclusion-Diversity/dp/1452172803
	Federico and All His Families	M. Hernández	Roof to roof, Federico the cat visits all his families everyday: Tadeo and his grandparents, Anna and her two Moms; Virginia, with her Mom and Dad, Paula and her two Dads... All of them are different, all of them loved by Federico. Unconditionally.	2-6	https://www.amazon.ca/Federico-All-Families-Mili-Hernandez/dp/8417673563
	A Family Is a Family Is a Family	S. O'Leary	When a teacher asks her class to think about what makes their families special, the answers are all different, but the same in one important way	4-7	https://www.amazon.ca/Family-Sara-OLeary/dp/1554987946
	When Aidan Became a Brother	K. Lukoff	This sweet and groundbreaking picture book, winner of the 2020 Stonewall Book Award, celebrates the changes in a transgender boy's life, from his initial coming-out to becoming a big brother.	4-7	https://www.amazon.ca/When-Aidan-Became-Brother-Lukoff/dp/1620148374

	Julián at the Wedding	J. Love	Julián and his abuela are going to a wedding. Better yet, Julián is in the wedding. Weddings have flowers and kissing and dancing and cake. And this wedding also has a new friend named Marisol. It's not long before Julián and Marisol set off for some magic and mischief of their own, and when things take an unexpected turn, the pair learns that everything is easier with a good friend by your side.	4-8	https://www.amazon.ca/Juli%C3%A1n-at-Wedding-Jessica-Love/dp/1536212385
	My Maddy	G. Pitman	My Maddy has hazel eyes which are not brown or green. And my Maddy likes sporks because they are not quite a spoon or a fork. Most mommies are girls. Most daddies are boys. But lots of parents are neither a boy nor a girl. My Maddy shows how some of the best things in the world are not one thing or the other. They are something in between and entirely their own.	4-8	https://www.amazon.ca/My-Maddy-Gayle-Pitman/dp/1433830442
	The Every Body Book: The LGBTQ+ Inclusive Guide for Kids About Sex, Gender, Bodies, and Families	R. Simon	This vibrant and beautifully illustrated book teaches children sex, gender and relationships education in a way that is inclusive of all sexual orientations and gender identities. Covering puberty, hormones, pregnancy, consent, sex, babies, relationships and families, it uses gender-neutral language throughout and celebrates diversity in all its forms, including race, ethnicity, faith, bodies, gender and sexuality.	7-12	https://www.amazon.ca/Every-Body-Book-Inclusive-Families/dp/1787751732
	This Is Our Rainbow: 16 Stories of Her, Him, Them, and Us	K. Locke	The first LGBTQIA+ anthology for middle-graders featuring stories for every letter of the acronym, including realistic, fantasy, and sci-fi stories	8-12	https://www.amazon.ca/This-Our-Rainbow-Stories-Them/dp/0593303946
	The Tea Dragon Society	K. O'Neil	The story of Greta, a blacksmith apprentice, and the people she meets as she becomes entwined in the enchanting world of tea dragons. After discovering a lost tea dragon in the marketplace, Greta learns about the dying art form of tea dragon care-taking from the kind tea shop owners, Hesekiel and Erik. As she befriends them and their shy ward, Minette, Greta sees how the craft enriches their lives—and eventually her own.	10+	https://www.amazon.ca/Tea-Dragon-Society-Katie-ONeill/dp/1620104415
	Heartstopper	A. Oseman	Charlie and Nick are at the same school, but they've never met ... until one day when they're made to sit together. They quickly become friends, and soon Charlie is falling hard for Nick, even though he doesn't think he has a chance. But love works in surprising ways, and Nick is more interested in Charlie than either of them realised.	12+	https://www.amazon.ca/Heartstopper-1-4-Books-Alice-Oseman/dp/9124120219

	Bitter	A. Emezi	After a childhood in foster care, Bitter is thrilled to have been chosen to attend Eucalyptus, a special school where she can focus on her painting surrounded by other creative teens. But outside this haven, the streets are filled with protests against the deep injustices that grip the city of Lucille.	12-17	https://www.amazon.ca/Bitter-Akwaeke-Emezi/dp/0593309030
	Last Night at the Telegraph Club	M. Lo	Seventeen-year-old Lily Hu can't remember exactly when the feeling took root—that desire to look, to move closer, to touch. Whenever it started growing, it definitely bloomed the moment she and Kathleen Miller walked under the flashing neon sign of a lesbian bar called the Telegraph Club. Suddenly everything seemed possible.	Teenage	https://www.amazon.ca/Last-Night-at-Telegraph-Club/dp/0525555250

Appendix C:
Queer Resources and Supports

Jurisdiction	Source
Alberta	Canadian Mental Health Association: https://alberta.cmha.ca/lgbtq2s-resources/
British Columbia	Government of British Columbia: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/gender-equity/resources
Saskatchewan	University of Regina: https://library.uregina.ca/c.php?g=710030&p=5058851
Manitoba	Government of Manitoba: https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/safe_schools/mygsa/lgbtq_resources.pdf
New Brunswick	Chroma: https://chromanb.ca/resources/
Newfoundland	Government of Newfoundland & Labrador: https://www.gov.nl.ca/education/files/k12_safeandcaring_gsa_09gsa_lgbtqresources_nl.pdf
Northwest Territories	Northern Mosaic Network: https://www.northernmosaic.net/
Nova Scotia	Halifax Pride: https://www.halifaxpride.com/nsresources
Nunavut	I Respect Myself: https://www.irespectmyself.ca/en/resources
Ontario	Humber Polytechnic: https://humber.ca/lgbtq/resources/community-resources-2slgbtq-folks
Prince Edward Island	Government of Prince Edward Island: https://womenandgenderdiversehealthhub.princeedwardisland.ca/2SLGBTQIA-Health#:~:text=Gender%20Affirming%20Care%20PEI%20(GACPEI,They%20also%20offer%20peer%20support.
Quebec	Centre Communautaire LGBTQ+ de Montréal: https://ccglm.org/en/our-services/resources/
Yukon Territory	Queer Yukon: https://www.queeryukon.com/



About the Authors



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Ryan has amassed almost 25 years of experience in the early childhood profession, having occupied a variety of front-line and administrative positions since graduating with his first of many field-specific credentials. He currently holds a full-time appointment at Humber College/the University of Guelph-Humber and is simultaneously working on a Doctorate of Education in Social Justice and Equity Studies at Western University in London, Ontario. Ryan’s doctoral research will examine the ways in which *Ontario’s pedagogy for the Early Years* ruptures and reproduces cis-, hetero- and homonormative discourses.



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Dr. Zeenat Janmohamed is an accomplished leader in higher education with progressive experience in administration, research and program development. She has a proven record in building cross sectoral and institutional partnerships advancing accreditation and quality assurance. With a deep commitment to equity, inclusion and anti-oppressive practice Zeenat is recognized for collaborative leadership, and organizational development.

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