Cultural Perspectives on Learning:

Building the foundations for working with Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander children and families.

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Foreword

Cultural Perspectives on Learning was inspired by the stories and experiences of families living on Bagot Community situated on Larrakia Country in the Northern Territory. In the pages to follow, the reader will be introduced to the concepts, ideas and provocations that emerged through the delivery of the *Building Relationships for Learning: Bagot Community Parent and Community Engagement Project.*

We hope this resource provides inspiration and guidance for educators, teachers, service providers, families and children to work together to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

We encourage readers to embrace the principles that underpin this work and use it to build and strengthen their own interactions and partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The resource is underpinned by the key principle that ***relationships provide the foundation for supporting children's learning and development.***

These relationships are born out of the central understanding that:

- We all come to the table with knowledge that is equally valuable
- We all come to the table with children at the centre of our view
- We all come to the table prepared to learn and take turns to teach
- We recognise that our priorities may differ and commit to developing a shared understanding of what we are seeking to achieve together

This resource focuses on issues that are central to people's childhood experiences. In recognition that some people's early life experiences may have been traumatic, care (including self-care) should be exercised when engaging with the content within.

The reader should be aware that this resource may contain names and images of Aboriginal people who have passed away.

Acknowledgements

The authors and those involved in the development of this resource acknowledge the traditional owners of the land where this work took place, the Larrakia people, their Elders, past, present and future.

The writing of this resource has been a collaborative and collective effort. It could not have been achieved without the candid insights, knowledge and wisdom of the people of Bagot Community and in particular, the participants of the Building Relationships for Learning: Bagot Community Parental and Community Engagement Project.

Bagot Community is a special place. It is an enclave within metropolitan Darwin situated on Larrakia Country. It is a place of cultural pride, of family, of togetherness and of community. We thank the people of Bagot for welcoming us and sharing their time, their knowledge and their wisdom so generously.

We would like to acknowledge and express our gratitude to the women and men of Bagot Community who shared their stories and books with us to help us understand how their experiences growing up and raising their children have shaped their views of family, community, culture and the broader society.

Much of the information that has informed this resource was gathered through conversations and opportunities to visit sites of significance with respect to the history and culture of community.

The quotes found throughout this resource, where not directly referenced, come from the individuals from Bagot Community who contributed to the development of this resource.

We thank you for inviting us into your community, sharing food and yarning. Your generosity with your time, knowledge and spirit will always be remembered. It has been a most rewarding, enriching and transformative experience. We will carry the lessons we have learned into our own life journeys and feel privileged to have been welcomed into such an inspiring community.

We would like to acknowledge the amazing work that is happening at Bagot Community through the programs delivered by Child Australia. This not-for-profit organisation's mission is to work with children and families to improve outcomes for children and this is evident in their work at Bagot Community. In particular, we would like to thank Kellie Johnson for her incredible skill and knowledge, and the support she provided during the process of writing this resource. Thanks also go to other Child Australia staff for their great work in delivering the PaCE program.

We would like to thank the Principal of Ludmilla Primary School, Di Wood and her staff for sharing their experiences of school engagement with the families of Bagot Community. We also acknowledge the insights of other service providers on the Bagot Community.

The visual appeal of this book could not have been achieved without the remarkable skill of local Aboriginal artist, Dotti Fejo who painted the piece of art that has become the visual and symbolic theme of this resource. Her piece is representative of the outstanding creativity that forms part of Bagot Community culture.

The outstanding photographers, Zoe Davis from Child Australia and Louise Law from Create Evoke Photography, captured the essence of the community through photographing the images displayed throughout this resource. These images are pivotal to telling the story of Bagot Community. Our graphic designer Amelia Wiltshire took our concept and created the reality and her efforts and skill contributed significantly to the final product.

Lastly, and significantly, we thank the Australian Government Department of Education, formerly Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations for believing in this work. Their commitment and continued funding of innovative projects like this one is important for all Australians because of its contribution to improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait children and families, the traditional owners of this land.

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Professional Learning Solutions

Dottie Fejo

Artist Profile

Dorothea Fejo is a Larrakia women and resident of Bagot community. Dotti was born in 1966 in the old Darwin hospital and has been in Darwin since her Birth. Dottie's artwork is well known in the Darwin region and she is famous for her curved cross thatching and depictions of Goanna.

Dottie's work can be seen around Darwin in places such as the Smith Street mall, Darwin hospital, Vopak at East Arm, Lyons estate and of course at Bagot Community.

"The story of this artwork is about Bush tucker, wet and dry season and the Dilli bag. The Dilli is used to gather all the tucker into. We watch the old people make these bags from Pandanas leaves and special roots to dye the leaves. This is an old tradition that is passed down to our children. In this painting there are pictures of water lilly peanuts, banana peanuts and mango, goanna and the long neck turtle. In the Dry season we eat the Goanna and in the Wet we eat the mango. This is Larrakia bush tucker."

"I grew up here with all my Family in Bagot community, we have always gone fishing and hunting on these lands, mainly in the dry season. We are always with our families and we listen to the old stories when we are away camping and hunting. These stories that are handed down to us teach us about our culture and our Law. These stories are precious and we as Aboriganal people have shared some of our stories with you in this book. This is a gift to you and we hope that this will help you see our stories as we do."

Bagot Community Contributors

The following people generously contributed their time, experiences and ideas in the development of this resource:

Anita Cooper
Charlene Rankin
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Introduction

Cultural Perspectives on Learning aims to help Aboriginal families, schools, education and care and other service providers build relationships for learning together. It considers the development of children within an ecological framework and discusses the importance of understanding the interplay of children's worlds and the impacts these have on their ability to thrive.

It draws on the perspectives and experiences of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to provide a framework for thinking and talking about common issues relating to young children's education and care. This resource encourages reflection about a range of topics from different cultural viewpoints so that learning is "both ways".

Terminology

Aboriginal people in Australia are identified by several terms including Indigenous, Aboriginal and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) people. Within this resource, we have followed the wishes of the Bagot Community Elders who requested that community members be identified as Aboriginal. However, it is acknowledged that broadly in Australia the other terms are relevant and interchangeable depending on the context.

How we developed this resource

Cultural Perspectives on Learning represents a collaborative product developed through the *Building Relationships for Learning: Bagot Community Parent and Community Engagement Project* funded by the Commonwealth Department of Education, formerly the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations and delivered by Child Australia.

Bagot Community is an Aboriginal Town Community in Darwin, Northern Territory. Child Australia is the Out of School Hours Care provider on the Community and, through strong relationships with families residing on Bagot, recognised the need to address gaps in service delivery on the Community that magnify the social and developmental disadvantage faced by many young children and their families.

The project involved the facilitation of two parenting groups over the course of a year including:

- Mums and Bubs Early Parenting Group (for mothers and children aged 0 – 3 years)
- School Readiness Parenting Group (for mothers and children aged 3 – 5 years)

The key aims of the project were to:

- Build confidence and capacity of Aboriginal parents to support their children's development in positive ways
- Build the confidence of Aboriginal parents to connect and engage with wider community supports including schools
- Build awareness in service providers of cultural barriers that impact on Aboriginal people's engagement with the wider community.

The project also involved the writing of this resource, which was developed collaboratively with members of the community and local education and service providers. It is intended to provide a culturally relevant and appropriate means to share lessons learned through the both ways learning process.

The examples, stories, anecdotes and images presented in the coming pages are about the experiences of families in this community. They provide a stimulus for reflection and discussion to grow greater understanding of the differing cultural perspectives that exist and how these impact on relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in different community contexts.

What's inside, who it is for and how to use it

This resource is designed to stimulate observation, listening, conversation and reflection that supports the development of relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who play a part in children's learning and development. The frameworks, provocations, activities and ideas on these pages may be equally valuable for building relationships with families from diverse cultural backgrounds.

This resource provides, first and foremost, a platform for early childhood education and care and school-based education providers to engage with questions about how to best support Aboriginal children and families to thrive in educational settings beyond the home environment. It recognises that, in order to do this, teachers and educators must be willing to engage with questions of culture and develop an approach that invites Aboriginal families to share their knowledge as their children's first teachers.

How the resource is used, who becomes involved and when, is dependent on the nature of existing relationships and community context in which it is used. In an overarching sense, it has been designed to accommodate a facilitated learning process, with the support of the accompanying facilitation guide. However, it is also provides useful information and stimulus to encourage conversations amongst Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people about various aspects of children's development, particularly in relation to their transition from the primary home environment into an early childhood education and care or school-based education setting.

The importance of early childhood development

“For many Aboriginal peoples [around the world] their perspective of child development refers to a child‘s spiritual, emotional, intellectual and physical wellbeing with a special consideration of the Aboriginal context of his or her community and culture. This includes everything from storytelling, learning, singing and practicing community protocols to being introduced to traditional foods and customs. Such practice and belief represents quality children‘s services and education in that it contributes to the building and/or maintaining of the child‘s emotional and spiritual wellbeing. This will assist in building strong children with the skills, resiliency and confidence to succeed in any education system.”

(Gerlach, Gray Smith & Schneider, 2008 p.12)

The importance of early childhood development

Experiences during the early years of life shape the chances children have to become successful and resilient learners and make effective transitions into adulthood (Bradbury et al, 2011, p.1). Research has consistently shown that children's development between birth and the age of eight has a significant influence over their educational attainment, workforce participation, health and wellbeing across their lifespan.

