Reflecting on Cultural Competence in the Early Years

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What does the data tell us?

• Life expectancy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is on average **11.5** years lower than the non-Indigenous population for males and **9.7** years lower than non-Indigenous females (COAG, 2012).

• Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been hospitalised for mental and behavioural disorders at **more than twice the rate** of other Australians (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2011).

• The suicide rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is around **twice** that of other Australians (ABS, 2012).

• Year 12 completions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were only **45.3%**, compared to **86.3%** for non-Indigenous Australians (COAG, 2012).

• Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are in out-of-home care at **10 times the rate** of other children (AIHW, 2012).
What does the data tell us?

• The participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 3 - 5 years in early childhood education is less than non-Aboriginal children, and this difference increases significantly with age.

• 73.9 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the year before school were enrolled in preschool nationally and 69.9 per cent were attending.

• This compares to 90.8 per cent enrolment and 88.7 per cent attendance for Non-Aboriginal children

What are Aboriginal parents, families and communities saying?

Cultural barriers – e.g. Lack of respect for kinship networks, sleeping expectations, behavior management.

Need for trusting relationships \(\text{(Trudgett and Grace, 2011)}\)

Teaching about culture through culture \(\text{(Bowes, Kitson and Burns, 2010)}\)

Encouraging access and working together through partnerships \(\text{(Early Childhood Australia, 2008)}\)

Services that reflect the cultural values, knowledge and practices of the community.

Culturally competent educators \(\text{(Belgarde, Mitchell and Arquero, 2000).}\)
Deficit ..... ‘othering’

A study conducted by Moreton-Robinson, Singh, Kolpenuk and Robinson (2012, 144) found that a number of non-Indigenous teachers ‘...harboured to varying degrees a “deficit” understanding of why there continued to be poor Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educational outcomes. Furthermore, these understandings were rationalised through a racialised “othering” process that placed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students beyond “white” norms’.

Why are we preparing the Aboriginal child and/or family - why are we not focussing on preparing more the educators who have an ethical and moral responsibility ....
Early Years Learning Framework

• Provides a national approach to quality and regulation.

• Describes Early Childhood Pedagogy through its Principles and Practices considered as essential to support and enhance young children’s learning from birth to five years as well as support the transition to school.

• The Framework has been designed for use by early childhood educators working in partnership with families.

• It does not tell educators what to teach; it is not a prescriptive curriculum framework, it provides direction.....
Early Years Learning Framework

The Principles
- Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships
- Partnerships
- High expectations and equity
- Respect for diversity
- Ongoing learning and reflective practice

The Practices
- Holistic approaches
- Responsiveness to children
- Learning through play
- Intentional teaching
- Learning environments
- Cultural competence
- Continuity of learning and transitions
- Assessing for learning

The principles of early childhood pedagogy underpin practice (EYLF p14)
What is Cultural Competence?

At the individual level, cultural competence may be regarded as

“The ability to identify and challenge one’s 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 different cultural lenses” (Fitzgerald, 2000, 184).

Growing Cultural Competence begins with individuals undertaking a process of reflection on their own cultural identity and recognising the impact their culture has on their own practice.
Research Question

What are educators’ understandings and perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Competence as outlined in the Early Years Learning Framework?

This study used quantitative and qualitative methods to collect data

1. Q Methodology

2. Indigenous methodology of yarning through semi-structured interviews.
Part 1: Q methodology

Q methodology:

• is well suited for studying empirical questions about the different views or standpoints that exist in any population (deGraaf and vanExel, 56).

• takes a holistic approach to understanding groups rather than individuals.

• provides a set of procedures for the systematic study of people’s viewpoints, opinions, and beliefs on a particular subject (McKeown & Thomas, 1988).

• involves a data collection technique known as a Q sort, as well as a data analysis technique known as Q factor analysis.
Main features of Q Methodology

The main features can be summarized as follows

1. A sample of participants (the p-set)
2. sorts a set of statements (the q-set)
3. into a meaningful pattern (the q-sort).
4. Which are then factor analysed by-person (q-analysis)
5. Producing a unique set of factors that reveals a set of ‘points-of-view’.
Development of an Early Years Cultural Competence (EYCC) Q sort

Statements on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence were drawn from the literature and reflected the “range of perceptions” (Brown, 2004, p. 4).

