

A WELCOMING YARN

Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and their Families in Education and Care Settings



'A Joining Hands' Project



Yorganop

INDIGENOUS PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT UNIT

 **child**
Professional Support
Coordinator

About this Resource

Our objectives are to create a tool that enables educators in early childhood services to work towards cultural competency and create welcoming and inclusive environments.

In doing so we embrace the child's rights to access and equity regardless of ability or background in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989).

This resource meets the guiding principles of the National Quality Framework and Early Years Learning Framework; each has at its focus, that 'the best interests of the child are paramount'.

It would be impossible to capture the full extent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in one place as it is a rich, diverse and multifaceted and that is not the intent of this resource.

We are not seeking to provide a blanket recipe for inclusive practices in your service; you will be the driver for that outcome. However, we hope that the information in this resource will be a starting point for further conversations and thinking in order for you to make the action that you as an educator and service need to do to meet the Frameworks.

What you learn will naturally feed into the Quality Improvement Plan and support your professional practice, curriculum, programming and planning.

This resource has been designed provide Educators with a series of prompts for reflective thinking about their current inclusive practices and where you as a service intend to be in the future in regards to creating a service that truly includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

There has been genuine consultation in making this resource in order to give a broad perspective. We would especially like to thank the following contributors; Yorganop, Indigenous Professional Support Unit (IPSU), Coolabaroo Multi-functional Aboriginal children's Service (MAC'S), West Pilbara Mobile Children Services, 'My World' Early Learning Centre - Seville Grove, Lockridge Campus and Bagot OSHC.

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Forewords

We know that Early Childhood Education and Care programs are great places for kids to learn and grow. However, research consistently shows that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families tend to not use these services. There is a challenge here: How can we make our services genuinely welcoming and culturally safe so that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families will feel comfortable to participate and to contribute?

This booklet provides a good beginning for meeting this challenge. It invites educators to begin a "Welcoming Yarn" with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It gives educators opportunities to learn, question, reflect and implement strategies to ensure that their service is ready to welcome Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

It is a Guiding Principle of the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care that: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are valued. This principle is a reminder that the challenge is not limited to creating welcoming environments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families who attend the service. It is also part of educators' work to ensure that their programs help ALL children and families grow in understanding and celebration of the contribution that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities make to our Australian identity. This is a big job, and this 'Welcoming Yarn ' booklet will help you achieve this goal.

Dawn Wallam
Chief Executive Officer Yorganop Association Incorporated, 2016

This resource has been designed to support educators' engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities. It is not meant to be prescriptive, it is rather a tool designed to support you through your own journey as an educator and service provider.

Child Australia is proud to say that in our 30 years of experience advocating for social inclusion and the rights of the child, we have walked along side children and their families within community in a manner that prioritizes individual rights, access and equity regardless of ability or background.

We also strive to walk the talk by fostering inclusive practice within our own programs and services, celebrating difference and diversity throughout the organisation.

Our journey together in education and care highlight the importance for thinking in innovative ways that embraces tolerance and supports creative thinking.

We hope this resource will help you gain an appreciation of Indigenous culture and support your capacity to work more effectively for the inclusion of all children.

So come along and learn with us.

Dawson Ruhl
Chief Executive Officer Child Australia, 2016

Who is the resource for?

'A Welcoming Yarn' is developed to assist educators working in early childhood education and care settings, however, the information and messages can also be utilised in related environments such as Out of School Hours Care (OSHC), playgroups and school programs.

The key to making inclusive practices successful is the way we engage with staff, educational leaders and management in order to support their daily work with children, their families and community. The journey starts with all of us together.

How can this resource be used?

The resource can be used by individuals and teams. The 'Reflective Questions' and 'Professional Practice' stories are designed to promote further thinking and conversation about your current practices and what you areas you want to improve in.

For example; you could ask Educators to read a section before each team meeting or you can ask Educators to read the whole resource and then dedicate some hours where you discuss your cultural practices when welcoming children and their families from an Aboriginal background.

Some services like to use a 'mind map' on the wall where Educators can jot down their thought in relation to inclusive practices ready to explore and reflect on at your next staff session opportunity.

Get together, have a yarn and make a conscious decision to go on a learning journey together. In other words, start!

Recommended readings and resources

'Living the Early Years Framework every day – team meeting package' developed by Community Child Care Co-operative Ltd (NSW) www.cscentral.org.au



How this resource supports your standards of practice

As early childhood professionals we are required to continuously work towards an inclusive and culturally competent practice.

The National Quality Framework, the National Quality Standard guide us:

Guiding Principles

- The rights and best interest of the child are paramount
- Children are successful, competent and capable learners
- The principles of equity, inclusion and diversity underlay the National Law
- That Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are valued
- That the role of parents and families is respected and supported
- That the best practice is expected in the provision of education and care services

In the Early Years Learning Framework, the principles and practices guide Educators toward the outcomes that research tells us will give our children a sound foundation for learning:

Relevant Principles

- Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships
- Partnerships
- High expectations and equity
- Respect for Diversity

Relevant Practices

- Holistic approaches
- Learning through Play
- Learning environments
- Cultural competence

Outcomes

- Outcome 1 Children have a strong sense of identity
- Outcome 2 Children are connected with and contribute to their world
- Outcome 3 Children have a strong sense of wellbeing
- Outcome 4 Children are confident and involved learners
- Outcome 5 Children are effective communicators

'Belonging, Being and Becoming' is appropriately the title of the Early Years Learning Framework.

'Early Childhood educators guided by the Framework will reinforce in their daily practice the principles laid out in the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (the convention). The Convention states that all children have the right to an education that lay a foundation for the rest of their lives, maximises their ability, and respects their family, cultural and other identities and languages. The convention also recognises children's right to play and be active participants in all matters affecting their lives.'

Acknowledgment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

The Statement

You may have experienced attending official gatherings such as meetings, seminars, workshops and conferences.

Where a non-Aboriginal person has acknowledged the Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people at the beginning of the gathering. You may also experience and Aboriginal person perform a welcoming ceremony to their ancestral land which upon you have gathered.

Do you stop and take full notice of what is said and the meanings? Next time, take close note to the importance of this welcoming practice, what was said, what it means to the people that is acknowledged, to you and how it can extend to your professional practice.

For example; consider the Child Australia's 'Introduction to Cultural Competency' workshop.