The influences on early childhood development

Studies on early childhood development clearly point to three key influences in children's development in the early years – home (situated within the community context), early childhood education services and schools. According to Siraj-Blatchford et al (2010, p.70) "Children become part of society's culture at first by participating in family practice. Through participation they learn what is accepted and expected". Teachers, early childhood educators, peers and others also contribute to children's developmental outcomes and ultimate chances of securing positive futures through supporting them to successfully transition into, and move between, their primary home, early learning and school environments.

Early childhood development outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children

In Australia, there is a substantial disparity between standardised early childhood development (ECD) outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and their non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peers. For example, results from the Australian Early Childhood Development Index (AEDI) 2012 suggest that on a national scale, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are more than twice as likely to be developmentally vulnerable than non-Indigenous children (DEEWR, 2013).

The comparatively poor developmental outcomes experienced by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children suggest that these children have not been able to successfully transition from the home to early learning and school environments, nor move between these environments, in ways that cultivate the learning and development experienced by their non-Aboriginal peers.

From a child's perspective, the accepted norms and expectations that exist in the home, early learning and school-based educational settings may be so disparate that the child cannot develop the confidence, know-how nor resilience to cope in one or more of these settings.

In this context, improving early childhood development outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is contingent upon families, educators, teachers and significant others in children's lives to work together to create the conditions for children to successfully traverse home and educational domains in which they can confidently live, play and learn.

The following pages provide a conceptual foundation for imagining a child's experiences of the world and the influences that shape these experiences.

Theoretical underpinnings: Understanding human development through an ecological lens

All of us grow and develop within our families, home, community and broader society. How well we travel through childhood into adulthood will be impacted by events and conditions within all of these contexts.

Bronfenbrenner (1994) proposed a theoretical model based on ecological principles to demonstrate the interplay and influences on human development. Figure 1 is an adaptation of this model and considers a child's development from birth to the end of schooling. The child is situated in the centre within the immediate environments (mircosystems) where the child lives, learns and plays. Children are active participants in their development and this is evident within their microsystems where they are influenced by the environment and also have influence on the environment.

As a child grows, microsystems in the child's world typically expand to include home, school, sports clubs and after school care. In the child's younger years the microsystem is the immediate home and the homes of extended family, and could also include childcare settings. It is important to note that the expansion of the child's world into other microsystems is influenced by a variety of factors at a macro level including government policy, dominant ideology, social values, societal economic stability and others.

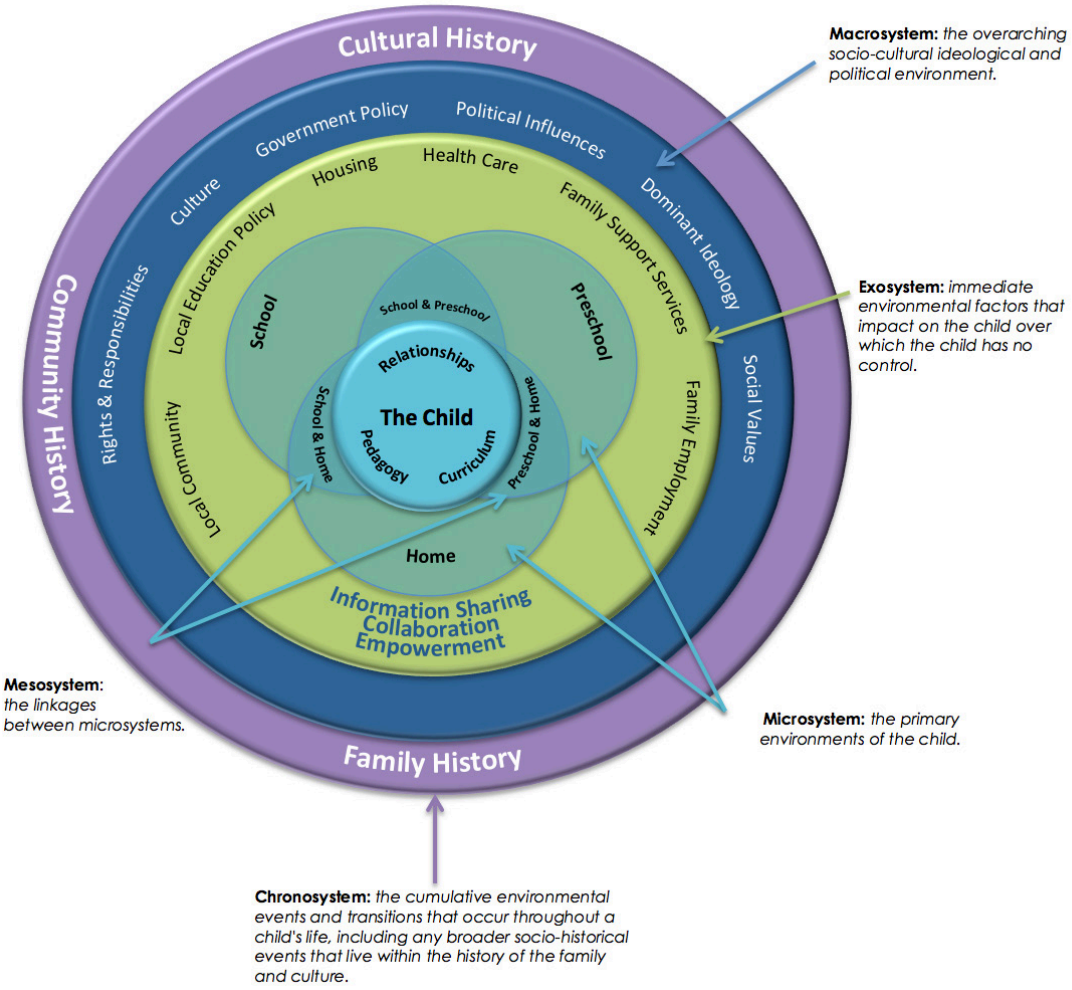
Importance of microsystems

All children need safety, security and consistency to thrive. Microsystems, in which children spend the majority of their time learning and playing, are the cornerstones of development. Microsystems have a proximal or direct impact on the child's development and this impact can be positive or negative.

Parents and family are a child's first teachers and the quality of relationships within the home setting, however broadly conceived, is very important in establishing the foundations for a child's development and emotional security. When a child enters another microsystem such as an early learning service or school system, the new microsystem often has quite different areas of focus, appearance and culture from the home microsystem. This is particularly amplified where a child is from a minority cultural group and has English as a second or third language.

For children to thrive in new microsystems, they need to feel they belong and that their broader world and primary microsystem - the home - is somehow reflected in any new microsystem. In addition, the environment needs to provide diverse opportunities for a growing child to build skills and knowledge and be emotionally secure.

Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model: Early learning context



Just as the quality of relationships within the family is critical to a child's development and emotional security in the home, so too is the quality of relationships in other microsystem settings central to the sense of belonging that a child experiences. According to *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (DEEWR, 2009) belonging is crucial because:

> *... knowing where and with whom you belong – is integral to human existence. Children belong first to a family, a cultural group, a neighbourhood and a wider community. Belonging acknowledges children's interdependence with others and the basis of relationships in defining identities. In early childhood, and throughout life, relationships are crucial to a sense of belonging. Belonging is central to being and becoming in that it shapes who children are and who they can become* (p. 7).

Mesosystems

In Bronfenbrenner's model, the mesosystems are the connections between the child's microsystems and these also have proximal impact. Mesosystems are the points of intersection where, for example, home and the early learning or school setting overlap. These intersections are vitally important to the child's ability to navigate each microsystem. There are particular opportunities and risks that present within the mesosystem space.

The delivery of the PaCE program on Bagot Community directly seeks to strengthen the quality of mesosystem connection between the school and the home to promote development of the child and enhance the child's readiness for entry into the school/preschool microsystem.

Critical elements of mesosystem connections are collaboration, information sharing and partnerships in supporting a child. Within school/family engagement, there needs to be a sense of equality and shared purpose and an acknowledgement that families, educators and teachers all bring valuable expertise to a child's development. The mutual transfer of cultural knowledge between families, educators, teachers and significant others can markedly strengthen the mesosystem connection.

Given that relationships are important within each microsystem, it makes sense that they also matter between microsystems, at the intersections or mesosystems. Where there are strong linkages and purposeful partnerships between the microsystems of early learning, school and home, children have a greater sense of belonging and emotional security. They are also better able to navigate the differences in systems, understand their place at any specific time, and respond appropriately to the expectations placed on them in and across each setting.

Exosystems

Exosystems impact children's development distally or indirectly because they comprise environmental conditions and/or social systems that are removed from the child but which still influence outcomes for the child. Examples of this include school policy, housing, healthcare and family financial security.

The influence and impact of exosystems are important to understand as bias related to exosystem factors can influence relationships with children and perceptions of family capacity and capability. This is particularly true for disadvantaged and minority groups where the challenges they face are beyond their sphere of influence.

Macrosystem

The macrosystem is the broader society in which we live; it is the societal blueprint for and of culture that governs and determines the other systems. It contains the dominant ideology, political system, social values and rights and responsibilities of citizens. The macrosystem has ultimate influence over the lives and development of children. Within a multicultural society like Australia there exist multiple macro sub-systems that families and communities from different cultures must traverse. This too has an impact on the developing child.

It is also important to note that Aboriginal people often traverse dual macrosystems; the traditional Aboriginal macrosystem with its own set of rights and responsibilities, ideology, social values and mores, and the dominant macrosystem. In needing to live and function within mainstream culture, this presents challenges and an additional layer of complexity.

