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Student Number: A00214515 Course Year: 4

Course Title: B.A. (Honours) Early Years Care & Education

Subject: Research

Assignment Title: Gender in Practice: the views of some Early Years Practitioners in the West of Ireland

Name of Lecturer: Dr. Vincent O’Connor Word Count: 4500

Due date: 24th March 2017 Mark: _______________

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RECEIPT OF ASSIGNMENT:

Student Number: A00214515 Course Year: 4

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Assignment Title: Gender in Practice: the views of some Early Years Practitioners in the West of Ireland

Signature of Lecturer: ___________________________ Date Submitted: ________________
Research Project

Gender in Practice: the views of some Early Years Practitioners in the West of Ireland

Completed by: Eilish Friel
Student Number: A00214515
As a requirement for:
B.A. (Hons) Early Years Care & Education

Submitted to Athlone Institute of Technology
24th March 2017
Declaration

I declare that this project is presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Degree in Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Early Years Care and Education. It is entirely the work of the author and has not been submitted to any other university or higher education institution, of for any other academic award in this institute. Where use has been made of the work of other people it has been fully acknowledged and fully referenced.

Signature: Eilish Friel  Dated: 24th March 2017
Abstract

This study evaluates the extent to which early years practitioners (EYP) understand transgender children. A quantitative method was used in which five questionnaires were distributed to four academic groups (Levels 5-8), across two tertiary educational establishments, 20 were distributed in total.

The main findings of the study have shown that across the four academic levels (5-8), the early year’s practitioner’s knowledge and understanding of transgender children in the West of Ireland is poor. Equally important although 100% of practitioners attached varying degrees of importance to promoting inclusion, 70% of settings did not approach the topic of transgender children.

This has implications for the holistic well-being and self-esteem of the gender non-conforming children in their care, as we know that an inclusive environment, where equality is upheld and diversity respected, is fundamental to supporting children to build positive identities, develop a sense of belonging and realise their full potential.

Recommendations for further research are made especially given the recent introduction of the updated Diversity, Equality and Inclusion guidelines that are requesting that early childhood care and education services sign up to the National Inclusion Charter, where the sector will strive to support children to celebrate diversity and feel comfortable with difference and guarantee the safety and well-being of all children as central to every aspect of children’s learning, well-being, welfare and development.
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The author wishes to sincerely thank:

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- Staff in both tertiary educational establishments for facilitating my request to distribute the questionnaires across the four levels 5-6 and 7-8 respectively
- My travelling buddies from Galway to Athlone on Tuesday and Thursday evenings for their advice, support and kindness
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Chapter 1

Introduction
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 This study evaluates the extent to which early years practitioners (EYP) understand transgender children. The two objectives are to; identify, at various academic levels (5-8), the EYP knowledge and understanding of transgender children and to explore the importance of the role that early years practitioners have in promoting inclusion.

1.2 Chapter 2 looks at the Literature Review. It reviews various pieces of academic literature from 2008-2016 from the Northern Hemisphere and a justification for the research is provided. In Chapter 3 Research Methodology, the research methodology is discussed, in which a questionnaire was used as the primary source of gathering the quantitative data. The results are shown in Chapter 4 in both narrative and where appropriate graphical format using Excel. Chapter 5 shows the discussion of the results and Chapter 6 closes with the conclusion and a recommendation for future practice and research.
Chapter 2

Literature Review
Chapter 2: Introduction

This chapter reviews current literature published from 2008-2016. The review opens with a definition of transgender, followed by a brief history of how transgender children are amongst the most vulnerable members of Irish society. It continues with a number of important factors, including: how important education and educational related services are as a primary influence, the age at which children become gender aware, early years’ practitioner’s role, consequences for children who are not respected and valued and the importance of support in the form of inclusion. The review concludes with an explanation of the necessity for the research.

2.1 Definition

Transgender describes people who feel that the sex they were assigned at birth does not match how they feel inside. For example, someone who was born as a girl but has always felt like a boy (Childline, 2016).

