



MY TIME, OUR PLACE

FRAMEWORK FOR SCHOOL AGE
CARE IN AUSTRALIA



FACTSHEET 2: CULTURAL COMPETENCE - ESTABLISHING WHERE YOU ARE

School aged children grow up in a globally connected world - being able to communicate across continents in an instant, travel to far-flung places and access information at the tip of their fingers.

In addition, they live in a multicultural nation with one in four of Australia's 22 million people either born overseas or having a parent who was born overseas. We speak over 260 languages and identify with more than 270 ancestries (*Australian Multicultural Policy*, 2010).

As educators we recognise that diversity contributes to the richness of our society. By promoting different ways of knowing and being we nurture children's wellbeing and development (see principle in *My Time, Our Place – Framework for School Age Care in Australia - Respect for Diversity – p 11*).

As an educator, identifying and extending your level of cultural competence is the basis for the creation of an environment that values and celebrates different languages, knowledge, traditions and practices.

WHAT IS CULTURE?

One description that may be useful: '... a framework in which people live their lives based on their experiences, skills and knowledge' (University of South Australia). Another: 'Culture can be defined as what we create beyond our biology. Not given to us, but made by us' (Williams, in MacNaughton, 2003, p. 14).

WHERE DOES CULTURAL COMPETENCE START?

According to the *Framework for School Age Care, My Time Our Place* (p15): 'Educators who are culturally competent respect multiple cultural ways of knowing, seeing and living, celebrate the benefits of diversity and have an ability to understand and honour differences'.



Establishing your level of competence can be facilitated by critical analysis and knowledge of three core elements (adapted from the *Cultural Intelligence framework* by Linn Van Dyne) in the context of culture:

You

- *Understanding* of your own culture;
- *Attitude* towards culture and diversity;
- *Ability* to make sense of and adapt to culturally diverse experiences.

Your Environment

- *Knowledge* of cultural universals, similarities and differences;
- *Experience* with diverse languages and cultures;
- *Information available* on values, traditions, rules of expression, social interactions and parenting practice

Your Professional Framework

- *Promote* cultural awareness;
- *Encourage* positive attitudes towards cultural differences;
- *Facilitate* knowledge acquisition of cultural practices and world views;
- *Model* communication and interaction across cultures.

CHALLENGING YOUR CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE, AWARENESS, ATTITUDES AND VALUES!

Personal reflection is a good starting point to identify your current ability to create environments that celebrate and reflect diversity. Some questions you can ask yourself for self-reflection could be:

How would you describe your own culture?

- The beliefs and traditions you have developed.
- Practices that are an important part of your life.
- Your dreams and goals.

How do you feel about the following?

- Variances in cultural and religious practice.
- Differences in the gender roles of various societies.
- Diverse arrangements of family structures and support networks.

How do you respond when you are confronted with a view or experience that is unfamiliar to you?

- Doing something a different way to what you are used to, like ordering documents in a different filing system, driving a car with manual rather than automatic transmission;
- Changing your opinion on something after hearing another side, seeing something that contradicts your beliefs;
- Spending an extended period of time on your own with people that you do not know and who do not speak your language.

ENRICHING AND SHARING YOUR KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE

Working within your team, share your personal position on various subjects and use this knowledge to discover how this impacts your work environment.

In your staff meetings explore an understanding of each other's personal position. By acknowledging similarities and differences in your team, you are at the starting point of embodying cultural competence in your everyday practice.

Reflective and culturally competent practice requires awareness of your own personal position and the ability to adapt and shift this position. As with children, having a safe environment in which to practice and explore is important. Deliberating with your colleagues about how to facilitate, model and implement culturally competent practice is imperative. You need to feel comfortable with having your personal position challenged and be able to negotiate changes. If you are uncomfortable with some families and children and you may not model the practices we want to achieve, which are openness towards and acceptance of different ways of knowing and being.



The following example of initial reflections for developing cultural competence comes from Manunda OSHC (Darwin, Northern Territory):

As a center we decided that what had been done in the past to tick Quality Assurance boxes in regards to culture was not relevant to our philosophy or personal beliefs. We wanted to work together to identify what our current practices were and how we could improve our day-to-day practices. There was no point just doing once-off activities, we wanted to embed understanding and acceptance of all cultures and backgrounds into everything that we do with children.

We began by thinking about our own beliefs, values and attitudes. How that impacted on our interaction with children and families. We surveyed children about what they knew about their family culture and background, about what they believed was important and how special it was that we were all different.

We discovered that there were 27 different cultural backgrounds in our center. After gathering all that information we used it to improve our relationships with children and families; to make cultural experiences a part of everyday programming; to review our policy and procedures and include this process in our continuous improvement plan.

REFERENCES

(Click on links to access website)

The People of Australia, Australia's Multicultural Policy (2010)

http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/multicultural/pdf_doc/people-of-australia-multicultural-policy-booklet.pdf

Framework for School Aged Care in Australia: My Time, Our Place

http://www.deewr.gov.au/Earlychildhood/Policy_Agenda/Documents/AgeCareinAus.pdf

University of South Australia – What is Culture? http://www.tllg.unisa.edu.au/lib_guide/gllt_ch2_sec2.pdf

Linn Van Dyne, Michigan State University – Cultural Intelligence

<http://linnvandyne.com/cq.html>

MacNaughton, G. (2003). *Shaping early childhood: Learners, curriculum and contexts*. England: Open University Press.

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