Chronosystem

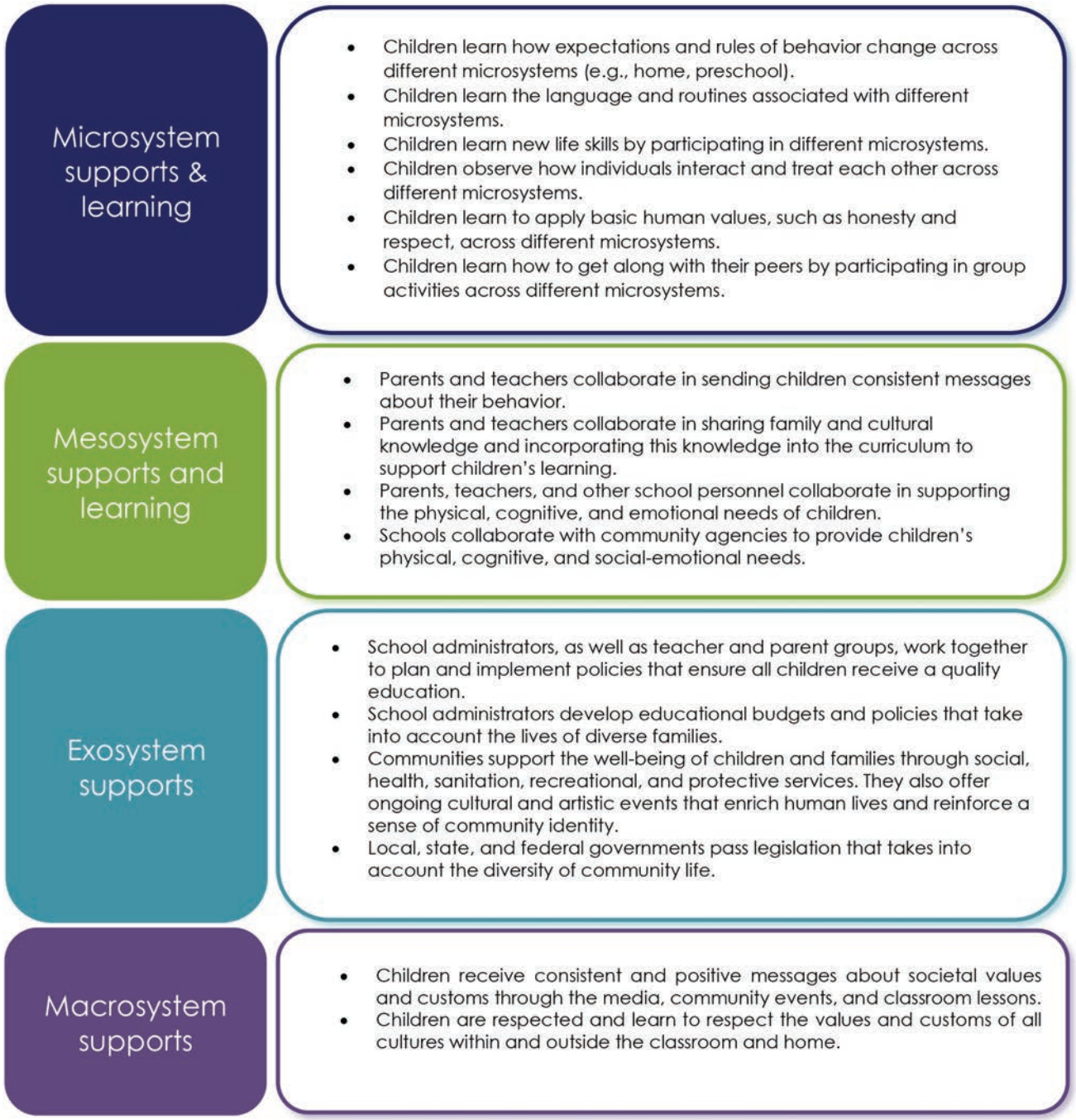
The Chronosystem was a late edition to Bronfenbrenner's ecological model. It is very important in the context of this discussion in that it acknowledges that cultural, community and family history do have an impact on children's development. This is particularly evident for Aboriginal Australians who may feel the weight of personal experience as a result of past government policy, prejudice, subjugation and family separation.

It is common for parents to transmit those experiences through the generations, both directly through family stories and indirectly through altered parenting and lack of trust in engaging with the dominant culture.

Understanding the impact of these experiences is important for people who work and engage with Aboriginal people because it can be the driver of behaviour and influence actions and engagement.

Supports for children's development and education through the ecological lens

The following table (adapted from Coleman 2013 p.49) gives a snapshot of the supports offered and learning that may take place within each of the ecological systems. This provides valuable impetus for considering the place of educators, teachers and other practitioners in a child's learning within these systems.


Microsystem supports & learning
Children learn how expectations and rules of behavior change across different microsystems (e.g., home, preschool).
Children learn the language and routines associated with different microsystems.
Children learn new life skills by participating in different microsystems.
Children observe how individuals interact and treat each other across different microsystems.
Children learn to apply basic human values, such as honesty and respect, across different microsystems.
Children learn how to get along with their peers by participating in group activities across different microsystems.
Mesosystem supports and learning
Parents and teachers collaborate in sending children consistent messages about their behavior.
Parents and teachers collaborate in sharing family and cultural knowledge and incorporating this knowledge into the curriculum to support children's learning.
Parents, teachers, and other school personnel collaborate in supporting the physical, cognitive, and emotional needs of children.
Schools collaborate with community agencies to provide children's physical, cognitive, and social-emotional needs.
Exosystem supports
School administrators, as well as teacher and parent groups, work together to plan and implement policies that ensure all children receive a quality education.
School administrators develop educational budgets and policies that take into account the lives of diverse families.
Communities support the well-being of children and families through social, health, sanitation, recreational, and protective services. They also offer ongoing cultural and artistic events that enrich human lives and reinforce a sense of community identity.
Local, state, and federal governments pass legislation that takes into account the diversity of community life.
Macrosystem supports
Children receive consistent and positive messages about societal values and customs through the media, community events, and classroom lessons.
Children are respected and learn to respect the values and customs of all cultures within and outside the classroom and home.

What is culture anyway?

“To know us, you need to acknowledge us, and be patient. You need to listen. We look, we listen, we learn. That's why we learn your culture. Indigenous mob have different cultures from different communities. Central, Arnhem, Inland mob, we all sit back and look to learn.”

“Culture is for my parents until they pass it on. I can't talk about it till they gone, it's not my place without authority to speak.”

What is culture anyway?

The dimensions of culture are complex, multi-faceted and interconnected. Culture shapes how we think, what we do, what we produce and how we organise the world, both physically and symbolically. We are all cultural beings although some of us have a higher level of awareness of our own culture than others.

We all have the ability to think about culture from the point of view of 'other' cultures. This is usually because when our own culture meets a different culture the differences become obvious. Frequently, the most obvious markers of a different culture are based on what we perceive in terms of historical traditions, ceremonies and artefacts. Many school curricula still involve teachings about Aboriginal 'culture' as it was before colonisation. This may give non-Aboriginal people a sense that Aboriginal 'culture', pre-colonisation, is a true and authentic representation of the cultures of Aboriginal people today. Similarly, Aboriginal people may be inclined to think that the 'European' or 'mainstream' culture is a true reflection of past and present culture in Europe and/or amongst Australians who are seen to be of 'European' background or culture.

Consideration of the history of cultures is important to place different cultural understandings in context. However, it is also important to recognise that culture is not static. Culture is shaped in time and through time – it shifts, changes and evolves in relation to all sorts of societal, environmental and economic conditions.

No person today has the exact same 'culture' as his/her ancestors from one hundred years ago, five hundred years ago, a thousand years ago or tens of thousands of years ago. We may have the foundations of traditions, values, beliefs and understandings that persist, but we, as human beings, constantly cross-fertilise and integrate new-found ideas and insights into our thinking and practice that, in time, become a part of our 'culture'. It is this understanding that provides a foundation to build relationships that are based on an exploration of culture and culturally-driven assumptions about 'who I am' and 'who you are' from the specific perspectives of individuals, families and communities. This takes us to a point where we can move from being culturally 'aware' to becoming culturally 'proficient' (SNAICC, 2012).

Culture is "a collectively held set of attributes, which is dynamic and changing over time". (Dahl, 2001).

"[All] Children are born belonging to a culture, which is not only influenced by traditional practices, heritage and ancestral knowledge, but also by the experiences, values and beliefs of individual families and communities". (DEEWR, 2009, p. 13)

Definitions and insights about culture

Activity: What is culture?

Hold a reflective conversation using the definitions and insights about culture as stimulus. Create a table to document some of the 'commonsense' assumptions that are proposed in relation to the following aspects of Australian society:

- political
- economic
- social
- technological
- legal
- environmental

This activity is for service providers although could also be used for exploring culture with community. If you would like to do this with community, please read the section 'Getting to know each other' before undertaking this activity.

"Culture refers to the broad set of relationships, history, ways of knowing, codes of behaviours, beliefs, values and practices that together make up culture for families and communities. For non-Indigenous Australians, this also necessitates an awareness of the effects of dominant culture on minority cultures, and its impact on relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples" (Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, 2008).

Culture is most easily identifiable through experiences or engagement with "other" cultures, particularly through the observation of tangible differences, often in the form of material objects or observable practices. These observable manifestations of culture mask the depths of its embrace on people and the meanings they attribute to the world.