2.2 History

Over the last two decades, Ireland has witnessed significant social change and increasing levels of awareness and acceptance of diversity. However, transgender people remain among the most vulnerable members of Irish society and experience high levels of stigmatisation, and marginalisation (TENI, 2014; Maycock et al, 2009).

2.3 Age of gender recognition

For many transgender children education and educational related services are the primary influences which affect their gender identity and gender role (Teni, P6. 2016). This is important for early years’ practitioners to be aware of as an article by Natacha Kennedy and Mark Hellen “Transgender Children: More than a Theoretical Challenge, 2010” advanced evidence, in contrast to what might otherwise be expected, that “transgender children become aware they are transgender at much younger ages than previously discovered and they conceal or suppress their transgender identities”.

In the article the author relates the findings from the age of epiphany question “The most striking aspect of the data is the clear spike at 5 years”, this concurs with similar findings from Riley et al (2013) who conducted a qualitative study that documented the childhood experiences of trans adults retrospectively (N=10). They found that 94%
had identified their gender before the age of 18: 48% reported identifying their gender between 0-5 years of age, 44% identified their gender between 6-12 years old and 2% identified their gender between 13-18 years. Only 2% identified their gender after 18 (and 4% did not reply).

As can be seen from the statistics above, 48% of children had identified their gender between 0-5 years, this has implications for EYP, as the children will be attending an early years setting at this formative stage and the knowledge and understanding that the practitioner has will be vitally important in developing their holistic well-being particularly their self-esteem.

2.4 Early Years Practitioners Role

One of the principles of the early years’ quality framework Siolta requires that “Quality early childhood practice is built upon the unique role of the adult. The competencies, qualifications, dispositions and experience of adults, in addition to their capacity to reflect upon their role” (p.8) and we know from Zimmer et al (2015), that “education is critical to social and economic development and has a profound impact on population health”, therefore by embracing difference, by exploring their own attitudes in relation to equality and diversity, and by realising that their attitudes and values influence children, early years’ practitioners can develop insights, self-awareness and skills that are needed to help children develop a strong sense of identity and belonging. This helps to ensure that all children are respected and valued and that they can recognise and deal with discrimination and prejudice (Aistear Identity and belonging, p.25).

Children need to feel valued, respected empowered, cared for and included. They become positive about themselves and their learning when early years’ practitioners value them for who they are and when they promote warm and supportive relationships (Aistear Well-Being, p.16).

2.5 Consequences

The consequences for children who are not respected and valued in the school environment are detrimental to the well-being of the development of the child. Like homophobia, racism and sexism, transphobia plays out in discriminatory acts directed toward a relatively powerless minority (The Society for Safe and Caring Schools & Communities, 2012).
According to a survey on homophobia in Canadian Schools: 95% of the students felt unsafe at school, 90% of transgender students reported being verbally harassed because of their gender expression and 50% reported that staff never intervened when homophobic or transphobic comments were made (Taylor et al, 2008).

Similarly, an Irish study (Maycock et al, 2009) which was funded by the National Office for Suicide Prevention found that over 50% of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people who participated had been bullied as a consequence of their LGBT identity, while at school.

A more recent Irish study by Higgins et al (2016) showed that young people who identify as LGBT are still at particular risk from depression, self-harm, suicide ideation and discrimination and that schools in many instances are not the safe places they should be.

### 2.6 Importance of Support

Research on the subject of transgender shows that a supportive, inclusive school environment can have a lasting impact on both the educational and lifelong outcomes for the children, “As a minimum, schools should introduce children to the concept of transgender people so that transgender children are able to feel they are not alone and their gender identity is as valid as any other” (Kennedy & Hellen 2009). Adults and carers who respect the child’s self-perception, gender identity or gender expression are important in order to support the child fully and openly, otherwise the risk of abuse will be that much greater (Alessandrin, 2013).