We acknowledge
the traditional Aboriginal people as the first people and custodians of this land that we share and
the first teachers of the next generations

We honour
and respect their country and cultural heritage

We value
their guidance to our professional practice when we support the future custodians ...

The Children

You can use the example as an activity among your staff. Discuss how you as a service currently acknowledge the Aboriginal people of the land that your service is located and extend the discussion into creating your own acknowledgement. When you are doing so reflect on the cultural meanings to educators working with the children, families and the community that you and they live and work in.

Reflective Questions

- What does 'country' mean to you?
- What 'meaning' can you take to your services daily practices?

Professor Mick Dodson is a member of the Yawuru peoples the traditional Aboriginal owners of land and waters in the Broome area of the southern Kimberley region of Western Australia. He is currently Director of the National Centre for Indigenous Studies at the Australian National University. He is a Professor of law at the ANU College of Law. To learn more about Mick Dodson go to http://ncis.anu.edu.au/people/dodson_nadc.php .

Read the statement below from Professor Mick Dodson, talking about the meaning of ‘country’.

“When we talk about traditional ‘country’ we mean something beyond the dictionary definition of the word. For Aboriginal Australians we might mean homeland, or tribal or clan area and we might mean more than just a place on the map.

For us, country is a word for all the values, places, resources, stories and cultural obligations associated with that area and its features. It describes the entirety of our ancestral domains. So when we acknowledge traditional country it is no empty ritual; it is to acknowledge who we, the Aboriginal people are, and our place in this nation. It is to take special note of a place and the people who belong to it”.

Professor Mick Dodson, Australian of the Year at the National Press Club, 17 February 2009.

In Practice

“We are a very multicultural service. We celebrate diversity with great passion and interest. We work towards a continuum of improvement of our cultural inclusive practices and in doing that we make decisions to how we cater for the best interest of our service community of children, families who use the campus and the educators who work here.

For example, we are developing our own acknowledgement in respect of the Aboriginal people and custodians of the land where we reside. We want it to have great meaning to our centre and to the Aboriginal families who utilise our services.

In that process we intend to obtain inspiration and input from the local Aboriginal community, receive training facilitated by an Aboriginal training provider and have conversation with our children, families and educators”.

Kelly Prussian, Lockridge Campus, 2016



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

Who are they?

Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are people who identify themselves as such; people who are recognised by their families, kinships and people as such. There are great diversity in terms of traditions, orientation, economics, geographic, social and language.

Knowing a few people from one culture do not determine all. This is the same for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, for example; some are closely connected to traditional practice and law and language in rural areas, some live an urban Aboriginal contemporary life and some are separated from land and language.

This diversity is reflected in the traditions, family practices, arts and daily life. For example; you will see a diverse use of colours in art and practice depending on where in Australia they come from. A person from a remote in-land community like Ngaanyatjarra 'the land' (remote Aboriginal in-land community) will differ from a person from the One Arm Point peninsular such as the Bardi Jawi people.



This resource will focus on Aboriginal people in Western Australia, however, before we do so we have to remember that people originating from the Torre Straits are also living in this state.

'Torres Strait Islanders come from the islands of the Torres Strait that separates the Australian mainland at Cape York from Papua New Guinea. The Strait was named after Luis Vaez de Torres, a Spanish adventurer who visited the area in 1606. The Torres Strait Islands became part of Queensland by an Act of Parliament in 1879'.

www.racismnoway.com.au

Recommended readings and resources

'Little Red Yellow Black Book' www.aiatsis.ashop.com.au

Playgroups, playing to get ready for school www.shinkfield.net/playgroup

Questions and Answers about Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Peoples

<http://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/questions-and-answers-about-aboriginal-torres-strait-islander-peoples>

Australian Indigenous cultural heritage

<http://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/austn-indigenous-cultural-heritage>

The Department of Indigenous Affairs www.daa.wa.gov.au

First Australians Kinships, Family and Identity information

<https://aifs.gov.au/publications/family-matters/issue-35/first-australians-kinship-family-and-identity>

Recommended videos

Djarindjin life by the Sea Bardi Burr https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_NIWrIDwFQE

Bardi Jawi Dancers <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CC5NIWQXykw>

Tour around Lombadina Djarindjin https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tBJu5aWtm_U

Ngaanyatjarraku Lands - It will be alright <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HRUjK5M9R8o>

History

'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are Australia's First People - this is something to never be forgotten. Their ancestors have lived on and been custodians of Australia for over 40,000 years. Therefore, they have very strong connections to this country, their land. Colonisers failed to recognise it and chose to ignore that fact that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples had significant connection to their land and sea. Which created the history of white settlement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to be one filled with significant loss, sadness and injustice'

SNAICC Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC), 2016

Australia was colonised by Europeans as they sought to take the land and its resources that were otherwise held for thousands of years in Aboriginal and Islanders ownership.

The British legal concept of Terra Nullius, which in its paradox means 'in free land', suddenly applied as rule of law with no consultation with the first people. The impact has resulted in a ripple effect related to poor access to health, education and opportunities which through generations continue to cause challenges in their lives whether they live in cities, rural or remote.

An analysis of national health information gives a powerful insight into the ongoing legacy of colonisation on the Aboriginal people of Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States of America (USA). While these first-world nations boast first class health systems, the key health indicators clearly show that their Indigenous people do not share equally in the benefits from these systems (The National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation and OXFAM Australia, 2007).

When a group of people is denied access to their land and culture it is bound to have a generational effect with compounding results that can be difficult to address. It is therefore highly recommended that you as an Educator become familiar with their story to support your understanding of the Aboriginal children and families backgrounds whom you meet or/and work with.

In practice

"Our people often experiences contemporary social and health challenges that has impact on how we support children and families who come to our centre. These include protective care, extended family member's care, mental health, poverty, Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and so forth.

It is important to remember these backgrounds may have an influence on how the child function in your ECEC setting and should be considered with great care in the way that you approach the child and family. For example many will feel great shame speaking about their challenges, and the child and families should never be made to feel that that defines them, rather supported in their attendance in the ECEC setting and offered information of professional and cultural appropriate external support should they need or/and want it".