Cultural inequality

In a context where one or more cultures have had greater influence on political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental systems, the cultures of groups who have had less influence become marginalised at both macro and micro levels. Sometimes these processes are overt and intentional; for example, laws and policies that discriminate based on race or culturally motivated violence. However, many of the marginalising forces at work are very subtle and can go unnoticed by many members of dominant cultures. These can best be understood in terms of the use of language, meanings, processes, practices and interactions, both formal and informal, that are embedded so deeply into the dominant culture that they become taken-for-granted by its members.

When, in their past, people have experienced reinforcement of their culture and values, their belief that their world-view is simple 'common sense' was strengthened. Aboriginal perspectives, when they differ from, or conflict with, dominant cultural perspectives of what is 'common sense', can often be sidelined or disregarded in their entirety.

When past experiences have resulted in occasions where a person's culture has been challenged, devalued or marginalized by society, the impact of these experiences can lead to actions and beliefs that serve to:

a) actively resist dominant cultural norms and understandings
b) dilute, or give the appearance of the dilution, of culture through passive acceptance of the dominant culture;
c) meld culture through accepting, rejecting and/or merging of different cultural values and norms and/or;
d) subscribe to the dominant culture at the expense of traditional culture.

Rarely do these represent conscious choices, but nevertheless shape the experience of culture.

Being cognisant of the complexity and depth of cultural variation and fluidity within Aboriginal cultures is central to building relationships to support children's learning and development. Providing Aboriginal people with the space and opportunity to become teachers of their cultures and express themselves freely and openly as valued cultural people is important. Given that we do not begin on a level playing field, seeking to elevate the attention and value afforded to Aboriginal perspectives is a pre-requisite for building cultural competence amongst culturally diverse groups, with cultural proficiency as a fundamental goal.

On the following pages in this section two frameworks of cultural competence are explored. It is important to note that broadly the term ***cultural competence*** is used to describe the required skills, knowledge and attitudes that enable an individual to work effectively in culturally diverse environments. Cross' (1989) Cultural Competence Continuum identifies cultural proficiency as the furthest point along the Cultural Competence Continuum. Therefore, cultural proficiency is the most evolved state of cultural competence.

Cultural Competence Continuum

Cultural Destructiveness	Cultural Incapacity	Cultural Blindness	Cultural Pre-competence	Cultural Competence	Cultural Proficiency
'We are superior'	*'We take care of our own'*	*'All people are the same'*	*'We have policies in place'*	*'We engage in mutual adaption to benefit all'*	*'This is our frame of reference for all we do'*
Intentional attitudes policies & practices that are destructive to cultures and consequently to individuals within the Culture.	Lack of capacity to help minority clients or communities due to extremely biased beliefs and a paternal attitude toward those not of a mainstream culture.	The belief that helping approaches traditionally used by the dominant culture are universally applicable regardless of race or culture therefore ignoring cultural strengths and encouraging assimilation.	The desire to deliver quality services and a commitment to diversity indicated by employing minority staff, initiating training and recruiting minority members for organisational leadership, but lacking information on how to maximise these capacities. This is surface level engagement.	Acceptance and respect for difference continuing self assessment, careful attention to the dynamics of difference, continuous expansion of knowledge and resources and adaptation of services to better meet the needs of diverse populations.	Holding culture in high esteem. Seeking to add to the knowledge base of culturally competent practice by conducting research, influencing approaches to care, and improving relations between Cultures. Promotes self determination.
Practice Examples					
Overt racist behaviour towards clients, patients or fellow staff.	Covert racism and a paternal attitude that the service provider knows best.	Good practice comes from a one-size-fits all model. Culture doesn't matter.	Culture is a factor in service delivery, but is the responsibility of designated staff not everyone.	Accepting responsibility to reflect on one's own beliefs and practices to implement change.	Seeking to implement innovative culturally appropriate practice that empowers self and others.

Adapted from Cross, 1989.

Cultural awareness and cultural competence

The cultural competence continuum (Cross, 1989) provides a general framework for understanding the various 'levels' of cultural competence practiced by an individual or organisation. At the lowest end of the continuum is cultural destructiveness which can be imagined as the overt and oppressive marginalisation of one culture by another. At the other end of the continuum is cultural proficiency where cultural competence is embedded in every facet of personal, professional or organisational functioning (Hains et al, 2000). In many ways, achieving cultural proficiency is a culturally transformative process. It does not replace cultural diversity. However, it forms another cultural layer that provides the cross-cultural points of connection and a common cultural space for communication, understanding and relationship development.

"Cultural proficiency requires more than becoming culturally aware or practicing tolerance. It is the ability to identify and challenge one's own cultural assumptions, values and beliefs and to make a commitment to communicating at the cultural interface" SNAICC, 2012, p.1

Activity: Setting the scene for continuous reflection and improvement

a) Examine the cultural competence continuum. Against each stage in the continuum, talk about or write examples of how Aboriginal culture in the past and present has been impacted by values and behaviours that relate to each stage.

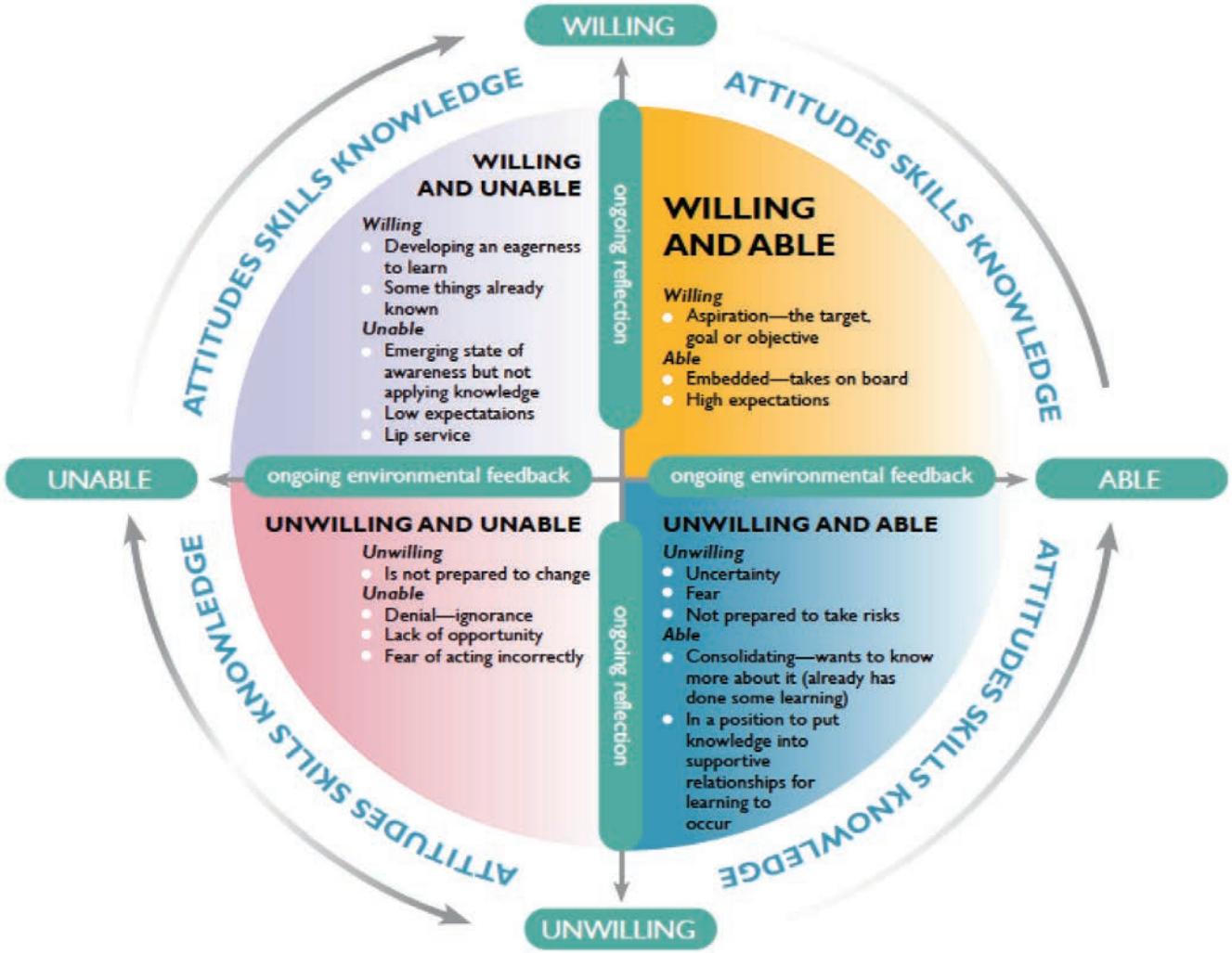
b) Identify some goals and activities that will assist you and/or your organisation to address gaps in your knowledge, policies and practice that relate to the advancement of cultural pre-competence, cultural competence and cultural proficiency in your context. Note, the first step towards cultural proficiency is recognising gaps and areas of weakness. Completing this task honestly and reflectively, in and of itself, represents a strength.

Core skills and the journey to cultural competence

It is important to understand that cultural competence is an *ongoing process* of examination of personal beliefs on an individual level and monitoring practices and processes on an organisational level. In an operational sense, organisations that are culturally competent or proficient integrate and embed standards, policies and practices into their everyday functioning and they 'live' or enact these through their work.