Similarly, international research by Brill & Pepper (2008) found that, a child’s experience at school can significantly enhance or undermine their sense of self. Furthermore, children need to feel emotionally safe in order to learn effectively. A welcoming and supportive school where bullying and teasing is not permitted and children are actively taught to report bullying and teasing is the ideal environment for all children. This is especially true for gender-variant and transgender children, who frequently are targets of teasing and bullying. A child cannot feel emotionally safe, and will most likely experience problems in learning if they regularly experience discrimination at school (Luecke, 2011).
2.7 Conclusion

From the research contained in this literature review it can be ascertained that dealing with children whose behaviour, identity or self-perception does not typically conform to gender norms must be seen as an emerging issue for all schools that cater for children. It is also a challenging one: transgender children who express a disjunction between how they perceive themselves and the sex that was assigned to them at birth are growing in number, confronting schools with the question of how to respect the child’s self-perception as they, themselves express it.

In order that we respect the child’s right to be heard, and to duly take into account their views, it is imperative that Early Year’s Practitioners have the knowledge and understanding to provide an inclusive environment in which the child can be supported and feel emotionally and physically safe. Therefore the growing awareness of transgender in early years’ settings needs to be matched with accurate information and responses that are based on good practice in addressing the needs of transgender children.

Current research both nationally and internationally indicates that there are few studies available that have looked at the early years’ practitioner’s perspective on their knowledge and understanding of gender non-conforming children. Therefore, this research is important in giving an early years’ practitioner’s perspective on gender non-conforming children that may have implications for practice and policy makers.
Chapter 3
Methodology
Chapter 3 Methodology

This chapter contains an explanation on the method of research employed and includes the following headings: research method, pilot study, participants, ethics, limitations and method of data analysis. These are explained in order to gain insight into the original aim and objectives of the research.

The aim of the research was to evaluate the extent to which early years practitioners understand the topic of transgender children. The two objectives were; to explore the EYP knowledge and understanding of transgender children in the early years setting and to explore the importance of the role that EYP’s have in promoting inclusion.

3.1 Research Method

The essential nature of research lies in its intent to create new knowledge in whatever field. It does this by a process of systematic enquiry governed by scientific principles, (Hockey, 1996). Two of the ways in which we create this new knowledge is by using either a qualitative or quantitative approach or combining them both to give a mixed methods approach.

To fulfil the aim of the research project which was; to evaluate the extent to which early years practitioners (EYP) understood transgender children, a quantitative method of research was used.

‘Quantitative research collects numerical data and...(Uses) typically structured and predetermined research questions conceptual framework and designs’ (Punch, 2005; p.5).

In employing a quantitative method to gather the data for this primary research a questionnaire was used. Bryman (2004) lists several advantages and disadvantages to using questionnaires;

3.2 Advantages; they are less expensive than other methods, they produce quick results, they can be completed at the respondent’s convenience, they offer a greater assurance of anonymity, they give a stable consistent and uniform measure without variation and give wider coverage because the researcher can approach respondents more easily than other methods.
**Disadvantages:** they don’t allow for the probing, prompting and clarification of questions, they don’t give opportunities for motivating the respondents to participate in the survey, the identity of the respondent and conditions under which the questionnaire was answered are unknown, it is not possible to see if the question order was followed, due to the lack of supervision, a practical response is possible.

**3.3 Pilot Study**

A pilot questionnaire was conducted with four random EYP not currently on the course, one at each level 5-8, as a result of this questions were altered and more explanations were provided to make some of the terms more easily understood. The researcher was aware of the need to formulate neutral questions when designing the questionnaire due to the nature of the subject. The piloting of the questionnaire to four people represented an additional anti-bias safeguard.

**3.4 Participants**

Five questionnaires were distributed to four academic groups (Levels 5-8), across two tertiary educational establishments, 20 were distributed in total. The questionnaire proved to be an effective and efficient way of carrying out the research and provided the necessary confidential information needed for the research process. Each questionnaire was accompanied by a cover letter asking practitioners to participate, and explanations regarding anonymity and confidentiality were provided. Respondents were presented with the questionnaires by their tutors/lecturers and when finished these were collected by the researcher.

