

Supporting the inclusion of marginalised families in early childhood education services

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The context

Disadvantage and ECE

- Sustained participation => Improved educational and health outcomes (Barnett & Nores, 2015; Sammons et al., 2014)
- Children living in disadvantaged contexts stand to gain most (Gambaro, Stewart & Waldfogel, 2014; OECD, 2017)



The problem

Participation

- Underrepresented in preschool programs
- Overrepresented in preschool programs for less than 10 hours per week
- Underrepresented in ECEC generally
- Overrepresented in children who are not school ready

(ABS, 2017; Lamb et al., 2015; O'Connor, 2016; Productivity Commission, 2018)



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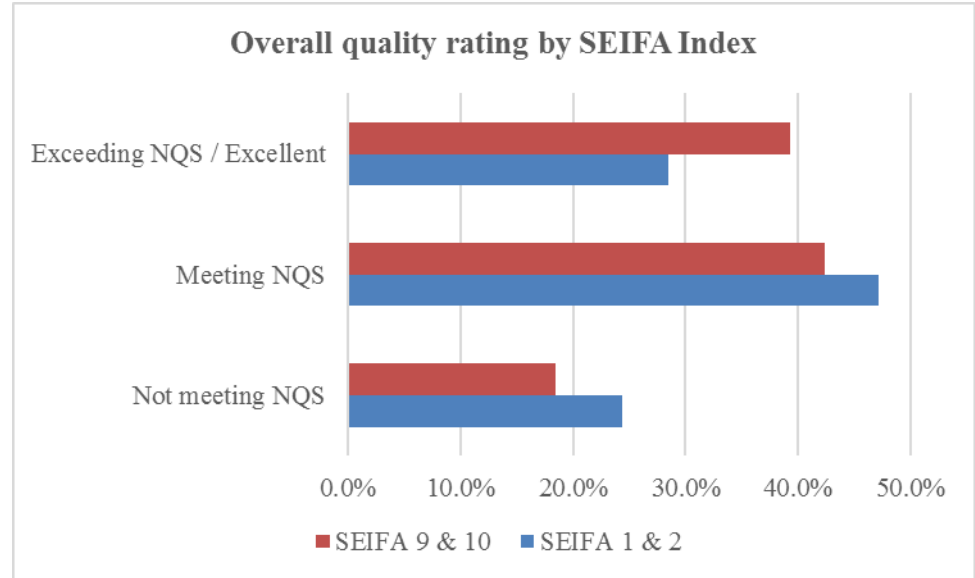
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The problem

Quality

- ECEC services in low socio-economic areas lower in average quality (Cloney et al., 2016; Lamb et al., 2015)



The barriers

Structural and psychological

- Affordability (real or perceived)
- Lack of transport / transport costs
- Parental values and beliefs
- Fear of judgement and stigmatisation
- Housing mobility
- Less available ECEC services
- Exclusive centre practices

(Baker, 2013; Baxter & Hand, 2013; Brennan & Adamson, 2014; Cloney et al., 2016; Pascoe & Brennan, 2017; Skattebol et al., 2014; Skattebol, 2016)



The current study

How do ECEC services with an established reputation for effectively including families on the margins navigate this landscape?

Starting point: how do these services enact social justice to achieve inclusion (rather than inclusion achieving social justice)?



Inclusion as social justice

Nancy Fraser's theory of social justice

(Fraser, 2007, 2009; Fraser & Honneth, 2003; Mills, 2012)

- Redistribution of resources (economic injustice or maldistribution)
- Recognition of diversity (cultural injustice or misrecognition)
- Representation of justice claims (political injustice or misrepresentation)
- Affirmative vs transformative remedies



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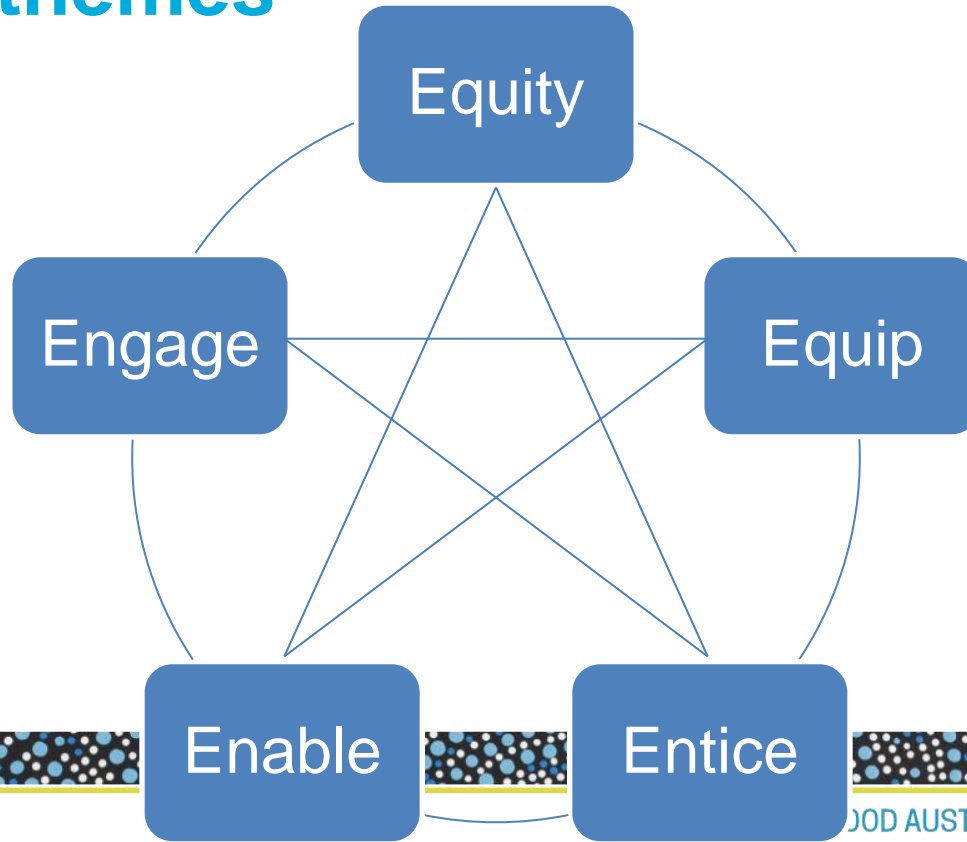
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Research method