When thinking about an individual's ability to become culturally competent, Anand (2000) identifies a set of core skills that are needed to interact in a culturally competent manner. These include:

- Being aware of one's own culture, values, and biases.
- Being aware of and breaking down one's own biases and understanding how these may affect interactions with others.
- Having culture-specific knowledge.
- Knowing the institutional barriers that prevent some populations from accessing resources.
- Having the ability to build strong cross-cultural relationships and to be at ease with difference.
- Demonstrating flexibility and the ability to adapt to diverse environments.
- Demonstrating the ability and willingness to be an ally to individuals who are different from oneself.
- Possessing effective communication skills across cultures.
- Having the ability to mediate cross-cultural conflicts.



Source:
Educators Belonging, Being & Becoming: Educator's Guide to the Australian Early Years Learning Framework, p.26.

Early childhood settings and the journey to cultural competence

In the early childhood sphere, the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) (DEEWR, 2009) references the importance of cultural competence and requires educators to focus on and build culturally inclusive practice. The EYLF also asserts that educators have an obligation to develop the skills, knowledge and attitudes to support the inclusion of Aboriginal and other culturally diverse groups in educational settings. Further, the EYLF identifies that cultural competence needs to be applied on three levels to become embedded:

Level 1 is at the ***Individual level*** characterised by:

- **Interpersonal relationships** = *I come to this relationship as a person first.*
- **Knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and behaviours** = *I take the time to examine and reflect on my values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours and I invest in the learning I need to do to enact culturally competent practice. I then come to the relationship as a professional.*

Level 2 is at the ***Service level***: **interpersonal and intra-service**, characterised by:

- **Management and operational frameworks that encompass policies, procedures, vision statements, practices and expectations** = *all families are valued and supported at the service level*
- **The voices of children, families and community** = *these are reflected in the decisions, policies, practices and operations of the early childhood setting*

Level 3 is at the ***Systems level: interpersonal and inter-services***, characterised by:

- **How services relate to and respect the rest of the community, agencies, Elders, local community protocols, etc** = *how well an early childhood setting is connected to the community, is reflective of the community and reaches into the community to build partnerships.*

The EYLF's Learning Journey of Cultural Competence examines an individual's experience of becoming culturally competent (DEEWR, 2010). This diagram illustrates the complexity and the potential push-pull of willingness and ability that impacts on an individual's journey and acquisition of skills and knowledge to inform attitudes.

Getting to know each other

“Don’t just barge in here...you ask. You wouldn’t like anyone barging into your home without asking or knowing.”

“I find them ignorant. They might just want to help but they just don’t ask us. We have protocols, just like other communities outside of Bagot have protocols too. We get it all the time...all the time.”

Getting to know each other

Where you are positioned on the cultural competence continuum and your reasons behind wanting to, or having to, engage with Aboriginal people, will impact on your capacity to engage with Aboriginal people and on their willingness to engage with you. It is important to remember that Aboriginal people are frequently approached for their input on a variety of matters, although have often experienced disappointment in how their views are represented or have been incorporated into decisions or practice.

When seeking to engage with Aboriginal families and communities it is respectful to first ask whom you should approach and find out when it might be convenient and appropriate to do so.

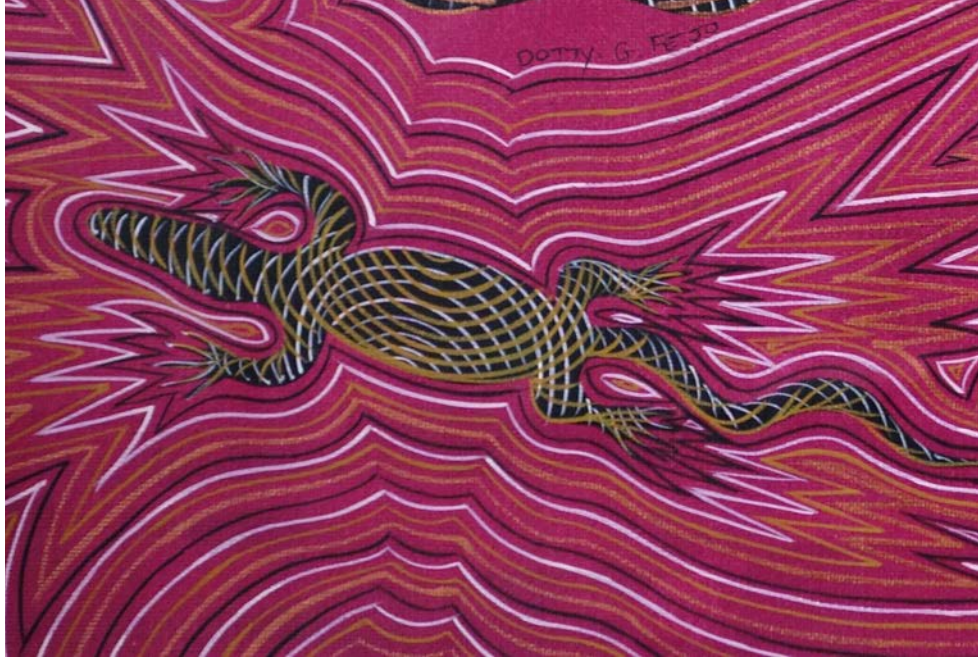
Understanding and respecting time

The notion of time, the expression of time and the value we place on it varies across cultures. In mainstream culture time is given value in the context of scheduling work, appointments and social gatherings. In many of these contexts, particularly work, value is often placed on punctuality and the efficiency with which business transactions occur. In mainstream work environments, systemic influences create many of the expectations and timeframes within which people must work. Common understandings of notions such as the 'school term' or the 'work week' are driven by policy, legislation and mainstream norms. This can often create a tension between the drive to achieve the outcome as efficiently as possible and the time required to build the trusting relationships that enable the outcome to be achieved.

For Aboriginal people, time may be expressed and understood quite differently. Flexible timeframes are important as family and community responsibilities often take priority. Time is also needed to get to know a person, and to establish the trusting relationship needed to work together and achieve outcomes.

When beginning to build relationships it is important to understand and accept that meetings and other arrangements could be changed completely with little or no notice owing to the emergence of a range of community issues; for example, 'sorry business' including a death, funeral or mourning period.

Generally most (Aboriginal) people do not see time like an arrow... that you are heading somewhere, on your way up. There is no notion like that in Aboriginal psychology and thinking. This immediately separates it from Western time in which you orient towards some end . – (Graham, cited in Adams 2009)



A friendly G'day, we are all Australian! Just a smile and a friendly hello is all we want.

There are always people who sit there saying bad things and talking about Bagot in a bad way. They're the ones who have never stepped a foot in the place. But people who really enjoy being in our community, they come in and spend time with us talking, like you mob.

Beginning the conversation

A good way to begin a conversation is to talk about who you are and where you are from. Non-Aboriginal professionals often describe themselves in terms of their professional role and career history. This may be related to the professional role they are playing when they meet Aboriginal people, although this may also be a reflection of mainstream cultural values that afford status according to job title, professional position and career achievement.

This may not resonate with Aboriginal people whose identity is tied closely to family and country and whose status is linked to age, knowledge, family roles and relationships. Talking about your own family and where you are from provides an equal footing through which to begin a conversation. Once you have opened the door to conversation, two questions can be posed that invite families to share their identities, stories and histories with you.

- Where's country?
- Who's family?

Take the time to listen and don't be afraid to ask questions.

Learning about the history

History is important for all of us as it shapes the way we think about the world. Taking the time to learn about people's histories and share your own provides the foundation for shared perspectives and understanding. If I know who you are and what you have experienced in your life, I can better understand your perspective on the world today.

Over from Paspaley, the old Star Theatre, mum used to go there for free sometimes. And the Nightcliff theatre was where the Nightcliff Woollies is now, it was a drive in.

Yeah Mr. Richardson had a bakery in town near Cavanagh Street, like a shop there. Richardson mob, had a bus and used to drop us all off there every morning, some to clean the commonwealth bank, clean the floors and stuff. There used to be a camp there near Paspaley, a quarters for single men. Tommy, he was in the Town hall
– Tommy Lyons and Tom Harris.

The clinic on Bagot used to be called Ward 11, with nurses quarters and all, it was a clinic. Them nuns worked there that lived at 2 1/2 mile. Old clinics all covered in long grass now. They used to come down from the hospital and look after the sick person.

"Must be early 60's they bulldozed everything. They had an administrator, Mr. Wilson, Mick ivory, Old man Harvey, and that cheeky woman we used to have, maybe '65? Lovegrove was the last one. One or two years maybe, they keep changing them. The government officers who watched over things here - They were alright! They alright we had no problem at all. They used to cook some tucker. That stopped because the shop closed down. Every year we used to have Christmas dinner. We had Administration, a manager, a storeman, a gardener. Aussie Jackson, Big Bill, Magdaline and Samson. That was back in the 60's. We had everything. Communal gardens, with bananas, tomatoes, sweet potatoes. We ate it all ourselves. Watermelons, everything. That whole block was full. We had a school garden for the school kids, paw paws, pineapples, cabbage, everything."

Setting the foundations for relationships

To set the foundation for relationship development, the following principles should be applied openly and equally amongst all participants, understood as people, not professionals.

1. We all come to the table with knowledge that is equally valuable
2. We all come to the table with children at the centre of our view
3. We all come to the table prepared to learn and take turns to teach
4. We recognise that our priorities may differ and commit to developing a shared understanding of what we are seeking to achieve together

Yarning

Yarning is pivotal to human interactions and relationships in Aboriginal culture and communities (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010). It is a foundation for communication and is an effective tool and approach for working with Aboriginal people.