**3.5 Ethics**

The moral philosophy or set of moral principles underpinning this project (Aubrey et al), are; the participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, this was done by the researcher upon distribution of the questionnaire personally and it was also written on the questionnaire itself. Their consent was requested in the cover letter, there was a slip attached to each cover letter which the students signed (this can be seen in Appendix 2). They were informed that they could withdraw at any point if they wished, this was clearly stated in the letter and re-iterated by the researcher upon distribution. They were assured that all data would be destroyed.
at a stipulated point in the future, the date of September 2017 was clearly indicated in the cover letter.

3.6 Alignment of Instrument

Questions 1-3 gathered general demographic information about the practitioner’s age, level of academic study and their gender. Question 4 was used to gather general information on the extent to which early years’ practitioners agreed or disagreed that a higher level of education impacted on their knowledge and understanding of transgender children. Questions 5-11 gathered information on the first objective; to identify, at various academic levels 5-8, the early years’ practitioner’s knowledge and understanding of transgender children. Questions 12-19 were specific to the second objective; to explore the importance of the role that early years’ practitioners have in promoting inclusion.

3.7 Limitations

Statistically a small survey of this size is not significant. Many factors contributed these being the time frame which is a requirement of the course and the scale and size of the study. In addition the absence of a male perspective is noteworthy as there was no male respondents and the only male input has been from the supervisor.
Chapter 4
Results
Chapter: 4 Results

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will illustrate the findings in both narrative and graphic form. The information will be presented under the two main objectives;

1. Identify, at various academic level 5-8, the early years’ practitioners knowledge and understanding of transgender children.
2. To explore the importance of the role that the early years’ practitioners have in promoting inclusion.

4.2 Demographic Information

Questions 1-3 gathered general demographic information about the practitioner’s age, level of academic study and their gender.

Half of the practitioners (50%) fell into the 25-34 year age bracket, One quarter 25% were in the 18-24 year age bracket, 10% were in both the 35-44 and 45-54 year age bracket and only 5% fell into the 55-64 age bracket. Five questionnaires were returned at levels 5-8 (20 in total). 100% of the practitioners were female.
Results Objective 1

The extent to which higher levels of education impact on knowledge and understanding of transgender children.

Figure 4.1

Figure 4.1 below shows, that 100% of level 8 practitioners strongly agreed that higher levels of education impacted on their knowledge and understanding of transgender children in comparison to 60% at level 7, and 40% at levels 5 and 6.

The extent to which higher levels of education impact on knowledge and understanding of transgender children.
Knowledge of Gender

Figure 4.2 below shows that; none of the practitioners at levels 7 and 8 rated their knowledge of gender as poor. None of the practitioners at level 5 rated their knowledge of gender as ok. The highest levels (40%) of good understanding can be seen at levels 5 and 8 and very good understanding (40%) was indicated by practitioners at levels 5-7.

Figure 4.2

Knowledge of Gender

![Bar chart showing knowledge of gender by academic level. The chart indicates that the highest levels (40%) of good understanding can be seen at levels 5 and 8, and very good understanding (40%) was indicated by practitioners at levels 5-7.](chart.png)
Understanding of transgender children

Figure 4.3 below indicates that; (100%) of level 8 practitioners rated the highest percentage in identifying the correct criteria in their understanding of transgender children, closely followed at 90% at level 6, 70% at level 7 and 40% at level 5.

Figure 4.3

Understanding of transgender children
The age at which children are aware of their gender identity.

There were four age categories with the 0-5 age group being the correct answer. The results for each level were as follows; 20% answered correctly at both levels 5 and 6, 80% answered correctly at level 7 and 40% answered correctly at level 8. Overall, 40% answered correctly and 60% incorrectly.

Percentage of children identifying their gender in the 0-5 age group.

Practitioners were given five options with the percentage of 48% being correct, the results were as follows; No one at level 5 identified correctly, 20% at both levels 6 and 7 identified correctly along with 40% at level 8. The results showed that 20% identified correctly with 80% identifying incorrectly.

Practitioners were asked to what extent they believed or disbelieved that gender should be included as part of a module for the training of early years’ practitioners.

