



National Quality Standard Professional Learning Program



Talking about practice: Cultural competency

DISCUSSION BETWEEN JUDY RADICH AND JO GOODWIN

Part 1

Discussion on cultural competency—defining culture. Does our own identity and culture impact on our daily interactions with families and children?

Part 2

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture—where to begin? What part does the past history of Aboriginal Australia play in the process of moving forward and engaging in a process of true Reconciliation?

Part 3

Quality Improvement Plan—how to document your progress in cultural competency. Resourcing—creating time and space for change.

Cultural competency is one of the eight areas of practice in the *Early Years Learning Framework*. Cultural competency is about interactions and attitudes. It is how we honour and celebrate diversity when working with families and children. When we are being culturally competent we appreciate and live with difference and we are aware of what we gain from acknowledging differences. In some cases, it is about learning to sit with the discomfort that this creates for us as educators.



When we consider cultural competency in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, is it from the view of the unique place that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture holds in Australia? Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have histories in Australia dating back 75 000 years. How much of this history are we aware of? Does our understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture begin with the colonisation of Australia? If this is so, how can we try to explore or understand cultural competency from this limited knowledge base?

Part 1

When we begin to consider cultural competency, one of the first questions we ask of ourselves is, 'what is my culture?' How do we define culture? How much are we aware of the aspects of our identity—race, class, religion, gender and ability—that are embedded in our own daily practices and interactions with families and children?

- What is culture—is culture an unconscious way of being?
- Are we aware of our culturally determined actions, postures or ways of dealing with people—or are they automatic responses?
- Is our own culture the standard by which everyone else is judged?
- Why should we be responsive to difference?
- What does it mean to be considered a 'dominant' culture?
- How do we create opportunities for parents' opinions and child-rearing practices to be included in our daily program?
- How do we reflect on the skills that are required to maintain the balance of a program running smoothly and the flexibility to respond to different cultural and individual family needs?
- How do we ask families what their expectations of us are?
- What different processes do we have to support families with enrolment and participation in the service? How and when do we adjust our enrolment and transition process?
- How do we recognise, with each new family enrolment at our service, the individual culture and values they bring with them? How do we adjust our practices to respond to this new culture?





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Part 2

How do we define true Reconciliation in our services? Why is Reconciliation an important concept to explore with children? When we consider exploring cultural competency in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, have we considered the view from the perspective of the history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?

- How do you explore identity with children and families?
- How would we cope if our identity was taken away from us?
- Where do you receive your information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples?
- Why is it important to understand the impact of past policies on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture? What are the dangers of not acknowledging the past?
- What strategies do you use to ensure that your communications are respectful with the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people of your community?
- What are you currently doing to increase your knowledge of the history of your local land, the Dreamtime, spirituality and language?
- How do you obtain general knowledge about the cultural identity of families and children? What information would you research for the families and children attending your service?
- How do you identify cultural groups within your community?
- How do you make opportunities for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people to share cultural knowledge?
- What experiences and opportunities are provided for families and children to enhance their understanding of cultural diversity?

Part 3

Where do we start when considering how to explore cultural competency? How do we begin to document and demonstrate cultural competency at our service?

- What would an outsider's first impression be of the 'culture' of your service?
- Do we ever reach a point where we can state that we are 'culturally competent'?
- How can we create opportunities for educators to have time to explore cultural competency?
- How do we engage in a process of reflection that has real meaning for both the individual and the team in which they work?
- What resources can we use to facilitate a whole-of-team approach to exploring cultural competency?
- How do we learn about perspectives other than our own?

As we progress with our understanding of cultural competency, it becomes evident that to be culturally competent is about what we don't know. It is looking inside ourselves and discovering how we define people and their behaviours by our own standards. It is about exploring our biases, acknowledging and accepting that there are other ways; we accept that our way is not the only way. There are many ways and there is no right or wrong way. It is the acknowledgement that reconsidering views is a slow process and it involves accepting people and families just as they are.

