

Sara Stefani Transcript of 9 November 2020

AK: Hi everyone, this is Anne Keary from VicTESOL and I'm with Sara Stefani today. Before we go on, And I'd like to introduce Sarah Stephani. Sara would you like to tell us about your role as an early childhood educator.

SS: Sure, so I teach kindergarten in a community Co-op in Kensington and I'm part of a four-person team. There are around 30 children per day in kinder up to 42 families so quite a large group. The centre itself is 140 place and was over 50 staff so lots of people and yeah, it's very diverse and I think as in Melbourne will find every centre has its diversity and yeah it's a non-profit centre and it is parent run.

AK: OK can you tell me a little bit about the diversity the background of the children and families?

SS: The integrated kinder background of children Vietnamese, Dutch, lots of different Chinese, yeah lots of different people actually in Melbourne so lots of diversity is also great yeah lots of Somali families and different other cities Spanish Italian yeah in terms of culture backgrounds. Socioeconomic looking at a real mix from middle high to lower. Yep so it's a real mix of people.

AK: And what about languages spoken in the home?

SS: Languages spoken, yeah Vietnamese, Mandarin, Spanish, Arabic, Somali, Hindi lots of languages.

AK: OK and you're bilingual?

SS: my home language is Italian and that was my first language coming up I learned English at kindergarten and living here and my own immediate family I've just got a 9-month daughter and she he's learning Italian and Spanish. So, my husband speaks Spanish and I speak Italian to her.

AK: Can you tell us a little bit more about how you doing that going about it.

SS: I think it's something that we both very valued highly and have found useful ourselves being bilingual we just wanted to give her that same opportunity and she'll learn English you know being out and about but at home we've decided to so Vic speaks Spanish only to Nina and I speak Italian only to Nina. I'm lucky my family here are very fluent in Italian so when they see her and interact with her, through COVID it's all been through WhatsApp calls and

things like that, but that only speak Italian to her. And it's the same with Vince's family who actually in the United States they speak to her in Spanish.

AK: OK So what are some of the ways that you're building community in the early childhood setting that you're working in and building that notion expected of language?

SS: It was really about acknowledging that we are in such a multilingual community and we have been throughout thousands of years terms of embedding aboriginal perspectives that's one of our things we really value as it's important so starting off with that and then looking at getting to know children and families making that priority in those relationships and making sure you know everyone feels respected for who they are and that they can bring their whole self into that setting. So in terms of building community first of all acknowledging aboriginal languages so where we work it's (unsure of the languages) you know and so and then you know from there getting to know your families that you teach and making the time to get to know them so I've always made it a priority that started with, I organise catch ups for families with children. And children are part of that and I just wanna let them know that this space is for them, so we build from those concepts. we built for the programme around them. I always share that I'm bilingual as well and how much I value that and that seems to help families there are sometimes I think only just want English spoken to my child and so kind of breaking that that you know if my child doesn't speak English at school well then they are not going to English well enough actually it's the opposite. You know really explaining that if home language is so vital and then you know the additional languages will come from that and so also you know setting up your... I found setting up my room with different resources different languages that being implicit in the environment yet has also helped. Yeah and then you know in terms of building community we also extend... we have true focus on excursions and being out in the community and children being part of their community so then that brings that diversity again back in from the community and also children sharing themselves and their knowledge and language knowledge with others in the community.

AK: and how do you work as a team of educators?

SS: yeah so, we're really lucky in that we get time to meet together as a team. So, we have fortnightly team meetings on top of you know larger staff meetings. But team meetings are definitely priority so once a fortnight we catch up and we're able to discuss you know you know what our programme looks like how that's evolving. It really helps us to reflect

together. We work with an anti-bias curriculum so really reflecting on how we teach and what our environment is implicitly and explicitly teaching in terms of like we talk about the hidden curriculum so you know what things are not included um maybe implicitly will put in our teaching so making sure that yeah we just always self-reflecting together build a strong team and yes that really helps. Also having we have really great resources in terms of having great pedagogical leaders that also help us and are there to support us.

AK: And what about in terms of partner organisation or community groups that you may liaise with?

SS: yeah, we liaise with quite a lot of community groups as I said before. We have a lot of excursions out in community. So last year we linked in with a local nursing home with weekly visits there. Small groups of children... with small groups work works best in terms of creating those relationships with other people in community and also between children/ us and children/ children. so yes that was fine we also go out to local adventure playground (The Vennie?) which is in Kensington are real pillar of the community yeah again just being outside the classroom it's amazing how that breaks some barriers to between children especially children who s home language isn't English and justice yes we find that the Vennie's an amazing place 'cause it's all risky play based on things so children can see a lot of working together and problem solving between children that you might not see in the classroom setting and that's the same as also (read the kinder programme) so going out in nature down at Neils Paddock where it's there's nothing man made it's all out in nature along the River. Children you know find sticks and things and build cubbies and create games and using those that imagination and storytelling also helps to breakdown barriers of difference and using strength so we also look at it benefit mindset model made by Ash Buchanan. He talks about you know we all have strengths and so building that community we look at each other's strengths and how can we support each other, impact each other positively by utilising our different strengths. So, it's really about working together and we do that as a team as a community but also acknowledge the children also bring their strengths with them so when it comes to languages other than English they have something to teach us. So, it's looking at power imbalance and you know as a teacher you need to acknowledge that power imbalance is there and that's part of just being respectful I think in your pedagogy and allow children to teach you and teach others.

AK: yeah OK so where can you see the programme going in the future, and I guess as a parent?

SS: Well, this year I have been on maternity leave, so it's been an interesting year to not be in teaching especially COVID that I guess as a parent I'm really looking forward to looking at what community resources are out there. For example, you know our local library has amazing Spanish books and no different playgroups and things that are out there I don't know about so that's being yeah great to connect with people through no technology which we're so lucky to have. Spanish playgroups that were part of WhatsApp group and things like that. Yeah so, I guess following on in terms of my teaching return to work next, I look forward to building up on those community Connexions and continuing those even through using technology and being smart with technology. I think that this year has probably taught a lot of people to be creative with what we have and utilising different methods to connect.

AK: oh, thank you Sarah it's been very helpful

SS: I'm glad hopefully it helps

AK: OK then we'll be in contact in the future more about how your daughter is going from multilingual space as well as your work as an early childhood educator.

SS: thanks