Mary Holwell:

Rhonda, the VEYLDF recognises that educators should be committed to equity and avoid practices that directly or indirectly discriminate against others. Thinking about this idea of commitment to equity, what are some of the practical ways that educators might demonstrate this and support equitable outcomes for all of the children in their programmes?

Rhonda Livingstone:

Yeah, it's a great question, isn't it? Thinking back to that Code of Ethics again, the ECA Code of Ethics talks about in relation to children, I will ensure that children are not discriminated against on the basis of gender or sexuality or age or ability or economic status or family structure or lifestyle or ethnicity, religion, language, culture, national origin. And sometimes I think it is a bit challenging. We are called on to challenge practices that might be discriminatory, and sometimes that can really be uncomfortable as well. I just wanted to share a slide if I may, Stephanie, around the difference between equality and equity. And of course, equality is more around everyone having the same rights and being offered the same opportunities and equity is making sure that individuals have what they need to enact those rights. And of course, the aim of inclusion for me is around that equity.

Rhonda Livingstone:

And it's not just about being enrolled in a service, but for me, it's more focused on that full and meaningful participation. And I think the VEYLDF and the Early Years Learning Framework, one of the key changes I saw when those two documents were introduced was that shift in the way we view children and seeing them as capable and competent and valued content contributors and that move away from that deficit model of what the children need and I'll support them. And I just think that the fact that we view children as being unique, that we value diversity and think about diversity when we're developing programmes, but also policies and practices. And also I think that we recognise that inclusion is everyone's responsibility. And from my experience of working in the sector, sometimes I think that our fears or our lack of confidence or our beliefs can be really significant barriers to achieving this.

Rhonda Livingstone:

And so I mentioned earlier about their reconciliation action plans. I think there are also in SIPs, Strategic Inclusion Plans, I think they're a great way of reflecting on practice and also building educated commitment and teamwork when you unpack those or you develop those collaboratively as a team. But I also think that having that commitment to equity and respect for diversity requires professionals to actively address issues of inequality and promote that value of diversity. And of course, this is quite complex and it can be influenced by lots of different factors. It can be influenced by personal, but also professional factors. And again, I just think that critical reflection in terms of service operations can help get some clarity about the context of our work and our values and our philosophies and our policies and procedures and how that can affect people's views and beliefs.

Rhonda Livingstone:

And we've undertaken some research, looking at services that have really improved practice and having a really strong philosophy was identified as a key driver in that research and using that strong philosophical base to inform practice. And also, I think engaging in genuine critical reflection helps to build a comprehensive view of your own views on equity and diversity, but also others' views. And it also helps you unpack your biases and whether those biases might be conscious or unconscious. And I just think working in a team setting in early childhood services gives us an opportunity to challenge some of the assumptions that might work against equity and also break down some of those stereotypes that might be related to dominant cultures or identify some of the barriers to inclusion and equity and thinking about even just the ways that we communicate and interact respectfully across cultures. I just wanted to share, sorry, Mary, you were going to say?

Mary Holwell:

I was going to say that some of the things that you've said there have done a loop for me back to something that you said very early in our conversation, Rhonda, which was around the importance of not only noticing children's skills and interests and strengths, but also being aware of their challenges. And I was thinking about that in relation to that issue of equity and equitable outcomes, and that idea that some children need additional support to achieve an equitable outcome. And that it's the role of the educator to provide additional support when it's needed to ensure that, as I said earlier, all children can reach their optimal potential. So don't just stop. Think about what else can be delivered for children to move them along and be aware of things that are challenges for children as well. Sorry to interrupt your train of thought there.

Rhonda Livingstone:

No, I was just going to share, just when we were talking about, sometimes it can be challenging to have some of these conversations. I was just going to share on the slide, we've developed a quest for quality pack on inclusion, and we found that it's been useful in starting some of those conversations around inclusive practices. And it might be a non-threatening way of starting a conversation if there are some barriers identified or challenging some biases that might be bubbling up.

Mary Holwell:

Yeah, sure. I think the other thing that this is making me think about a little bit is that we're all aware that there are staff changes in services from time to time. And you've spoken about the idea of having a strongly rooted philosophical approach to the work that we do. And I think that cards like this might even be useful when you've had some changes in your team and you want to regroup and be sure that everybody is on the same page for want of a better colloquial term, and that you're all thinking about things from a similar perspective, but you're being challenged by the perspectives that other people might bring, so that ultimately you reach a consensus that sits comfortably for everybody and can guide and inform the practice within the service.

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