Overall, 15% strongly believed, 45% believed and 40% were neutral. The results showed that 60% believed that gender should be included as part of a module and 40% were neutral.
LGBT in the setting

Figure 4.4 below shows; 80% indicated there was no discussion on LGBT, 30% were aware of an anti-bullying policy that clearly included LGBT, 20% indicated there is discussion with staff, 15% that there is discussion with children and 10% that there are books and/or posters. The results show that 80% indicated there was no discussion on LGBT in their setting.

Figure 4.4

LGBT in the setting

Sources of information on transgender children

Practitioners were asked to tick from 7 choices, their sources of information in relation to the topic. 70% indicated the internet, 40% Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter, 25% Transgender Equality Network Ireland, and 15% were indicated for both setting policies and procedures and course literature, 5% indicated the television and information from other professionals. These results indicate that the highest proportion of practitioners information on the topic (70%) comes from the internet.
Results Objective 2

The level of importance the practitioners attached to promoting inclusion.

Figure 4.5 below demonstrates that; 70% indicated that promoting inclusion is very important, 10% fairly important and 20% important across the 4 academic levels. None of the practitioners thought that it was slightly or not important at all.

Figure 4.5

Level of importance the practitioner attached to promoting inclusion

70% Very Important
10% Fairly Important
20% Important
Practitioners were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the statement “research on the subject of transgender shows that a supportive inclusive school environment can have a lasting impact on both the educational and lifelong outcomes for the children”.

The results were as follows; 65% strongly agreed on the research, 30% agreed and 5% had no opinion.

Practitioners were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed that supporting children in developing their gender identity required practitioners to examine their own attitudes.

The results showed that; 55% strongly agree, 35% agreed and 10% had no opinion.
Introducing children to the concept of transgender

Figure 4.6 shows that 35% of practitioners strongly agreed, 40% agreed, 10% had no opinion, and 15% disagreed. These results indicate that 75% were in some form agreement with the recommendation and 25% had no opinion or disagreed.

Figure 4.6

Introducing children to the concept of transgender
Reasons for not approaching the topic of transgender children

Figure 4.7 below shows that; 30% of practitioners answered that they did approach the subject and 70% revealed that their setting did not approach the subject.

The results revealed the reasons for not approaching the subject were; 45% were not sure where to start with the subject, 30% were concerned about the parents reactions, 25% thought they lacked the knowledge and skills and 5% felt uncomfortable with the subject of transgender people.

Figure 4.7

Reasons for not approaching the subject of transgender children

![Bar chart showing reasons for not approaching the subject](chart)

Practitioners were asked if they had ever avoided the topic of transgender children in their setting.

The results showed that; 80% indicated No, 10% indicated Yes and 10% did not answer.
How staff engage with the topic of transgender children in the setting

Figure 4.8 below shows that; 65% challenge stereotypes, engage with children in meaningful discussion and represent diversity within materials and 35% use inclusive language.

**Figure 4.8**

How staff engage with the topic of transgender children in the setting
Importance rating on the topic of Transgender Children

Figure 4.9 below shows that; 95% agreed that the topic of transgender children had various degrees of importance and 5% thought no importance at all.

Figure 4.9

Importance of rating on the topic of Transgender Children
Chapter 5
Discussion
Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the importance of the results while referring to the literature review. These findings will be analysed with reference to the two objectives set out in the introduction.

5.2 Identification, at various academic levels 5-8, of the practitioner’s knowledge and understanding of transgender children.

Zimmerman et al (2016), state that “education is critical to social and economic development and has a profound impact on population health”. 40% of practitioners at level 5 rated their knowledge and understanding of gender as good/very good, however this did not follow through when they were asked to define transgender people. It is noteworthy that 100% of practitioners at level 8 defined transgender children accurately. Thus, the result clearly supports Siolta’s principle of the “Role of the Adult” in which qualifications and competencies are extremely important in providing quality early childhood practice. It is plausible from these results to suggest that further information and training at level 5 is needed in relation to the topic of gender/ transgender people to improve the knowledge and understanding of the practitioners.