Chris Ross, Multi-functional Aboriginal children's Service (MAC'S) in Thornlie Western Australia, 2016

However, it is also important to understand that the Aboriginal people and communities evolve with time and they are now represented in many facets of contemporary Australian way of life with great referral to their cultural background. This is prevalent in many areas such as health, government, education, enterprise, music, the arts etc. and with this comes a heightened societal hope for the future of the Aboriginal people rights and influence in what affect them as the first people of Australia today and as fellow citizens of Australia.

'Culture is a living process. It changes over time to reflect the changed environments and social interactions of people living together'.

J. Atkinson, 2002

To assist you with a broader perspective and understanding of this development go to sources such as the SBS channel National Indigenous Television (NITV) and ABC channels Message Stick program.

Recommended readings and resources

National Inquiry Report, Bringing Them Home (1997)

'Not one size fits all' - Understanding the social & emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal children
<http://www.childhoodinstitute.org.au/Assets/226/1/NotOneSizeFitsAllreportfinalNov2012.pdf>

Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care <http://www.snaicc.org.au/>

Brief Introduction to Australian Aboriginal Culture <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R6xIUg7i1gs>

'Close the Gap' report – NACCHO and OXFAM

<http://bahsl.com.au/old/pdf/CloseTheGap.Report.pdf>

Cross Cultural Tip 1 - 'The beckoning finger'

<http://www.whywarriors.com.au/media/news/2016/04/cross-cultural-tips-01-the-beckoning-finger/>

Cross Cultural Tip 2 - 'Eye Contact'

<http://www.whywarriors.com.au/media/news/2016/05/cross-cultural-tips-02/>

Bachelors Press <http://batchelorpress.com/>

National Indigenous Television (NITV - SBS) <http://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/>

Message Stick (ABC) <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/messagestick/>

Local Aboriginal radio - look for your area version i.e. Noongah radio on 100.9fm
<http://www.noongarradio.com/>



In practice

“We decided to make a big effort to find out more about the Aboriginal history and culture for our area before European settlement to now. It was amazing how this project just grew. For instance we found some stories from our local shire that included names for local land marks like lakes and hills, and some names for plants and animals. At this stage we realised if we wanted to do this in a way that was not just tokenistic we needed to include it into our program in a meaningful and respectful way. After some thought and discussion we decided to make maps with the children. We got lots of little maps of the suburbs around our service, and asked children and families to mark in places that they knew and were important to them.

We liaised with local Aboriginal people and organisations and we invited them to come along to our staff meeting and help us with culture and language. They also informed us about a local Aboriginal radio station that has a language session on between 12 and 1pm so we have made time for one educator to listen in and feedback her growing skills and knowledge with the rest of us.

One of the really lovely things that came out of all this was a beginning relationship with some local Aboriginal families. We are hoping to organise a picnic with them and our families, educators at a local park where there is still quite a lot of bush left so we can learn some more and do some practicing. And we are going to continue our map project”.

Participants in the 'Joining Hands' project, (IPSU and PSCWA), 2012



The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags

Before you use, replicate or refer to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags, it is recommended that you read about its history and copyrights. Each flag has to be respected and treated as flags of the nation like the Australian flag. These flag represent its people with a special meaning to its design.

Aboriginal flag



- Black represent the Aboriginal people of Australia
- Yellow circle represents the Sun, giver of life and protector
- Red represents the red earth, the red ochre used in ceremonies and Aboriginal peoples' spiritual relation to the land

In 1997 the Federal Court recognised Harold Thomas as the author of the flag. Requests for permission to reproduce the flag should be addressed to him.

For further information go to <http://www.naidoc.org.au/indigenous-australian-flags>

Torres Strait Islander flag



- Green represent the mainland of Australia and Papua New Guinea.
- Blue represent the blue water of the Torres Strait Island between the two continents.
- Black represents the people of the Torres Strait.
- Central symbol represent the Dhari or headdress which all Torres Strait Islanders are familiar with.
- The five pointed star represents the five major islands of the Torres Strait and sea-faring navigation.
- White represents peace.

The Torres Strait Island Regional Council holds copyright in the Torres Strait Islander Flag. Requests for permission to reproduce the flag should be addressed to them.

For further information go to <http://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/articles/torres-strait-islander-flag> .

Languages

In the years of Australia being colonised it is thought to have been more than 250 Aboriginal languages and dialects spoken, however this has reduced to only 60 known languages currently in use. The main reasons for the reduction is due to the colonist's systematic effort to stop ATSI people from speaking their language and practice their culture (SNAICC, 2016) and due to the resource and opportunities for strengthening their languages being lesser with the overwhelmingly focus on the English language in order to function in today's economic and social climate.

You may have heard about the terminology 'Aboriginal English' also sometimes referred to as 'Kriol' or 'Creole'. This is referring to a particular sound and rhythm of English that many Aboriginals speak and is viewed as a unique display of language development that is recognised and respected as a part of identity and belonging to the ancestral languages (SNAICC, 2016).

"The home language of very many Aboriginal children throughout Australia is some kind of Aboriginal English. It is not 'bad English' or 'pidgin English' and it is in no way inferior to Standard English. Children who speak Aboriginal English are fluent, articulate and creative users of language, just like children who speak Standard English. Furthermore, although the differences between Aboriginal English and Standard English may not seem great in many areas, there are subtle differences, especially in the way that language is used, which are important to the identity of Aboriginal children. Respecting, valuing and understanding Aboriginal ways of using English is a significant step in respecting, valuing and understanding the identity and self-esteem of these children".

Dr Diana Eades (1993) for Primary English Teaching Association

As with any other language you need to be mindful of the fact that if you do not already master the language, you should not teach it. So if your centre would like to learn more about your local Aboriginal language and incorporate it into you planning and programming you would need to consider finding guidance and local support the learning about meaning, pronunciation and spelling from an Aboriginal person who speak that local dialect.

Recommended readings and resources

Map of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages spoken in Australia

<http://www.abc.net.au/indigenous/map/>

SNAICC's webpage 'Connection to Languages'

<http://www.snaicc.org.au/policy-and-research/connection-to-language/>



Learning Styles

When we use the term 'learning styles' we referred to a person's preferences for how they learn and also how this is taught (adapted from Krause, Bochner, and Duchesne, 2003).

We all have a learning style, adults and children, and they are linked to our characteristic ways of thinking, perceiving and processing information so we can remember what is taught. It is how our brains work things out and can be referred to as cognitive (learning) processes.

