

Case study: Addressing social justice with the children at Magic Pudding Child Care Centre

Magic Pudding Child Care Centre is one of three services operated by UTS Child Care. The educators at this centre make discussing social justice part of their everyday practice with children and families. Educators are supported to help raise children's awareness of social justice issues. They alert both children and adults to issues in the wider community that don't necessarily directly affect them and ensure that children are aware of issues outside their immediate community. This also means helping children realise that all people do not have the same opportunities and that things in the world are not always fair.



Educator Tim Gillard and children (from left) Jimmy Simpson and Kaitlyn Phun

The centre's director, Sally Beesley, says that as educators it is our role to break down stereotypes and question inequity. Sally feels that it is important to realise throughout this process that educators don't have to have all the answers. "You can say to children, you know, I really don't know the answer to that question". Educators can help support children to research and find the answers.

Sally also adds it is important for educators to reflect on their own biases before approaching social justice with children and families. Some topics may make us feel uncomfortable and challenge us morally or religiously. Some educators may feel that discussing certain subject matter with children could be controversial and that it is somehow breaking the innocence of childhood. Sally says an example of this is children in detention.

Educators must decide how to approach sensitive issues such as this with children who may have seen images on television of children and families behind bars. Children may become quite confused and even distressed about what they have seen in the media. Sally adds that the educators at Magic Pudding Child Care Centre

are still considering the most appropriate way to approach the issue of refugees in detention, and they are also discussing this with families.

Educators have also discussed same sex families with the children and have talked about how some children have two mums. Sally believes that it is the educators' role to alert children to the fact that some families are structured in this way.

Educators also regularly address gender bias with children. Sally gives the example of when a small tree needed to be removed in the playground educators discussed with children how this could take place. When children suggested that a Dad could come and remove the tree the educators questioned "why couldn't a Mum do this?". Literature,

including fairy tales, is also explored to encourage discussion around gender-bias and stereotypes. The female characters in these stories are often portrayed as passive and helpless, the male characters brave, strong and heroic. The images in popular culture of superheros also present opportunities to challenge our biases.

Sally says the challenge for educators is to avoid tokenism and she emphasises that it is important for educators to discuss and plan experiences together, collect resources and discuss intentions with families to ensure that experiences are respectful and part of everyday practice with children. Sally also mentions that it is important to talk to families about what educators are discussing with children, as some families may feel that some topics should not be discussed and educators need to respect families' views.

Sally asserts that "As educators you have to instigate, it is up to us to intentionally go there, to explore and discuss social justice issues with children even though we may feel uncomfortable" ■