5.3 Age at which children are aware of their gender identity

One of the major findings in the research conducted by Kennedy & Hellen (2009), advanced evidence to what might otherwise be expected that transgender children become aware they are transgender at much younger ages than previously discovered and they conceal or suppress it. In the article the author relates the age of epiphany question “The most striking aspect of the data is the clear spike at 5 years”. This has serious implications for practitioners as the overall results from practitioners regarding the age that children are aware of their gender identity revealed that only 40% were able to identify the correct age and 60% identified incorrectly, the implications for this will be discussed in the next paragraph.
5.4 Percentage of children identifying in the 0-5 age group

Similar findings to Kennedy & Hellen (2009) from Riley et al (2013) emerged when they conducted a qualitative study that documented childhood experiences of transgender adults retrospectively (N=10). The following data from Riley et al found that 94% had identified their gender before the age of 18: 48% reported identifying gender in the 0-5 years of age. When practitioners in the questionnaire were asked the percentage of children identifying in the 0-5 age group the results showed that overall only 20% of practitioners identified correctly and 80% identified incorrectly.

From the above results of the questions that were asked regarding understanding of gender/transgender children, age of awareness of gender identity and the percentage of children that identify in the 0-5 age group we can see that the practitioners have very limited knowledge and understanding of gender/transgender children. We are aware from research (Teni P.6, 2016), that for many transgender children education and educational related services are the primary influences which affect their gender identity and gender role.

The fact that 40% of practitioners were neutral when asked whether they believed or disbelieved that gender/transgender should be included as part of their course is concerning as this may have serious implications for a child/family. Lack of knowledge and understanding by the practitioners puts the children at risk of “depression, self-harm, suicide ideation, and discrimination” because schools in many instances are not the safe places they should be (Higgins et al 2016).

It is imperative that practitioners have training in gender and transgender children, this could be done through a module at both tertiary educational establishments which is specifically targeted on this topic or the practitioners could engage in self-learning starting at level 5 and continuing through all levels to build knowledge and understanding of the topic.
5.5 Importance of the role that practitioners have in promoting inclusion

It was found that while 100% of practitioners attached varying degrees of importance to promoting inclusion, 70% of settings did not approach the topic of transgender children. 30% of the practitioners listed the reason as “being concerned about the parent’s reaction”. This concern is also expressed in research by Payne and Smith, (2014) where they say that teachers experience fear and anxiety about reprisals from parents of the other students who they fear would be alarmed if they thought that their child had any type of sexuality even if it were heterosexual as transgender children introduce the body and implicitly sexuality into the classroom. These concerns of the practitioner cannot be ignored and need to be addressed as the growing awareness of transgender in early years settings needs to be matched with accurate information and responses that are based on good practice in addressing both the needs of the child and the practitioner.

Unexpected Findings

There was a recurrent level 6 result which was not indicative of the overall results, this indicated a practitioner with very good knowledge and understanding of gender/transgender people. Upon further analysis this was explained by the fact that the level 6 practitioner was a member of LGBT community. It was evident within the research that having a member of the community who was LGBT influenced the knowledge and understanding of those around them.

5.6 Introducing the concept of transgender children

75% of practitioners were in some form of agreement when asked to what extent they believed or disbelieved that as a minimum schools should introduce children to the concept of transgender children, this is in accordance with Kennedy and Hellen (2009) who state that “As a minimum, schools should introduce the concept of transgender people so that transgender children are able to feel they are not alone and their gender is as valuable as any other”.

This result is significant as adults and carers who respect the child’s self-perception, gender identity or gender expression are important in order to support the child fully and openly, otherwise the risk of abuse will be that much greater. This idea was further
supported in the study with 95% of practitioners agreeing that a supportive, inclusive school environment can have a lasting impact on both the educational and lifelong outcomes of the children.

5.7 Evaluation of Method

The questionnaire proved to be an effective and efficient way of carrying out the research and provided the necessary confidential information which satisfied both objectives and provided valuable data. There were no issues in the distribution and retrieval of the questionnaires.