Learning styles are referred to as 'dispositions' in the Early Years Learning Framework and are linked to our intelligence potential, our attitudes, our views about different identities and feelings about ourselves and make up our personalities and our potential of self, to be what we can be and what we can become.

Children will explore many pathways (processes) and use many dispositions when they are engaged in their learning and the environment leading to skills such as;

- problem solving
- inquiry
- experimentation
- hypothesising (making a prediction, developing/having a thought (forming a knowledge base) on why things are that way – linked to problem solving)
- researching
- investigating

Early Years Learning Framework, 2009 and
Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority – ACECQA, 2014

Children being a part of their own learning, how they transfer knowledge from one context to another, highlights children's positive dispositions for learning through a display of; enthusiasm, curiosity, commitment, persistence, confidence and reflexivity (Arthur et al., 2009).

'It is important in terms of equity and social justice that strategies are implemented to assist all children to be confident and involved learners'.

Early Years Learning Framework, 2009

To support children from a diverse backgrounds we need to consider the pedagogical framework is inclusive and culturally appropriate as this should become the base for the play based curriculum in order to accommodate different learning styles. These could include;

- Learning through observation and imitation rather than verbal instruction
- Learning through trial and feedback
- The group is more important than the individual
- Holistic (global) learning
- Visual spatial skills
- Imagery
- Contextual Learning
- Spontaneous Learning

Hughes, More & Williams, 2004

How can we as Educators ensure that Aboriginal children and indeed all children to build their identities, to be belong, be and become confident and involved learners? By:

- Being an inquiry based problem solver and ongoing learner ourselves
- Reflecting on and being critical about our teaching practices (did it work, what did not work, what will I do differently next time, what can I do to extend on this)
- Promote positive dispositions and learning processes (find out children's interests, their experiences and their families in context)
- Building relationships with children and their families and including them in the planning and decision making regarding their children's learning – invite them in to participate in learning projects
- Asking/learning about the differing cultural practices and beliefs in your settings and respecting them
- Planning varied learning and play experiences and environments to support the differing types of learner - that include a range of open-ended loose part type resources that encourage children to explore and inquire with quite spaces for children to sit, think and reflect
- Allow time in the program for children to be able to use a variety of the learning processes
- Make learning and play experiences authentic and meaningful (connect to children's everyday lives) – so children can transfer knowledge from one context to another
- Interacting and engaging with the children to scaffold, support and being able to extend on the learning either individually, in small groups or all together
- Documenting children's achievements, accomplishments and learning to describe the processes
- Being flexible and willing to take some risks – not everything we plan will turn out the way we wanted or thought it may.

Recommended readings and resources

'8 Aboriginal ways of learning' <http://8ways.wikispaces.com/>

'Programming and planning in early childhood settings' 6th edition, 2015.



INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

What does this mean?

The 'inclusion experience' is a very individual experience that will differ from person to person, and in context of the education and care experience the provision of high quality inclusive environments is an ongoing journey and may therefore also appear different from service to service as social contexts, child, family and community needs and dynamics varies.

'Inclusion Practices' can be a topic that may be challenging to educators. They may not feel confident enough to ask questions or approach challenging situations without a deeper understanding of the topic and this can in itself be a barrier to inclusive practices. For example;

- you may be holding back in asking a family questions that you would not hesitate asking others due to your perception of their background and ability instead of based on actual knowledge
- you may think that you are inclusive when you make special attention to a child in a group setting, not taking into consideration that your approach may actually single the child out more than include.

This resource has a focus on how important the role of the educators are to children's development of sense of *Being* and *Belonging* - knowing where and with whom you belong – as an integral part of human existence and indeed inclusive practices.

Inclusive practice is associated with connecting learners (children) with their own learning first and Educators connecting the learnings of both educator and child to the curriculum (Corbett, 2011). This promotes the sense of agency and supports intentional teaching and learning. This means that you too learn with the children, their family and the communities and cultures they belong to.

Furthermore, the inclusive learning opportunities for both the children and the educators are of great benefit to your service as it promotes children's awareness and appreciation of diversity.

What may **Exclusion** feel like?

- *To be present but not included*
- *To be defined by only one of your characters*
- *To have lots of ideas and not be able to express them*
- *To have someone always assume that you can't do things*

Clare Boschetti and Anne Stonehouse, 2006

How may **Inclusion** feel like?

- *To be heard*
- *To feel a sense of belonging*
- *To have free and safe access to engage daily in social interactions with peers and adults*
- *To be in an environment that accommodate a development of independence at a pace that is right for them*

Early Years Learning Framework, ACECQA, 2009

Understanding the child in context needs an understanding of the layers of relationships. Inclusive practices are organic and driven by pedagogical principles:

- Adopting holistic practices
- Being responsive to children
- Planning and implementing learning through play
- Intentional teaching
- Creating learning environments
- Valuing cultural and social contexts
- Transitions and assessments for continuous learning.

The organic process of inclusion refers to the way our knowledge grow and take forms and directions as we are learning. As Educators, we are role models for the children we work with. You will find that the children grow in competency with you when you practice in an inclusive environment.

The holistic approach refers to the many natural opportunities, resources and planning's that for allow the organic process to develop and being practiced.

- Recognise the connectedness of mind, body and spirit (Blatchford & Sylva, 2004 cited in Early Learning Framework, 2009)
- Give attention to children's physical, personal, social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing as well as cognitive aspects of learning (Early Years Learning Framework, 2009)
- Foster children's capacity to understand and respect the natural environment and the interdependence between people, plants, animals and the land (Early Years Learning Framework, 2009)
- Understand that learning is a social activity that value collaborative participation - includes working with parents and the community (National Quality Standards, 2014)



Building inclusive relationships is important to us as educators and it is useful to remind ourselves of the reasons why these relationships are so important to our inclusive practices. We know that from text such as:

- Humans learn best when they are working together on meaningful task (John Dewey)
- networks in the child's life (Urie Bronfenbrenner)
- Learning is fundamental to interpersonal processes. Children do this by observing people (including you as an educator) around them (Lev Vygotsky)
- Relationships (child, family, educators and community) require a fluid approach to curriculum (Loris Malaguzzi)

Cited in Wanermann and Roffman (2011)

Reflective questions

- What does inclusion mean to you?
 - Look for commonalities in perceptions and perspectives.
 - Discuss the potential benefits of an inclusive education and care experience for children.
 - Make the link to the impact that inclusion will have on all children throughout their lives.
- When did you last time take time to review your inclusion practices? Consider:
 - In what way do we show respect for the child's sense of self and strengths?
 - Are we staying connected to the child's learning journey by showing enough interest in cultural backgrounds?
 - Do we acknowledge inclusive practices towards our colleagues?
 - Have we looked at what training we need to become more inclusive?
 - Who do we need to link up with in the community?
 - Do we liaise enough with family and exchange shared knowledge?
 - When we plan for inclusion and cultural practice do we go with the child's natural sense of wonder?
 - How do we foster a sense of belonging and acceptance?
 - How brave are we in our own learning journey?
 - Do we ask enough question or do we often act on something we do not know about?