- One-off interviews with centre director (and educators)
- Five centres in generally low SES areas
- Two preschools (Centre 1&2); 1 Aboriginal Child & Family Centre; 1 integrated service; 1 LDC
- Two Council services; major provider; charity; Aboriginal board
- NFP; 40-52 places
- Three services Exceeding; All exceeding on QAs 6&7
- Families living in adversity



Emerging themes



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Equity focus

Whole-of-centre social justice philosophy

- Shared commitment
- Governance practices
- Leadership

I tried to seek out organisations that were known for their diversity and inclusive way. So for me it was always something that was at the forefront of what I wanted to be doing and where I wanted to be working. (Centre 4)

[The Council] “support[ed] across the board children and families who are on the margins or who need additional support ... we have councillors ... who genuinely care” (Centre 2)



Equip for inclusion

Dispositions, knowledge and skills

“it's hard work, it's exhausting, frustrating and all those things ... it takes a lot out of you (Centre 3)

- Committed, caring, passionate
- Complex lives
- Interdisciplinary work
- Specialist skills: communication & empathy



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Entice families

Making participation desirable

- Value of quality ECEC
- Build trust

Community development

- Visible
- Networks

If you're home, the kids are home ... So that was a big job in our role as well, to get families engaged in early learning (Centre 3)

A lot of the families - we actually then realised - were almost sussing us out: were we a safe space? Were we going to be able to be open and accepting and non-judgmental? Because I think for a lot of these families we hear stories of how they've gone to other services and offers were made but then rescinded when they found out that there was a bit more to this family than originally was at surface level. (Centre 1)



Enable access

Making participation possible

- Affordability
 - Enrolment e.g., reduced fees; scholarship or free places
 - Participation e.g., reduced fee/free excursions and incursions
- Accessibility
 - bus service

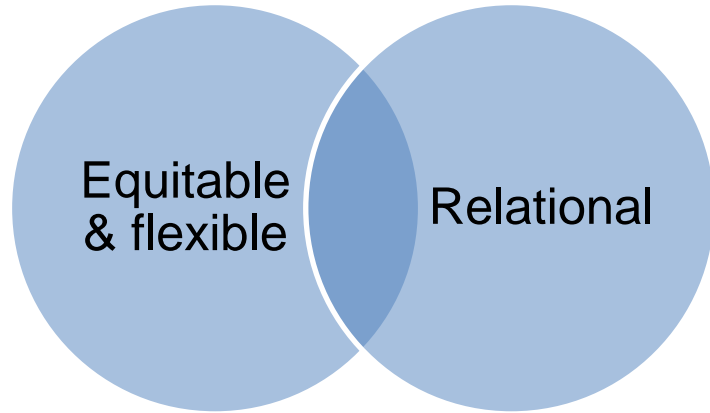
But still not ideal ...

- Free public schooling but no free preschool
- Universal access limited to 4 year olds
- A new barrier: The Jobs for Families Child Care package



Engage families

Making participation sustainable



Making participation sustainable

- Family-focused accommodation of pragmatic and psychological needs
- Building rapport
- No judgement
- Partnering to empower



Social justice for inclusion

- ✓ Redistribution
- ✓ Recognition
 - Centres were a “difference-friendly world” (Fraser & Honneth, 2003, p. 7)
 - Cultural recognition extends to class
- ? Representation
- ✓ Transformative strategies (minimise economic differences / promote cultural differences)
- ✓ Affective (care) justice (Mills et al., 2015; Lynch, 2012)



Can all centres “find ways to make it work”?

- Whole-of-centre social justice philosophy in action
- Investment of resources (dollars and time)
- Specialist skills to address complex needs and “whole-of-family” priorities (Skattebol, 2016)
- The role of the early childhood educator



Back to inclusion for social justice

Advocacy and 'child care' policy

- Transformative policies
 - Access
 - Affordability
 - Quality

Quality, inclusion and the NQF

- Socially just inclusive practices core or an optional extra?