5.8 Conclusion

The research results have concluded, across all academic levels 5-8, that the EYP’s knowledge and understanding of gender/transgender children is poor, and while 40% of level 5 students indicated their knowledge and understanding of gender/transgender children was good/very this did not carry through when asked to define the criteria for transgender children.

Equally important although 100% of practitioners attached varying degrees of importance to promoting inclusion, 70% of settings did not approach the topic of transgender children.

We can conclude from these results that that further information and training across all academic levels 5-8 is needed in relation to the topic of gender/ transgender children to improve the knowledge and understanding of the practitioners.
Chapter 6

Conclusion
Conclusion

This study, amongst Irish early years’ practitioners, across four academic levels (5-8), has shown that while practitioners across the four academic groups were able to identify transgender children, at varying percentages at different levels, when asked more in-depth questions regarding the age at which children identify their gender and the percentage of children identifying in the 0-5 age group these questions revealed that the respondents knowledge and understanding of transgender children in the West of Ireland is poor. These results suggest that more in-depth knowledge of transgender children is required at all four academic levels (5-8) as for many transgender children education and educational related services are the primary influences which affect their gender identity and gender role.

In addition, although 100% of practitioners attached varying degrees of importance to promoting inclusion, 70% of settings did not approach the topic of transgender children. This has implications for the holistic well-being and self-esteem of the gender non-conforming children in their care as inclusion is about ensuring that the child’s identity and belonging is promoted throughout the early childhood care and education setting.

Recommendations

Whilst this limited study is too small to have any validity its results would appear to suggest that this is a topic that is deserving of further research and attention especially given the introduction of the updated Diversity, Equality and Inclusion guidelines that are requesting that early childhood care and education services sign up to the National Inclusion Charter.
Bibliography


24 January 2017

For Attention of: Ms Anne Duggan,
Early Years Course Co-ordinator
Galway Community College

RE: Ms Eilish Friel

I wish to confirm that Ms Eilish Friel is a registered student on
the Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Early Years Care and
Education – Level 8 for the academic year 2016 /2017. This
programme is offered as a part-time programme and forms
part of the Lifelong Learning schedule at Athlone Institute of
Technology.

Ms Friel is currently working on her Research Project and is
required to carry out appropriate and relevant research across
various academic levels. As such it would be of great benefit to
Ms Friel if you would allow her to carry out said research on
students in your Level 5 and Level 6 Early Years programmes.

Should you have any queries or wish to discuss the above
please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Michael Tobin
Head of Department
Lifelong Learning

Tel 09064 71860
Email mtobin@ait.ie
Appendix 2

Dear Participant,

My name is Eilish Friel and I am a 4th year B.A. (Honours) Early Years Care & Education student studying at Athlone Institute of Technology. Part of my course includes a research project, and I have chosen to evaluate the extent to which early years practitioners understand the topic of transgender children. The research is being supervised by Dr. Vincent O'Connor research lecturer at A.I.T.

The questionnaire responses will be used to identify, at various academic levels (5-8), the early years practitioners knowledge and understanding of transgender children and to explore the importance of the role that early years practitioners have in promoting inclusion.

As an Early Years Practitioner, I would be extremely grateful if you would participate in the research. Participation is entirely voluntary and participants may withdraw from the process at any point, if they wish.

The information gathered will be used only for my thesis. I may use quotes to highlight certain points or findings, however no names or identifying characteristics will be used. The anonymity of all participants will be preserved at all times.

The questionnaire will take no more than 15 minutes and I “Thank you” in advance for taking the time to complete it.

All questionnaires will be destroyed by September 2017.

Should you have any queries, please contact me on 085-7036115.

Thank you for taking the time,

Eilish Friel.

I hereby agree to take part in the research conducted by Eilish Friel on Evaluating the extent to which early years practitioners understand the topic of transgender children. The research is conducted as part of the requirements of the B.A. (Honours) Early Years Care & Education Degree at Athlone Institute of Technology.