Recommended readings and resources

Child Australia's 'Inclusion Readiness' www.childaustralia.org.au

Child Australia's 'Inclusion Statement' www.childaustralia.org.au

'Including One, Including All: A Guide to Relationship-Based Early Childhood Inclusion' book by Wanerman, T. & Roffman, L. (2010).

The Rights of the Child

Inclusive practices are underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989, UNCRC).

Australia has agreed to uphold the rights of every child which should guide the practice of all those who care for children.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child is universally agreed set of non – negotiable standards and obligations, founded on respect for the dignity and worth of each individual, regardless of race, colour, gender, language, religion, opinions, origins, wealth, birth status or ability. 'By agreeing to undertake the obligations of the convention on the Rights of a Child, Australia has committed to protecting and ensuring children's rights.

The Education and Care Services National Law states:

Section 3 (a) that the best interests of the child are paramount ...

Section 3 (c) that the principles of equity, inclusion and diversity underlie this Law...

The National Quality Framework and the Learning Frameworks are influenced by the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child and recognise the importance of all children's rights to:

- Have their voices heard
- Feel a sense of belonging
- Have free access to safe and appropriate play environments and resources
- Engage daily in social interactions with their peers and supportive adults
- Develop their independence at a pace that is right for them.

National Quality Standards Quality Area;

- 5.2.3.The Dignity and rights of every child are maintained at all times

As your policies are developed and reviewed, critical reflection will influence and improve processes and procedures both of which will have a collective impact on the inclusion of all children in your care. This process becomes a staple of the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) and plans for inclusion. A good practice is to question how your current philosophy and policies reflect the rights of the child and how it connect to you planning as well.

Recommended resources

Convention on the Rights of the Child <http://www.unicef.org/crc/>

A simplified version of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

<http://www.unicef.org.au/Upload/UNICEF/Media/Our%20work/childfriendlycrc.pdf>

Supporting young children's rights: Statement of intent (2015–2018) between Early Childhood Australia (ECA)

<https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/childrens-rights/publications/supporting-young-childrens-rights>

What is Culture?

Culture is a set of rules for behaviour that shapes the characteristics of a group of people. It is learned and nominate the rules of a culture that are shared by the group which are passed on from one generation to the next.

In order to become culturally competent we talk about that step ahead of 'awareness'. This is where we acknowledge and value what we have learnt and work to make sure we are able to apply it to everyday practice in a meaningful way. We do not learn about culture and become competent without forming respectful relationships to the culture and the people.

Humans are social beings by nature and we often belong to a number of 'cultural' groups and will often in the course of a day cross over from one 'cultural' setting to another i.e. sport, work, social clubs etc.

Reflective Questions

- What 'cultural' groups do you belong to?
- What behavioural norms in one of those groups that wouldn't work in another?
- In what ways is culture taught in families?
- How do you share diverse cultures in your service?
- When and where have you noticed a culture change (work place, family, community)?

Although our core beliefs and values will generally be consistent we tend to adapt and work within the particular cultural rules of a particular group. We do this as a need to belong and to be able to communicate and socialise effectively with other members of the group.

'Culture is referred to 'that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.'

Edward Burnett Tylor, 1917

'All cultural practices are significant, and all cultural objects are endowed with meaning. Every cultural practice is a communicative event, and every act of communication is a cultural event'

Gunther Kress (1989)

When you work with remote Aboriginal communities, you will need to consider the cultural practices by consultation. For example if you need a permit to enter the area visit The Department of Indigenous Affairs www.daa.wa.gov.au to access a map of where permits are required, the application form and various other useful travel information and rules.

In practice

“After reading some of the information on culture we decided that it would help all of us in our service to understand culture better if we knew more about our individual cultures and could share some of this information with each other. We contacted Child Australia and asked if they could program a workshop on culture for our service. They conducted a Tree of Culture Workshop at our next staff meeting. It involved us drawing a tree bit by bit. So we started with the roots and, then the trunk, then the branches and so on. As we drew each part of the tree we were prompted by the facilitator to think about our own history, the people who have helped us acquire our important skills and knowledge and so on. It was fun and such a good thing to do. Everyone discovered things about themselves and the others in our group of educators that they didn't know before. We realised what a rich mix of cultures we had in our service. At the end we all shared some parts of our tree with the group and then we put all the trees together and had a forest of culture”.

Participants comments in the 'Joining Hands' project, 2012

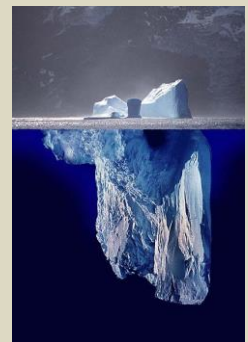
Reflective questions

Imagine that 'Culture' as an Iceberg. What aspects of culture (behaviours, symbols, and systems) are visible or not visible (above or below the water line)? For example;

Above - dress, gestures, food preferences, religious rituals and celebrations, social engagement, child care practice, greetings, facial expressions, music etc.

Below - values, child care beliefs, food, world view, religious beliefs, family celebrations, concept of self, customs, concept of beauty, social rules, family dynamics and relationships etc.

adapted from the Alaska Native Knowledge Network, www.ankn.uaf.edu



Consider having a Cultural Inclusion Readiness Audit to identify your services strengths and gaps. An audit is a way of gathering a snapshot of where you are at in regards to inclusion readiness and practices and the information that you still need to gather to inform you as an educator and service of where you need to improve. Consider the following;

- What can we improve on immediately?
- What training, resources and support do we need?
- Are we including children and parents voices?
- Are we involving the community?
- Have we documented the progress into your improvement plans?
- Are our philosophy, policies and procedures reflecting of this?

Inclusion readiness is a component of inclusive practices which refer to a consistent and considered thought of environments, resources and planning to ensure you are ready and able to welcome children (and families) with a range of needs, interest and backgrounds.

In practice

“There are many varying fundamental aspects when working within an aboriginal community these key aspects are family, culture, hierarchy, environment and history. When entering a community these key issues need to be respected and taken into account. There are many diverse differences even though those 5 key aspects appear in each culture there are different levels of tolerance and acceptance within, so what may not be acceptable in town culture is normal living in the community, we as the visiting body need to highly respect those differences.

It is a main focus that our West Pilbara Mobile Children Services educators have a responsibility to know about and be sensitive to the bias and diversity of Aboriginal cultures and to demonstrate this into our daily work practices.

When working in an Aboriginal community prior to the visit you need to contact an aboriginal or non-aboriginal representative of the community to organise permission and what parts of the land you are entitled to be on. It is best to even call a few days in advance to remind them of your visit.

Every staff member that you have is also recommended to meet with the Elders to gain an understanding and permission and show respect for the land and the people of the community. As we attend 3 different locations and communities we must gain permission from elders to visit. If they elect a new board for the committee of the community we usually attend to re-gain permission and give the committee some information of what we are achieving within the community.

When working within a community, we have to take into consideration Aboriginal traditions such as Law time and funerals. We do not attend playgroup out of respect for their cultural traditions and beliefs. Funerals may take up to a month of families coming from other communities to join the family in the grieving process. When we get the go ahead to come back to the community we could get inundated with children from different communities attending playgroup. We are very privileged to be allowed to run playgroup from the 3 remote communities. We acknowledge and respect the Elders and their culture, land and the children”.

Rachel Rankin, Supervisor of West Pilbara Mobile Children's Service (WPMCS) BBF, 2016

Recommended readings and resources

Child Australia's Cultural Connection Booklet www.childdaustralia.org.au

'The tree of culture' Book by Ralph Linton.

'Tree of culture' Poster <http://www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/02434.pdf>

'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in early childhood education and care.'
www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au

Recommended videos

Cultural Competency – Early Childhood Association

<http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/nqsplp/e-learning-videos/talking-about-practice/cultural-competency/>

The Flipside of human messages

Human send verbal and nonverbal 'messages' to each other often without even knowing it and depending on the person who receive these messages can be perceive in a variety of ways.

The message that we intend may not be received the intended way and this can have an effect on the relationship we would like to have with another.

Reflective questions

- How can a young child with limited world experience come to a negative view of others and themselves?

Some aspects of different cultures to our own can be easy for us to value and accept; others will be far more challenging. There are three important strands or components of cultural competence according to the Early Years Learning Framework that can support this process and they are; attitudes, skills and knowledge. All of them must be present for cultural competence to flourish.

Children can create a false and often negative image of themselves. These misconceptions are based on other people's cultural messages to them and relate to the perception of the child and the group that they belong to. This perception can be detrimental to their self and stay with them throughout life.

Why does this happen? As mentioned before they are learned and can led to the following;

- **Subconscious Stereotyping** - cultural beliefs, values and world views of individual's, family, community or group applied to others without fully be aware of it and its consequences.
- **Predisposed prejudice** - we are often unaware that we have predisposed ideas around cultures. These are often established in an early age and passed on by people and media surrounding us.
- **Tokenism** - is the bare minimum practice or action taken, to tick a box, so to speak. It has little meaning and will not influence the thinking of others in positive ways.
- **Racism** – when a person, group or doctrine project a belief that inherent differences in human racial groups are a stamp for individuals markers, often placing one's own race as superior and inferior to others with the right to dominate these.

Reflective questions

- How do assumptions impact on our actions and capacity to build relationships?
- Have you observed tokenism in a service you have worked in? How could it have been more meaningful?

It is not uncommon that an educator questions an activity that they are considering using in the service. For example, who can play the didgeridoo? Can we sing this song using Aboriginal words? Can we make dot painting? And so forth.

However, the apprehension should not deter you from researching the topic further by consulting with your local Aboriginal people as to the 'rules' of use of these activities.

In practice

“Our service is in the northern suburbs in Perth. There are quite a few Aboriginal families around here but we don't have any children enrolled. After looking at the cultural competence framework we wondered if the attitudes in our service were part of the problem. We decided to look at the attitudes of ourselves as educators, the attitudes of our service expressed through our policies practices and the attitudes expressed by our organisation as a whole. We were hoping that by understanding where our attitudes were biased, stereotypical or prejudiced we could begin the work to change.

We also took a look at our service vision and policies and procedures manual. We have been looking at our policies as a group since the Early Years Learning Framework was released but this time we wanted to see where we had included words or ideas or practices that worked against valuing and including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultures. One thing we realised immediately was that we needed a statement at the beginning of our policies and procedures manual to acknowledge the Aboriginal peoples on whose land the service is situated. We also decided to add to our diversity and inclusion policy a specific reference to the importance of staff challenging negative stereotypes and attitudes amongst other staff.

We asked our organisation (we are part of a group of services) to look at their attitudes towards including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures at the organisational level. We thought the best way we could get some action here was to point out the part of the Early Years Learning Framework Educators Guide that says that cultural competence needs to address at systems level by looking at: how services relate to and respect the rest of the community, agencies, Elders, local community protocols”.

Participants in the 'Joining Hands' project, IPSU and PSCWA, 2012



Connecting with child, family and community

When you are building inclusive relationships in collaborative partnerships with families and communities you are bound to foster children to have a strong sense of identity and inter-dependence as they look upon you as role models and leaders in their time at your centre.

The educational program and play based curriculum that you project contributes to each child's learning and developmental outcomes in relation to their identity, connection with community, wellbeing, confidence as learners and effectiveness as communicators. This assist the children to connect with and contribute to their world.



When working with Aboriginal children and families one has to know that 'family' is more than the typical 'European' way of thinking of 'family'. The extended family often has a caretaker role of children which is often reflected in the daily handover in education and care settings. For example; you may see a great involvement by grandparents, uncles and aunties.

"Many grandparents carry out the responsibility of 'growing up' Aboriginal children today. Grandparents are, as they have always been, very important members of the Aboriginal family unit and are often relied upon to play a major part in child rearing. This results in children being encouraged to think family. Some have responsibility at a very early age for the care of siblings, and as a result they have a large degree of personal autonomy".