What is Yarning?

- Yarning is a culturally safe facilitation approach to working with Aboriginal individuals and groups
- It is a form of story telling that is aligned with how Aboriginal people learn, teach and make sense of the world
- Yarning can occur informally/socially or purposefully (with a particular goal or objective in mind)
- Yarning is an effective tool to build trust and assist in the establishment of relationships
- Once relationships have developed, yarning provides a means to achieve shared understanding and common goals

Types of Yarning

There are 2 main types of yarning that might be used in working with Aboriginal people. They are:

Informal or social yarning

This type of yarning is good for:

- Building Trust
- Establishing relationships
- Maintaining connections
- Teaching and learning

Purposeful yarning

This type of yarning enables:

- Exploration of a particular issue
- Learning about a particular topic
- Gathering or sharing information
- Teaching and learning

Purposeful yarning cannot occur without established relationships. There are some important things to understand about yarning:

- Yarning has its own convention and style as a type of conversation and is not a straightforward question and answer process
- Yarning requires a lead from behind facilitation style and a relaxed and non demanding approach
- Yarning takes time and is not time limited
- Yarning can sometimes be meandering as stories weave in and out of topic
- There are protocols in relation to participation, especially in relation to Elders and gender

Activity: Professional group discussion

If you don't already have an understanding of yarning, how might you learn about it?

Who might you talk to?

What resources might you gather?

How can you create opportunities to see other professionals yarning so you can learn from observation?

Talking points

The following questions can be asked as a means to establish and embed an equal footing for on-going conversations and relationship development, with recognition that broader socio-cultural systems bring into play a set of power dynamics regardless of intent. It is important to have awareness of these and be willing to discuss them openly to establish a 'level playing field'.

The questions allow all parties in the conversation to identify what is important to them, what they would like to get out of the relationship and, importantly, the things they already have in common. As a group, take the time to explore these questions and record thoughts and ideas.


Nikon

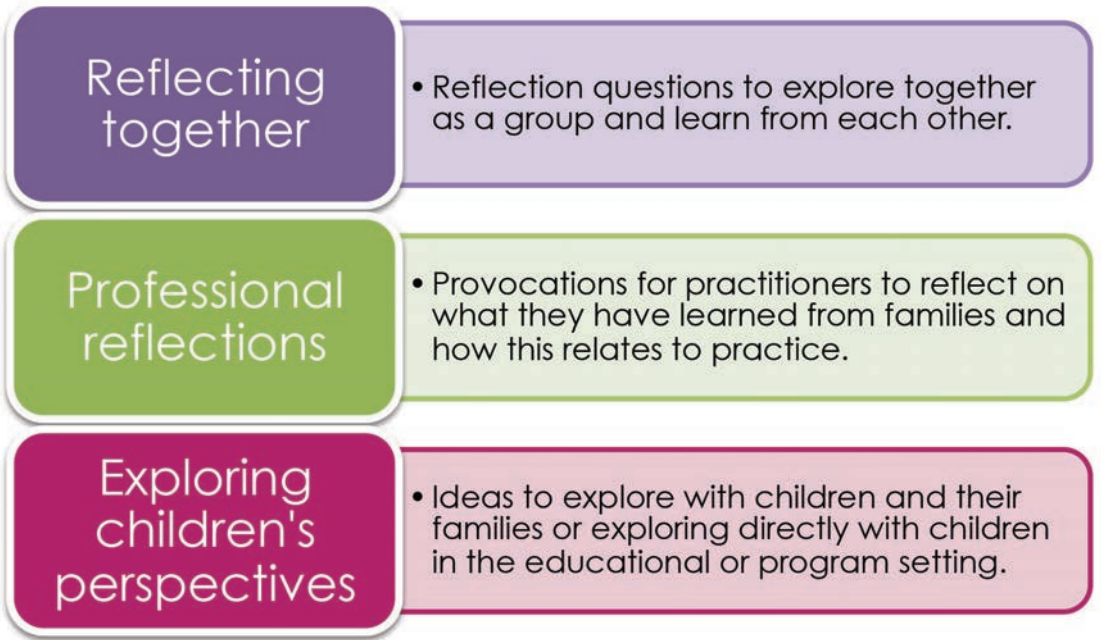
Provocations for practice

“It was good to share our stories with him and his stories with us. He reckons he’ll go home with real learning of our culture!”

Provocations for practice

Once relationships have developed to the point that people know each other's stories and have established a shared purpose for working together, the opportunity to delve deeper into the identities and experiences that influence children's learning becomes possible.

The following *Provocations for Practice* have been designed to build on established relationships to promote deeper conversations, exploration of ideas and reflection on key areas where cultural variations emerge and frequently impact on children's capacity to transition effectively from home to early learning or school based settings. The provocations ask for exploration and reflection at a personal and professional level. There are also questions and suggestions for engaging children and families in exploring the themes. These are broadly aimed at school aged children and can be adapted for children of different ages.



How to use this section

The images, quotes and perspectives outlined in this section have been drawn from the experiences of families living on Bagot Community. Additional quotes and images have been drawn from other sources to add further stimulus for conversation. For each topic, reflection questions are posed to provide a platform for reflection and both ways learning. These include:

Exploring home: Children's primary microsystem

Home

The home is the primary environment through which the world is shaped and understood through a child's eyes. The people in the home, their practices, beliefs and values are what a child comes to understand as the 'norm'. Prior to engaging widely with other social and cultural contexts, a child has nothing against which to compare the home. It is a child's first universe and plays an essential role in shaping a child's culture. It sets the foundations for the deep-seated values, beliefs, practices and "ways of knowing" a child will carry into other environments in the future.

Reflecting Together

What does home mean to you?

How do you know you are home?

Who is there?

What happens?

How do you feel?

Do you have more than one home?

When you think of home do you think of place or people, or both?

I have lived on Bagot all my life. I'm 62 now. I came as a tiny baby from Belyuen. My dad sent us on a boat over here, me and my brothers and sisters... Been here since then. I got a house. Everywhere used to be scrub. I used to live in a Sydney Williams house. One big block, and share the showers. One big pot for boiling clothes, no washing machines back then.

Professional Reflection

How are families' homes reflected in your environment?

Exploring Children's perspectives

Ask children to draw their home(s). Talk to them about what home looks like, how it feels and who is there. What is important to you about home?

Family

At the core of the home environment for most children is 'family'. Family comprises the primary set of social relationships through which children learn who they are and where they fit, or 'belong', in the world. Family interactions provide the primary context for children to test and rehearse their language, behaviour and ideas and, through this process, learn what is acceptable and the expectations they are required to meet. It is also in the comfort of family that children learn to feel safe and secure in their world.

They bring me their kids. My house is never empty, except when I'm not there. I've only got 2 kids, but I've raised a total of 35 kids! All the kids grow up but they don't forget me.

Reflecting Together

What is family to you?

Who is in your family?

What are their roles in relation to your life or your children's lives?

How do you know what to teach your children?

How did you learn?

What did you learn and what do you carry with you from your childhood childhood lessons?

Who taught you?

Professional Reflection

How do you learn about the families with whom you work?

How are different families represented in your environment?

Exploring Children's perspectives

Ask children to draw their family tree and tell you about their family. Talk to them about the similarities and differences between your family and theirs. Have the children share these with each other.

I look after my grandchildren, I don't have a choice, it's what we do. Them white fellas say get out of here, you're 18, go live your own life. We don't do that.

Culture

As children engage in family interactions they go through a process of "enculturation". This process is rarely obvious to family members or other members of the community who share a family's cultural norms. Culture presents to children, and to members of their family, as simple "common sense". Culture is embedded in daily practices, rituals, rules, relationships and expectations and underpins the logic that is applied to why things are a certain way or get done a certain way. Culture provides the footings for a child's taken-for-granted ways of being, doing and knowing.

Reflecting Together

What are the ways of your culture?

How do you know these?

How do these influence your actions and interactions with others?

Mum came over when she was 14. Mum was promised to someone. She said she had to learn the white man way of living. She had to put on clothes. I said "What you wear back home mum?" She said "nothing". I said, "Really?"

Professional Reflection

How do you learn about the cultures of the families you work with?

How are families' cultures represented in your environment?

How do you include or exclude cultural groups?

Exploring Children's perspectives

Talk to children about your culture and the norms that exist in ways that they can understand. Ask them about important family traditions that they have experienced and how they connect them to their family and community. Explore other cultures with the children in your group to help them see that there are many different cultures in your community.

Traditionally men were hunters, and the women made the babies. Now men don't go hunting, only out bush communities. Not here. A lot of people, they miss the bush tucker. They have to go out home to find it. We can't find it here no more.

Values

Every culture is underpinned by a value system that shapes children's understandings of right and wrong, appropriate and inappropriate, acceptable and unacceptable and the variations in between. These value systems also invite preferences and priorities to emerge about what should be valued. In short, a child's culture, transmitted primarily through family interactions in the early years, shapes his or her understanding of what is of greater or lesser importance in his or her world.

Reflecting Together

How do your values shape and guide your behaviour?

Do you believe that there is only one set of values that is 'right'?

Are you open to different perspectives?

How do you respond when faced with values that differ from your own?

Professional Reflection

How do you accommodate different values of the people you work with?

How do differing values impact on your professional interactions with people?

If you haven't already done so, work through the activities about culture in section 1. How culturally competent do you believe your practice to be?

Exploring Children's perspectives

Ask children to draw what is important to them and their family members. Help children explore the values that are important and share these within the group.