Signed: _______________________________

Print Name: _______________________________

Date: _______________________________
Appendix 3

Questionnaire

To evaluate the extent to which early years practitioners understand the topic of transgender children

Transgender People

People who feel that the sex they were assigned at birth doesn’t match how they feel inside. For example, someone who was born as a girl but has always felt like a boy (Childline, 2016).

Q1. Please state your age? (Tick the box)
18-24  □  25-34  □  35-44  □  45-54  □  55-64  □

Q2. Current level of studies?
Level 5  □  Level 6  □  Level 7  □  Level 8  □

Q3. To which gender identity do you most identify? (Tick the circle)
□ Female  □ Male
□ Transgender Female (person who was assigned male at birth but whose gender identity is that of a female)
□ Transgender Male (person who was assigned female at birth but whose gender identity is that of a man)
□ Gender Variant/Non-Conforming  □ Not listed ________________

Q4. To what extent do you agree or disagree that a higher level of education impacts on your knowledge and understanding of transgender children?
Strongly Agree  □  Agree  □  No opinion  □  Disagree  □  Strongly Disagree  □

Q5. How would you rate your knowledge of gender?
Very Poor  □  Poor  □  Ok  □  Good  □  Very Good  □
Q6. What is your understanding of transgender people? (Tick all that apply)

- Males who wear female clothing
- Males who associate as females and adopt female characteristics
- Females who wear male clothing
- Females who associate as males and adopt male characteristics

Q7. At what age do you believe children are aware of their gender identity?

- 0-5 years
- 6-12 years
- 13-18 years
- Don't know

Q8. What percentage of children, do you believe, identify their gender in the 0-5 age group?

- 18%
- 28%
- 38%
- 48%
- Don't know

Q9. To what extent do you believe or disbelieve that gender should be included as part of a module for the training of Early Years’ Professionals?

- Strongly believe
- Believe
- Neutral
- Disbelieve
- Strongly disbelieve

Q10. In my setting (Tick all that apply)

- There is an anti-bullying policy that clearly includes lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people (LGBT).
- There are books and/or posters in the setting with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people or characters included.
- There is discussion with the children about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and or issues in the setting.
- There is discussion with the staff about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and or issues in the setting.
- There is no discussion on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.
Q11. Which of the following best describe your sources of information in relation to this topic? (Please all tick all that apply)

- Setting Policies & Procedures
- Course Literature
- Internet
- Transgender Equality Network
- Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter
- None of the above
- Other____________________________

Q12. How important do you consider your role in promoting inclusion?

- Very Important
- Fairly Important
- Important
- Slightly important
- Not at all important

Q13. Research on the subject of transgender children shows that a supportive inclusive school environment can have a lasting impact on both the educational and lifelong outcomes for the children. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- No opinion
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q14 To what extent do you agree or disagree that supporting transgender children in developing their gender identity requires early years practitioners to examine their own attitudes.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- No opinion
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

15. It is recommended that, as a minimum, schools introduce children to the concept of transgender people, do you agree or disagree with this statement.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- No opinion
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
Q16. Does your setting approach the topic of transgender people? (Please circle)

YES/No

If you answered YES please move onto Q17.

If you answered No, please indicate your reasons for not approaching the topic (Please tick all that apply).

- Lack of knowledge and skills on transgender
- Feeling uncomfortable with the topic of transgender
- Concerned about the parents reaction
- Not sure where to start with this topic

Q17. Have you ever avoided the topic of transgender people in your setting? (Please circle)

YES/NO

If you answered NO please move onto Q18.

If you answered YES please give details below.

___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________

Q18. In my setting (Please tick all that apply)

- Staff challenge stereotypes.
- Staff engage with the children in meaningful discussion e.g. “Actually, if Lydia wants to be a boy when she grows up, she can be”.
- Staff use inclusive language e.g. “Mother’s Day or Father’s Day” becomes “Family Day”.
- Staff represent different kinds of family structures within materials, e.g. posters, photos, jigsaw, puzzles, books.

Q19. On a scale of 1-5 how important do you think the topic of transgender people is? (Tick only one).

1 = Not at all important
2 = Slightly Important
3 = Important
4 = Fairly Important
5 = Very Important

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire!