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# CHCECE001 Develop cultural competence

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Section 1: Identifying own culture

Introduction
To be able to assist children appreciate and celebrate differences, early childhood educators need to have a clear understanding of diversity. This involves taking opportunities to reflect on diversity and culture, and learn new concepts in regards to inclusive practices. It is essential than an environment of mutual respect for all who access services is fostered. Through adopting this attitude the children in care will feel valued. This in turn enables them to develop to their fullest potential.

What is culture?
Cultural identity is a distinctive human trait, recognising and relating to features of a person’s physical and social environment. It is what a person knows and feels and is part of their upbringing, family, beliefs, values and attitudes. It can be hard to define as it is different for everyone.

Culture embodies those things in life that make a family unique. People will live their culture through daily routines, rituals and interactions with the world. For each individual ‘culture’ is safe, and it can be forever changing, yet some people may have a totally different perspective on others and how they function within the community. ‘Family culture’ provides a sense of identity and belonging, be it positive or negative.

The Early Years Learning Framework (2009) states:

There are many ways of living, being and of knowing. 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 (page 13).

Culture is a way of life. It is the way people think, how they interact and the goods that are produced. It is expressed through values, expectations, beliefs and language. It is internalised from birth, mainly through the family, but also through the media and schooling years.

Culture in Australia
Australian culture and society have changed dramatically in the second half of the nineteenth century. Influences on culture are a result of an ever changing population and the acceptance of other varied ethnic groups.

Australia is a very diverse country. The following statistics from The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012) may be of interest:

- There are almost 400 languages spoken in Australia
- 16% of the population speak a language other than English at home
- 8% of Australian children have a disability
4.3% have a severe disability

This means that many children come from diverse backgrounds, and have varied needs. These children may need individualised and varied support to enable them to learn and fulfil a meaningful role in our society.

**Activity 1.1 – Beginning to identify personal culture**

Complete the following activities:

Think about what you say to a new person when you meet them. What is the important information you tell people, about who you are, your family or where you are from?

You might like to think about these possible conversation starters:

- Do you tell them your name?
- Where you live?
- What you do for a living?
- What school or study you are doing?
- Your nationality?
- Does this change if you meet someone from another country?

What extra information or how does the information change when you are introducing yourself?

Think about your nationality, family culture and social networks.

- Nationality
- Birthplace and Birth Order
- Family values and obligations
- Expectations
- Beliefs
- Families use of language
Key values, attitudes and expectations

Values are the judgments we make about what are important in our lives. They are standards. Culture and values are inextricably linked.

All people are both a product of environment and natural genetic make-up. Cultural influences like customs - family traditions, music, religion and language - are part of the environment.

The family environment provides a scaffold for children to develop understanding about themselves and also the community around them. Growing-up in a local neighbourhood/suburb will influence a family and friends about how they view others. Understanding how bias and prejudices are formed is a way to breaking them down.

The majority of people in Australia will view themselves as not being prejudiced or biased against anyone. However it is important to critically reflect on the other influential factors such as: family role-models, educational environment, media, life experience, economic/social status, beliefs and perceptions that impact on how views are formed, often unconsciously.

By regularly reflecting on thoughts actions and words and examining these objectively, it is possible to gather knowledge and experience so that judgements are not based on stereotypes or hearsay.

Activity 1.2 – Influential people

Complete the following activities:

Who is/are the person/s that have influenced you while growing up?

What values and attitudes did this person/s try and teach you?
Culture in early childhood

Early childhood educators must recognise that they play a key role in children’s appreciation and awareness of cultural identity. Kearns (2010: p. 64) identified the following key cultural understandings:

- Cultures are not static – they change and grow with families
- The concept of family means many different things in different cultures
- Caregiving practices are a key feature of cultures
- Health, illness and disability are looked upon very differently in some cultures
- The social and cultural context of children’s lives is essential for effective program planning.
- Within cultures there is diversity and stereotyping must be avoided.

This is supported by some key concepts in the Early Years Learning Framework:

- EYLF Principle 4: Respect for diversity
- EYLF Practice 5: Learning environments
- EYLF Practice 6: Cultural competence
- EYLF Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity
- EYLF Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world.