Ceremony and sorry business. Our kids need time off school for this – the school needs to understand sometimes we need more than a week or longer, it takes time to go home and stuff....
We know each other. You mob different from ours. We go to the place or that persons place, get together like olden days, we get together in family place for one or two weeks like that, we mourn like that. We can keep the body for a week or more, family get together and ceremony comes like that, sometime ceremony carry on for a month or more. Might be whole family, country men, ceremony man, we sit down and proper settle down before we move on. You mob different. We have long sorry business.... We rather keep them home till we satisfied. I keep my grandchildren home for one or two months, not a few days.

Respect

Children develop an appreciation of respect with reference to their cultural value system. Families frequently encourage children to develop a *sense* (ie: internal appreciation) of respect through teaching children how to *demonstrate* respect for what is important through their behaviour and interactions with others and their environment. Through 'enacting' respectful behaviour when encouraged and reminded, children reinforce and solidify their understanding of the cultural value system at work in their home environment.

Reflecting Together

Thinking about your own childhood, how was respect demonstrated in your family?

Were you told explicitly to respect certain people and things or did you learn in other ways?

So about this Ceremony - for Ceremony we just leave – sometimes 2 or 3 weeks, other times 2 or 3 months. When the men go, we don't normally talk about men's Ceremony. Women don't get involved, we sometimes might do the cooking or things like that, but we don't go near it all. When women have ceremony, women have them where no men are allowed to go. Men shouldn't be listening or talking about it either. The young women and men learn about respect and how to take care of themselves and others.

Professional Reflection

What are the different ways respect is demonstrated in your professional life?

At times when you have felt disrespected as a professional, what made you feel that way?

How did you respond?

Exploring Children's perspectives

Ask adults in the group to role play different scenarios to demonstrate respectful and disrespectful behaviour. These could be culturally based to explore how respect can vary by culture. Encourage children to come up with their own scenarios and perform for the group. Use this as a stimulus for discussion about the meaning of respect and how it might mean different things in different cultural contexts.

It's about teaching respect to kids, respecting your elders and also respecting culture and traditions...work is important and family is important We think about what we want to achieve, get them to think about what they want to achieve (Hammond 2009 cited in SNAICC 2010 p.72).

Trust

Children learn to trust in the home through their relationships with family members, the experiences that stem from these, and the cues that are provided by family members when interacting with others. In situations where families find trust difficult because of experiences of the past, children may also develop this orientation regardless of their own life experiences.

Nobody at the school talked to me. We never went out, to the cinemas and that, just the beach. Never trusted myself to take them that far, not knowing what's going to happen.

Reflecting Together

Thinking about your childhood, who did you trust?

What were the characteristics and qualities of these people whom you trusted when you were a child?

Thinking about the people you trust now, when did the trust form?

Did you trust them immediately (eg: based on family relationships, their behaviour or their roles in society such as police or teachers) or did it take time?

In what places do you trust that your children will be safe and happy (eg: with family, at the doctor's, in school, at the park, etc)?

Why do we trust some people and places and not others?

Professional Reflection

Are there differences between personal and professional trust?

How can you engender trust in the families or children you work with?

How do you overcome an inherent mistrust Aboriginal people may have in 'the system'?

How do you gauge when you are trusted professionally?

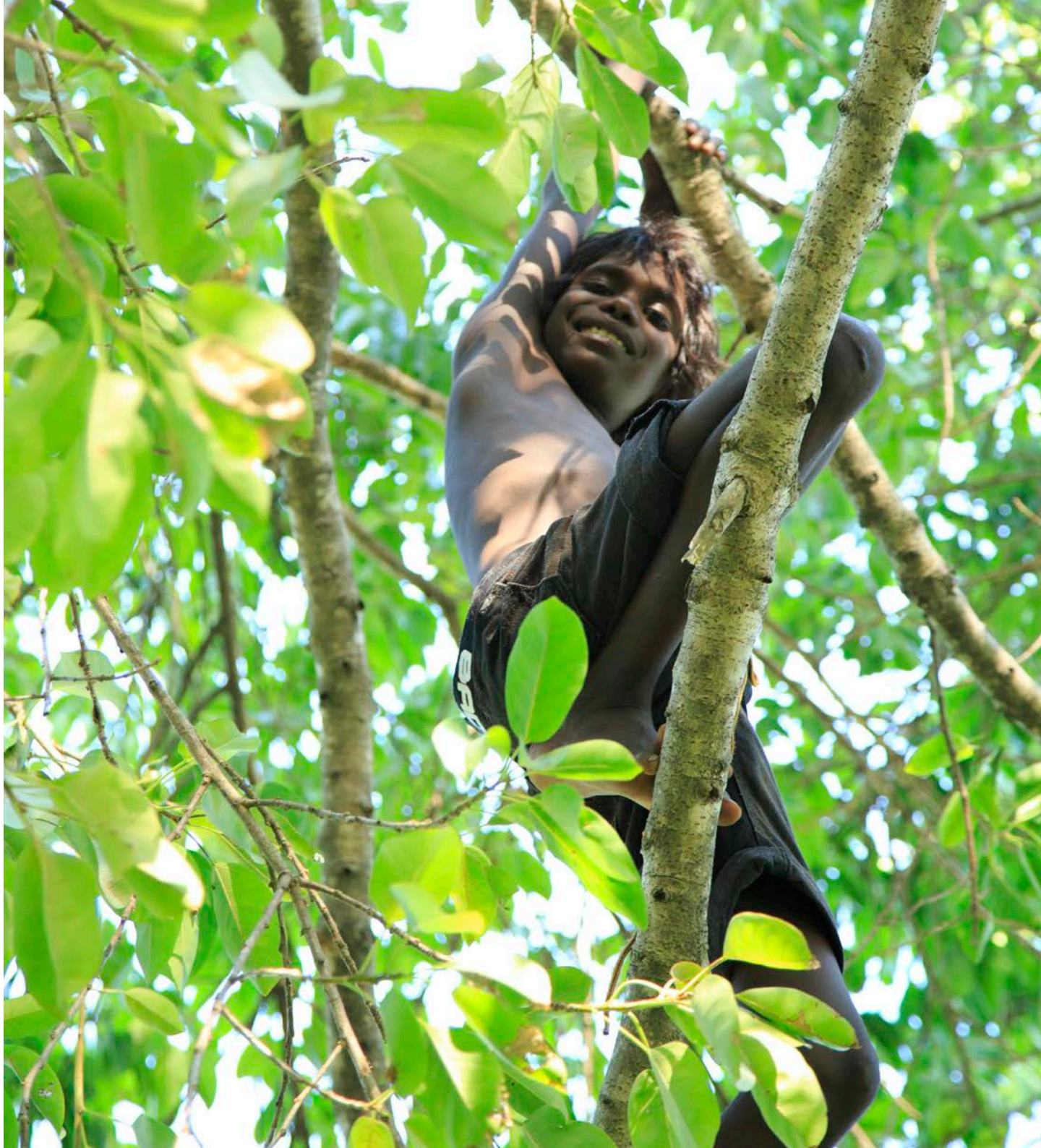
Exploring Children's perspectives

Talk to children about the feelings of trust. How do they know when they can trust someone? What does that feel like? Through exploration you can help children to understand what trust *feels* like.

Lots of kids at Bagot School when I was young – it closed in '67 before Ludmilla School opened. Life was good then. My memory gone but I think it was Mr and Mrs Crawford then. I used to run away from school, we used to get the Cane! But light one. They taught us to talk and to sing. I was naughty naughty naughty!

Autonomy, safety and security

Through lessons that impress 'common sense' understandings of culture, values, respect and trust, a child's sense of autonomy, safety and security is engendered. Initially, a child is only cognisant of his or her own existence and the home environment in which this existence takes shape. Through engagement with the environment and family, however, children develop an instinct about risk, and the boundaries within which they need to operate to keep themselves safe and secure.



Reflecting Together

How do you know you are safe?

What are the cues that alert you to the idea that you may not be safe?

How has your childhood shaped these understandings?

Professional Reflection

In your work with families and children, how do you create a safe and secure environment that promotes the development of autonomy in children?

How do you accommodate risk-taking behaviour while keeping children safe?

What boundaries do you place on children's freedom?

Exploring Children's perspectives

Similar to trust, safety and security for children is often a *feeling*. Get the children to draw what safety and security look like to them and talk about the feelings that accompany their visual expression of it. Can you see the feelings in their picture?

We used to have Skate World down Nightcliff, somewhere to go. They tore Skate World down. Skate World was safe, it had security, and parents used to pick their kids up when it closed.

In the 50's and 60's it was safe, people used to sleep with their windows and doors open and unlocked.

Transitions: From home to education (from one microsystem to another)

The educational setting

When children experience their first day outside of the home, they enter a new world. The familiarities of the home environment and family interactions are, to a greater or lesser extent, removed. They may experience feelings of excitement and anticipation combined with fear and a sense of displacement. Their ability to cope with their new world is contingent on the similarities they can identify between home and family and the new environment and people they engage with.

A successful transition is defined...as one that:

- enables children to feel comfortable, connected and engaged with their school environment and community;
- facilitates readiness to achieve early learning outcomes; and
- promotes, amongst parents and families, a feeling of engagement in the school experience and school community.

