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I often wonder if growing up being different has not only built resilience within me but also the strong drive for inclusion, respect for diversity, and the importance for all to feel a sense of belonging and to have their voice acknowledged and represented.

Growing up I had to hide my cultural background—well, at least I thought I did. There was no space for being 'other'. It was assumed, I guess, that all of the children at preschool celebrated Christmas. We were all light skinned and spoke English. My mum would take me in to preschool each day and collect me, so the teachers never met my dad, never heard his thick accent. I have never asked my mother, but I do wonder if there were questions on the enrolment forms back then asking about culture or language. Perhaps there were, and perhaps my centre just wasn't sure about what to do with this knowledge—what to do about this 'otherness'. So, as a young child, I sat and listened and learnt the language of Christmas and Santa. I found a way to fit in. Eventually we moved to a suburb with cultural diversity. It took some time but eventually I felt safe, and understood.

As a teacher, and as an adult generally, my vision is for a peaceful world, one where everyone is safe, where we all feel a sense of belonging and connectedness, where we are understood and respected for who we are. It is ambitious, I know, but visions after all are meant to be aspirational—why not go for gold! With this in mind I try to make decisions that work towards this dream. I try to humanise decisions that need to be made while at the same time ensuring that they fit within the many frameworks within which I, as an EC professional, need to work.

As the director of an ECEC centre, a thorough knowledge of the regulatory requirements for my work is not only critical to ensure compliance, but can be a great tool too for pushing boundaries and going beyond. While some components within the NQF are black and white, there are many that are grey—that can be interpreted to best meet the needs of all families and children to work with equitable practices. I am conscious that I am now in a position of power and that I have an incredible legal responsibility for other people's children as well as for my own team of staff. My aim is to use my position to push boundaries so that there are better outcomes for all, and to ensure that I do my very best in relation to my responsibilities. This can only be done with an understanding of the frameworks within which I am required to work.

My centre's philosophy is a useful tool for backing up inclusive practice, and I am often debating with others the rights of inclusion for many 'othered' families or children, whether it be family type, ability, cultural heritage and so on. I find that being open from the outset about inclusion provides a safe space for prospective new families or staff; it reduces the likelihood that they feel that they need to be silent.

When questioned about our centre practices around inclusion, I always respond by saying how important it is to us that no child is silenced into pretending that they are anyone but who they are, or their family is anything other than what they are. I respond that we want children to grow up confident and proud of who they are. I love that I can also use the NQF to back up such practice to say that we are actually required to ensure inclusion and respect.

I am required to use the guiding principles of the NQF to inform my practice. My vision reflects these principles and I am grateful for their existence to support my practice. One of my favourite guiding principles is 'to ensure equity and inclusion'. I believe we are only limited by our own vision and

commitment to social justice as to how we can use this principle to support decision-making. I can choose to use the NQF as a 'tick the box' or can truly and deeply engage within the requirements to work towards a vision of inclusion and respect. I will continue to use the NQF as a tool to challenge biases and break down stereotypes within the curriculum and whole-of-centre practice.