Australian Institute of Australia, retrieved 2016

The National Quality Framework and the Early Years Learning Framework inform us that partnerships between educators and families matter because:

- knowing that educators respect and value their family strengthens a child's identity and sense of belonging and enhances their learning
- knowing children well also includes knowing the family and the cultural and community contexts of their lives
- families bring insights that offer a richer picture about their child.

In practice

We work on an Aboriginal community and run a number of programs including the 'Mums and Bubs' program.

Our main objectives for 'Mums and Bubs' is to build strong relationships with children and families and provide educational experiences and high quality care to enhance their learning and development.

An example of how we engage with the children, their families and community is when we held a bush cook-up. We invited children, family and community members to improved involvement in our program as a meet and greet. It was a great success as we all learnt more about each other and in particular improved our connection with the families we work with and their relations on the community. Staff also gained a further understanding and respect for their culture which will assist in building a strong foundation with the new families and strengthened already formed relationships with the community.

Comments from our last Birthday Party. Wow, what an exciting and fun year it has been! We sang, danced, cooked, played, painted, talked, laughed, feasted, shared and grew bigger together! Lots of guests visited us - big people, little people, furry creatures, feathered animals and slimy reptiles!

Bagot Out of School Hours Care & Indigenous Advancement Program, 2016

Working in a respectful partnership with parents (the child's first teacher) will greatly influences the child's learning, self-awareness and approach to moving between the home and service care environments. Inclusive practices should therefore not be seen as an additional element of your curriculum planning.

When encompassing the needs and interests of children and their backgrounds by feeding it into your planning and documentation you will know what to modify to make the play based learning inclusive.

In practice

Our service includes a number of Aboriginal families but not all the families are from around this area. We really wanted to find a way to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures into our programs but we were a bit scared that we might offend someone. When we discussed this at our staff meeting one of the educators came up with the brilliant idea of asking the families themselves! Not all of the families wanted to be involved or even get into a discussion. But we decided to work with the families who had some ideas and continue to ask everyone if they were happy with what we planned. One parent was able to give us the name of a great book about the history of the Aboriginal people in our local area. He also put us onto the Aboriginal liaison officer at the local council offices. We never knew he was there! When we talk about the difficulty in developing relationships across cultures, we forget that it can start with one little story or conversation.

Participants in the 'Joining Hands' project, IPSU & PSCWA 2012

Partnerships with vulnerable families is particularly important as quality education and care can improve the life outcomes for children. The relationship you form with families need to be sensitive and inclusive to their needs without judgement.

The terminology 'vulnerable' covers a wide range of factors such as poverty, trauma, mental and physical health challenges, abuse, divorce, refugee etc.

In practice

"Lindon's mother had concerns with Lindon food choices and eating patterns so we worked in partnership with his mother to really get to know what food interests and from that we worked on strategies that would not overwhelm him. We sang songs about fruit and veggies and promotes good eating habits where ever we could. We made limited poster of picture of either healthy foods or not so healthy food and we used these as a type of game boards where children would take turns to place a play food item accordantly to healthy or unhealthy.

We spend a lot of time talking about how food makes us strong and we gave parents information that reflected healthy eating etc. we also got hold of a cook book for the parents for free from the food bank. Gradually Lindon began to eat fruits. Not just one piece. He started with two bananas and then he tried oranges.

We kept coming up with interesting and different ideas for each week such as children assisted in making frozen berries smoothies. Lindon was very interested in the whole process and drank the result with pleasure. Lindon kept improving each week and soon he was able to eat any of the fruit for morning tea. You could not wipe the smile of his face. Not only were we proud of him he was proud of himself and due to his fantastic partnership with the parents we demonstrated how working together are to the benefit of not only the child but all the children and the families as well"

West Pilbara Mobile Children's Service BBF, 2016

Reflective questions

- How can Educators ensure that parents' thoughts and opinions are listened to and when incorporated into the curriculum planning?
- How can educators document their work with families and describe how it has influenced their planning?

Recommended readings and resources

'Linking Together for Aboriginal Children' Listening and Learning to form partnerships with Aboriginal families and communities

<http://www.armsu.org.au/cultural-awareness/linking-together>

Indigenous Australian families

<http://australianmuseum.net.au/indigenous-australia-family>

'How to' series: 'Build strong relationships with families' www.childaustralia.org.au

'Collaborative partnerships with families' www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au

'Partnership with families' - videos www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au

Building an inclusive cultural environment

How can we provide experiences and the environments that reflect and include the culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and the cultures of the children and families in our service?

Cultural competence must go further than attitudes and include behaviour and models for change in your service such as:

- Get to know the child and their family
- Involve the children exploring and researching cultures with the educators
- Know the cultural history of your local community – incl. Aboriginal
- Invite (incursions) local cultural groups who can offer interactive cultural experiences with the children and educators
- Visit (excursion) relevant local cultural events, services and groups
- Perhaps collaborate with other services about hiring and sharing an Aboriginal educator with a focus on inclusion and support
- Integrated use of cultural music, books and foods on a regular basis
- Libraries are great sources of information on different cultures
- Develop an Cultural Competency 'audit' of your educators as it may support further training and resource needs
- Truly understand the resources you already have in your service as a starting point for further cultural learnings and resource needs
- If you buy culture and language specific resources from any source make sure to research the items meanings and make appropriate allowances for their intended use
- Various websites and TV channels offer excellent opportunities for enhancement of cultural experiences for children and educators i.e. NiTV channel, SBS and ABC etc. – *Ensure you are familiar with the sites that you use and only go to authoritative sources.*
- You could engage with an Aboriginal education and care service and become Facebook friends to share ideas and for children to exchange stories of their lives and learning experiences.
- Create a community event and invite Aboriginal people, services, child care centre, playgroups etc.