Activity 1.3 – Culture and identity

Access the document ‘Cultural competency: discussion between Judy Radich and Jo Goodwin’ from this link:

Part 1 of the document is very relevant to the discussion of identity and culture. Read the information and reflect on the questions and challenges presented.
In developing an awareness of how values and attitudes can influence culture, it is worth considering the following example.

**Some key cultural values may include:**

- culture - both traditional and contemporary
- people – respect for the dignity of a human being
- harmony in social relationships
- family and kinship systems
- observing family obligations and responsibilities
- family networks

Attitudes are tied in with cultural beliefs and identity. The key values held in regard to family kinship are reflected in attitudes.

Attitudes such as:

- interdependence
- respect for older members of the community
- self-reliance
- sharing and caring
- co-operation
- observation, imitation and discovery learning

Expectations are also tied in with cultural beliefs, identity and values.

Expectations such as:

- listening to your family
- learning from your family
- learning sense of ‘belonging’
Activity 1.4 – Attitudes and values

Are some of these characteristics familiar to you and your culture?

Perhaps there are attitudes and values you would like to adopt in your own family and culture? Think about it and write them down.

Often throughout significant events in life people remember exactly where they were, how they felt and what impact that moment had on their life.

- 2013 Did the Boston bombings make you feel unsafe?
- 2011 How were you affected when the Queensland floods swept through the state?
- 2001 Where were you on Sept 11, when the Twin Towers were attacked?
- Talk to your mother about your birth.
- The day Michael Jackson died.

These reflections enable each person to identify the values, environment and culture that is relevant to them. When a person has a strong connection and awareness of their own identity, then they are in a strong position to foster anti-bias and equity practices.

Understanding that the personal experiences, family background, peer and social networks have contributed to shape our worldview is very important.
Developing professional competencies

Educators in early childhood settings have a key responsibility to not only support children’s identity and culture, but to also understand their own culture and the impact their beliefs may have on how they treat children and families. This is a complex and ongoing process.

Some key practices include talking about culture with others you work with to discuss the following considerations:

- How might our views of culture affect others?
- Is it possible to provide advantages to some families over others?
- How do we show families that we respect and value them?
- Does the environment reflect the cultures at the centre?
- Are representations of culture in resources non-stereotypical?

(Connor, 2011)

Activity 1.5 – Impact of external influences

Think about what values and attitudes you have now that you didn’t have as a child. List some of these below.

E.g. being able to stand up for yourself if you felt you had experienced injustice

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

SAMPLE
Activity 1.6 – Views of other cultures

Consider and respond to the following scenario.

Rana is a Sudanese person who has migrated to a large country town. Rana had a lot of contact with Anglo-Saxon people on a daily basis but did not have any close personal relationships with them. She saw Anglo-Saxon people every day in town, bought things from them in the shops. She said hello to some of them and knew their names. She saw Anglo-Saxon people each night on the television and in the movies.

She sat in a classroom with mostly Anglo-Saxon students during the day. At lunch and playtime at school she talked to some Anglo-Saxon students and if there was a netball game being played she was often asked to come onto a team which she did gladly.

Mostly she sat with other Sudanese students at recess and lunch and travelled with these friends to and from school. Her home was a mile or so out of town and she mostly played there or visited and played at the homes of other members of her family on the weekends.

If non-Anglo-Saxon people had limited opportunities to build personal relationships with Sudanese people, and if Sudanese people were portrayed in the majority only according to stereotypical images, what effect might this have on Anglo-Saxon people’s attitudes towards or knowledge about Sudanese people?

Write a few points about Anglo-Saxon attitudes towards people, particularly refugees, according to media reports and public perception.
Section Summary

This concludes section one (1). This section has given you the opportunity to

- Develop an understanding of culture
- Identify what has contributed to your own values and culture
- Reflect and identify potential bias and stereotypes
- Begin to understand what skill are needed to work with others from different cultures

At this stage you should be able to

- Identify significant events or history in own family background which may influence current values, beliefs and attitudes
- Identify aspects of the environment which influence own cultural identity
- Reflect on potential impact own background may have on interactions and relationships with people from other cultures
- Identify any knowledge, attitudes or skills to be developed to ensure cultural competency