- More than 100 statements
- Reviewed similarities and differences
- Discarded repetitive statements
- Consulted with an expert group – changed wording of statements
- Selected 34 statements - representative of the concourse
- Quality not quantity – 18 participants
- The goal is to find patterns of thought, not how many people think a particular way.
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<td>(26) I have attended at least one Professional Learning session that has enhanced my understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence.</td>
<td>(7) I am aware of my own worldview and how it impacts on my practice.</td>
<td>(5) I understand the importance of connection to land for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.</td>
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<td>(31) I am confident that I have reached a high level of advancement in my understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence.</td>
<td>(19) I avoid imposing values that may conflict or be inconsistent with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.</td>
<td>(14) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are regularly included in our daily program.</td>
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Preliminary Findings – Q

Factor 1 – Beginning the journey towards Cultural Competence

Participants placed significant value in understanding and recognising culture in developing children’s sense of belonging, being and becoming but did not seek support from or use the cultural tools of their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

Factor 2 – Learning with Aboriginal Communities and families

Participants place great value in understanding their own cultural beliefs and undertake self-reflection of their own worldviews as an important part of the journey towards growing cultural competence.

Participants highly value input from their local Aboriginal communities and families to assist in service delivery.
Part 2: Yarns

Yarning is a holistic method that allows individuals to reflect and reconstruct their personal experiences, understandings and perspectives (Dean, 2010).

• Is a conversation with a purpose – to gather information and knowledge about something.

• Is conducive to Indigenous ways of doing; its strength is in the cultural security that it creates for Aboriginal people.

• Is a process that requires the researcher to develop and build a relationship that is accountable to Indigenous people participating in the research (Bessarab & Ngandu 2010, 38).
Preliminary findings from the yarns

Four key themes;

1) Understanding
2) Relationships
3) Conversations and Listening
4) Time for Learning.
1. Understanding

Cultural competence is about developing an understanding of each child’s culture with their own set of experiences, values and beliefs (Mary).

I believe that for an educator to be culturally competent they must have an understanding of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander ways of being. There must be an understanding and awareness of family structures, relationships, practices, languages and accept that difference is ok (Sally).

My understanding of cultural competence has changed a lot in the last few years, whilst I would probably say I don’t have an in depth understanding of it (Jenny).
2. Relationships

Cultural competence is not only about building respectful relationships with Aboriginal children, families and community. It is also about understanding more about Aboriginal ways of being (Mary).

Educators need to demonstrate respect and develop respectful relationships with all their families that go into their centres as well as their local community (Jane).

We cannot develop and deliver a quality learning program if we do not focus on interactions and developing relationships with families (Mary).
3. Conversations and Listening

My understanding is developing through conversations (Jenny).

It’s about having the conversation and listening to different perspectives (Kate).

I tend to take cultural competence as an opportunity to listen and learn and share and so it’s about unwrapping and consolidating a growing understanding of what the child’s connections and lifestyles and knowledge is and then sharing that (Pam).

It’s very much about listening to people, to understand their perspective, their worldview and in order to learn but also in order to share (Jenny).
4. Time ... for learning

It’s growing, for me it’s been much more of a journey in the last 18 months, because more specifically I have had time to talk to people, to work with people (Kate).

The fact that we place time restrictions on it, which is about a lack of understanding, we place time restrictions on our work and our understandings, when it’s actually a long term approach and process (Jenny).

Cultural competence requires deep slow thinking, and honouring time to yarn about it (Laura).

Time has to be inclusive of understanding cultural competency (Ruth)
Findings ....summary

Participants in both the Q sorts and interviews acknowledged the importance of recognising and promoting the diversity of cultures in developing children’s sense of belonging, being and becoming (DEEWR, 2010).

This is such a vital component of developing cultural competence because culture is not fixed and opportunities to develop richer understandings of other cultures always exist (Obegi and Ritblatt, 2005, p. 200).

If we overlook culture we can potentially make detrimental decisions and we place boundaries on our ability to engage with families and communities (Williams, 1997).

It is vital that we learn from and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families instead of ‘knowing’ or just being ‘aware’ of families.

IT TAKES TIME TO DEVELOP RELATIONSHIPS
Are we honouring time to develop cultural competence?

Cultural competence requires innate deliberate thinking, and **honouring time** to talk about it, we do not honour that, we say we do, but do we really?

Research participant Laura stated, “*If you don’t sit in doubt how are you ever going to be culturally competent, because you can’t be certain, if you think you’re certain, you’re not*”.

Taking time to think, engage in dialogue and reflect is vital in all of our work.

Are you using your time efficiently in developing your own cultural competence?

http://thespoke.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/are-we-honouring-time-to-develop-cultural-competence/
Reflections ....

Honest engagement, building trust, and working with community members is essential.

A focus on empowerment and working from strengths makes a difference.

To be culturally competent requires a focus on growing relationships with all stakeholders and keeping the growth of cultural competence featured in our daily work.

Vital to immerse ourselves in conversations about culture and cultural competence.

Reflect and plan for further opportunities to share, listen and learn.
References