Environments and experiences which reflect, include and explore Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures could include using:

- Ideas, interests and knowledge of children and families in your service
- Open-ended experiences where children are able to tell stories /express their experiences through their art work and play
- Resources such as books, puzzles and posters that show Aboriginal peoples engaged in a range of roles in everyday activities and that reflect important local and wider Aboriginal history both traditional and contemporary
- Resources and experiences that include both traditional and contemporary Aboriginal languages
- Natural materials from the area in a wide range of experiences and activities. For example using leaves, flowers, shells and rocks in play dough tables, sand trays, art and craft activities, home corner and more.
- Ensuring that the toys that reflect humans such as dolls, puppets and felt board people are diverse in different skin tones.
- Providing a range of Australian animals and talk about those ones that occur in your area
- Providing papers, paint, crayons and other art materials in a range of colour tones Australian nature including land, water sources and ocean.

Finding local relevant resources written with great input from Aboriginal educators can be difficult, however it does not have to be local for you to get useful information, ideas and perspective in including children and families from an Aboriginal background. For example; give children a camera to document their environments and make a resource out of the photos and stories.



Consider how you can incorporate days of importance to Aboriginal people that also celebrate the relationships that we all can have together such as;

- **National Aborigines and Islanders Day of Observance Committee - NAIDOC week**

'NAIDOC Week celebrations are held across Australia each July to celebrate the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. NAIDOC is celebrated not only in Indigenous communities, but by Australians from all walks of life. The week is a great opportunity to participate in a range of activities and to support your local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community'.

<http://www.naidoc.org.au/>

- **Aboriginal Children's Day**

National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day (NAICD) is a day to celebrate Aboriginal children in Australia. It is held on the 4th of August every year and by visiting the designated webpage below you can obtain more information and resources.

<http://aboriginalchildrensday.com.au/how-to-celebrate/>

<http://www.indigenous.gov.au/celebrating-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-children>

- **Reconciliation week**

'As Australians, we are all here, woven into this country. As part of our reconciliation journey, there are truths to tell, stories to celebrate, and relationships to grow.

Reconciliation is at the heart of our nations' future. Join us on our nation's reconciliation journey'.

<http://www.reconciliation.org.au/nrw/>



In practice

“My World Child Care is a long day care service located in Seville Grove. In August 2015 My World Child Care began a partnership with Save the Children (STC). Save The Children Australia's (SCA) Aboriginal services are based at the Champion Centre in Seville Grove Armadale and run a play group program called Deadly Chef which is a program for mums, aunties, grandmas, which includes cooking, parenting advice and support.

Our program ‘Little Geckos - nit bidjools’ was launched in November 2015 and enables children from STC program to attend My World Child Care with their family members and friends.

Ownership for naming the program was given to the families.

Save the Children identified that one significant factor in the lives of many of their parents is a lack of time - to indulge in some self-care, or deal with the business of running a household, or even exploring study/work opportunities. As a result, a wonderful partnership between My World Child Care and STC was forged. Families were offered the opportunity to enroll their children into a unique session for the STC children and many options were explored as this was a new experience for all the families and children. This opportunity enabled the children to experience a new play setting with new educators - whilst having the security of their friends to support them in the transition as well as promoting an immediate sense of belonging.

The pick-up drop-off service provided by My World made utilising day care viable for many of the families, who would have otherwise struggled to access the service. The transition to day care was very successful experience for the families and it was not long before the playgroup children made the final transition to the larger My World community.

We have received extremely positive feedback from the parents, and the children are accessing more opportunities to early learning. For the older children, the next big transition to Kindy and will be so much smoother as a result of this wonderful opportunity. My World Child Care’s aim is to give every child the opportunity to have a sense of being, belonging and becoming for all children to create self-identity, social skills, pro-social behaviours, school readiness and most importantly that children are ready for new experiences”.

‘My World Child Care Centre – Seville Grove

Consider seeking funding for an idea or program that can enhance your services links with the Aboriginal Communities. These types of grants are available from various organisation, businesses, local shires, governments departments.

For example; Celebrate Harmony Day with your local Aboriginal Community. Children and families by seeking a grant from the Office for Multicultural Interests (OMI)

http://www.omi.wa.gov.au/omi_grants.cfm .

Recommended readings and resources

‘From little things big things grow’ - the story behind the song by Paul Kelly and Kev Carmody www.australianstogether.org.au/stories/detail/the-story-behind-the-song

‘From little things big things grow’ – children’s book by the Gurindji children retelling the Paul Kelly and Kev Carmody song and story behind the song.

Child Australia’s ‘Cultural Connections’ booklet – www.childaustralia.org.au

Reconciliation information <http://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/reconciliation>



In Summary

We now know that it is not enough to just be 'aware'.

Educators need to actively work towards a greater understanding of Aboriginal culture, and the impacts this has on children, family and community. Educators need to apply the knowledge that they acquired to their daily practice.

'Importantly, for individuals, cultural competence requires more than becoming culturally aware or practising tolerance. It can be defined as the ability to identify and challenge one's own cultural assumptions, one's values and beliefs. It is about developing empathy and connected knowledge, the ability to see the world through another's eyes, or at the very least to recognise that others may view the world through a different cultural lens.'

Stewart, 2006

We cannot develop cultural competence and engage in inclusive practices if our understandings of culture is undeveloped and unsupported.

A good starting point is to reflect on the notion that we cannot begin to understand and value other cultures if we do not know something about our own. Everyone has a culture and we need to take time to look at our own beliefs and values and our perception of how the world works to understand cultural competency at our workplace.

When we talk about *cultural practice* we are talking about a deeper understanding of values, goals, and practices that people share within particular families, groups, communities, or organisations.

An educator who is 'culturally competent' is working together with people from a varied of backgrounds and thereby has the ability to better understand and value the cultural context of children and families.

Inclusive practice involves a willingness to acknowledge that other ways of seeing the world and doing things have value. It is therefore a continuum of attitudes, policies and practices. Where we stand in the continuum can vary at different time and in different situations.

Most importantly if a child's cultural identity is denied or denigrated, their sense of belonging, being and becoming is all under threat. Denying cultural identity is detrimental to children's attachment, their socio-emotional development, their education and their health.

On a final note...

"Culture is central to identity. Culture defines who we are, how we think, how we communicate, what we value and what is important to us... Every area of human development, which defines the child's best interest, has a cultural component. Your culture helps define HOW you attach, HOW you express emotion, HOW you learn and HOW you stay healthy."

Muriel Bamblett for VACCA (2006)

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Western Australia

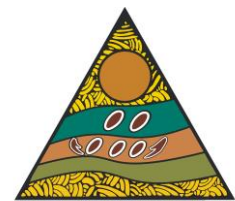
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