(SNAICC 2013, P.5)

When [our]...children go to school they take their family with them. They take their skills, their knowledge, their beliefs... You don't just leave all of that at the door. You take it with you, so you can't change and be someone else as you enter the classroom (Fleer, 2004 cited in SNAICC 2013, p.20)

Aboriginal children do not come to school [or early childhood centre] as individuals, but should be seen as part of a complex family and community system...The teacher [or educator] is not only expected to think of the child as 'the family', but to recognise and maintain the obligation associated with the concept of family. In having an Aboriginal child in an early childhood centre [or school], staff are accepting the family unit (not an individual child) and the cultural obligations associated with this responsibility. (Fleer, 2004 cited in SNAICC 201,3 p.21)

Reflecting Together

What was your first experience as a child leaving family for education?

What is your memory of it?

To whom did you look for reassurance?

How did you feel?

Professional Reflection

What do you do to see this experience through a child's eyes?

What do you do to see this experience through a family's eyes?

How can you make this a positive experience for children and families?

Exploring Children's perspectives

Who would you like to have with you on your first day?

What will they do with you?

How will you get to know your teacher?

Who will help you make friends?

We know that Aboriginal children begin school equipped with a wealth of strengths, knowledge and experiences. With careful nurturing, these can be critical building blocks from which to engage Aboriginal children in the transition process and build a positive foundation for their future education (SNAICC 2013 p.7).

Broadening social relationships

When children enter their first formal educational setting, the key framework they have through which to understand relationships is underpinned by their experience of family. In the home, the roles, relationships and interactions within the family have already shaped a child's thinking, language and behaviour according to the family's expectations and codes of acceptable practice. If a child can identify similar roles, relationships and interactions in the new context, a child is able to connect the home and educational settings and comfortably locate himself/herself in both. When a child is unable to do this, he/she feels unsafe and displaced and may be unable to cope within the new space.

Reflecting Together

How do you create a sense of belonging for yourself in new environments?

When the major aspects of children's lives intersect through strong connections and understandings, and these understandings are incorporated into planning for children's learning, children are much more likely to succeed and have a strong sense of belonging. (EYLF Educator's Guide, 2009, p.17)

Professional Reflection

How do you invite families into your professional space?

Do the children you teach recognise how you are connected to their families?

Do the children see the people in the learning environment as a family?

Exploring Children's perspectives

Families, educators and teachers work together to assist children to draw a family tree reflecting the roles and relationships in the family and educational settings. How do the trees interconnect?

Play-based learning is a context for learning through which children organise and make sense of their social worlds, as they engage actively with people, objects and representations (Early Years Learning Framework, 2009, p.6)

Cultural intersections

Inevitably, every setting outside a child's home exposes the child to variations in culture. In addition to adapting to cultural variations stemming from the ethnicity of educators, teachers and peers, children transitioning into formal educational settings must be able to learn to operate within the organisational and systemic cultural environment. A child's level of familiarity with at least some of the cultural practices, rules, rituals and expectations in these settings, influences his or her ability to orient to the new cultural context and become culturally competent in the learning setting.

We gotta live to society, the Aboriginal way and the European way.
We have to meet halfway and bridge the gap.

Beginning school [or early childhood centre] can bring particular challenges for Aboriginal children, as they strive to reconcile different home and school environments and cultures. Transition programs must recognise and appropriately respond to this (SNAICC 2013, p. 12).

Traditionally much of the knowledge and language associated with the land would have been explained to children as they walked through the land (Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team (2002) p.69).

Our School Motto "Together we can achieve anything", demonstrates our commitment to being a true community school built on an atmosphere where everyone belongs. Our student population comes from the local area, the Defence Forces and the Bagot Community. This gives our school a rich diversity of cultures (Ludmilla Primary School website).

Reflecting Together

Is your own culture reflected in your workplace?

How do you navigate cultural differences that you experience in different settings?

Professional Reflection

What are the cultural practices, rules, rituals and expectations you have of children in your professional setting?

How are these different from those in their home environments?

Exploring Children's perspectives

Talk to children about the learning culture and the norms that exist in ways that they can understand. Tell stories about important traditions and rituals that happen in the educational setting. Invite families to share their knowledge about their own experiences of learning traditions. Explore different learning settings around the world and talk about the similarities and differences.

English language is the best knowledge they can teach. If you teach them English we are better in their eyes. It will enrich their lives, and we can always speak and live in harmony. That was always a dream of mine since I was a kid.

Intersecting values

In the new or varied cultural context of the learning environment, different value systems at play can create tensions for a child. A child must negotiate between the value systems that operate in the home, those that are specific to the new learning environment and the broader socio-cultural value systems that interplay in the learning space. This involves more than learning new sets of values. A child must also be able to assess when and where different value systems come into play.

Reflecting Together

How do you behave differently in different contexts such as home, work, sports, recreation, etc?

How do you behave differently when playing different roles (eg: parent, child, spouse, professional, volunteer, etc)?

How do you know how to behave in the different contexts and roles?

Professional Reflection

How do you support children to learn about the value systems that govern the learning environment?

How much do you know about the value systems that children bring from home?

Are there any tensions?

Exploring Children's perspectives

Draw pictures of the home and learning environments. Help children identify the differences that exist in their different worlds. Eg: "At home I can..." ; "At school I can..."

My mum and dad speak to us all the time. They taught me and my children. Education is a big one. To learn to speak. It's hard cause our kids miss so much school as they go away for so long for sorry business and ceremony, when they get back they have to catch up.

Intersecting forms of respect

As children attempt to engage with and master different value-systems across the educational and home-based settings, there is often an expectation in each setting that respect will be demonstrated appropriately. As principles and practices associated with respect are intimately tied to value systems that ascribe what and who is important, children can experience challenges in traversing the home and learning environments in the beginning. If these challenges are not successfully navigated, a child can appear to lack respect in one or both environments.

There are...occasions on which the child will vent anger against a mother and, rather than seeing these instances of disrespect to be severely punished, the adults laugh them off and, in fact, tend to admire the child sticking up for [his/her] rights (Hamilton, 1981 p.100).

Reflecting Together

Thinking about people you respect, how did this respect develop?

How do roles in our society determine the respect people are granted?

A school uniform is more than clothing. It symbolises respect and belonging in the school community.

Professional Reflection

What are your expectations in relation to children showing you respect?

How do you show respect for children?

Would children recognise this as respect?

Exploring Children's perspectives

Talk to children about the ways in which you respect them and make explicit what you do to show them respect.

Having children who trust the teacher, who are keen to be with the teacher and who respect and respond positively to the teacher, provides a solid base for children starting school. This needs to be matched by teachers who have a similar trust and respect for the children, their knowledge and understandings and their ability to become successful school students. This requires a conscious effort on the part of the teacher to engage in interactions that build such trust and respect. (Dockett et al. 2008 cited in SNAICC 2013, p 18).

Building trust

The degree of trust a child has in a new learning environment has already been influenced by their family relationships, including the history and experiences of family members. The interactions that take place in the new learning environment, between children and educators and between educators and families can play a significant role in breaking down or reinforcing relationships of trust or mistrust. Successfully navigating the home and learning environments is contingent on relationships between the broader family and education professionals.

Reflecting Together

Think about institutions in our society (eg: government departments, banks, universities, hospitals). Are they places you trust?

How do you determine which institutions are trustworthy?

Where did you learn these principles?

Professional Reflection

Thinking broadly about educational systems and institutions, how do they engender trust or mistrust?

What factors or personal experiences might influence whether a person has trust in a formal learning setting?

How do you engender trust with children and families in your learning environment?

Exploring Children's perspectives

Tell children a story about your childhood that includes someone you trusted and illustrates why. Bring any photos or other artifacts that you have that represent a trusting relationship in your childhood.

I was the only black kid in my class, all the others were mixed and European. I used to ask the teacher why you not ask me. I know the answer. You think cause I'm black I don't know the answer, that's why you don't ask me. She said "Yes". Well I said next time you ask me and I will know the answer, and she did. I blew her out of the water. I was really good at Maths and English, and I loved history and learning about other cultures, what clothes they wore and their ceremony and what they eat.

If you take them and give them to white people like they used to, they'll soon forget their culture, their stories, their dances, their language, they lose it all.

Autonomy, safety and security beyond the home

A child's sense of autonomy, safety and security is necessarily interrupted upon leaving the home and transitioning into a more formal learning setting. The safety, security and boundaries offered by the "common sense" world of the home environment are challenged by the differences in the new world where different understandings of risk and autonomy are applied and new sets of boundaries are put into place. For a child, these can sometimes represent increased freedom with the expectation of increased self-regulation, and at other times may appear to be more restrictive on their thoughts and behaviours compared with the home environment.

Aboriginal children...are often very socially mature as a consequence of their earlier experience of independence and autonomy. They have culturally enhanced capabilities to undertake self directed, self paced learning towards goals that are clearly understood and have been accepted by them (Howard 1994, p. 9).

Reflecting Together

Thinking about your own childhood, what freedoms did you have at home that did not exist at school and vice versa?

If you have children, have you afforded them the same freedoms? What influences this?

Professional Reflection

If you have children, what are the differences between the freedoms they may enjoy and those enjoyed by children in your educational setting?

How do you know what freedoms and boundaries children in your learning environment have at home?

Exploring Children's perspectives

Explore with children the rules of home and the learning environment. Have the children compare these with each other and ask them to describe the reasons for the rules. Where possible, promote children's sense of agency by giving them a say in the rules that exist.

The important aspects of childrearing...including encouraging autonomy by expecting that children would be self-reliant, able to make decisions for themselves regarding their basic needs, naturally observant and practically competent, and prepared to seek help from their peers as much as from adults (Malin 1997, cited in SNAICC 2013, p 73).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