



# MY TIME, OUR PLACE

FRAMEWORK FOR SCHOOL AGE  
CARE IN AUSTRALIA



## FACTSHEET 2B: CULTURAL COMPETENCE – IN ACTION

### HOW CAN WE DEMONSTRATE MEANINGFUL CULTURAL COMPETENCE?

To nurture and support a strong sense of identity in children we need to show interest, understanding and respect for different ways of knowing, seeing and living in our every day actions as educators.

Doing this in collaboration with the children and their families will increase and develop their ability to understand and honour differences.

Common practices include encouraging children to dress up in traditional or ethnic costumes during occasions such as Harmony Day and asking families to provide recipes of dishes that they cook at home or share music and stories from their country of origin.

Reality is that the response to these efforts of collaboration are often very poor and educators frequently resort to 'buying in' support in the form of professional groups and organizations, who will perform 'cultural' dance and music pieces or offer activities associated with food, arts and crafts. More often than not, educators research in books and on-line to find additional information, then create activities such as an 'Italian Day' during vacation care in which the children can participate.

The following well-intentioned attempts to create an environment that reflects and acknowledges diversity have been labeled by some as the 'Five Deadly F's':

**Flags** - Displaying flags of the different countries from which children or their families originally came from

**Fashion** – Inviting children to wear their traditional or ethnic costumes on Harmony Day or other occasions

**Food** – Inviting children and their families to bring traditional dishes or food representative of their cultural or religious community during special cultural occasions

**Faces** - Displaying photographs of people or art representing different ethnic communities or of different national heritage

**Festivals** - Celebrating significant traditional, ethnic, cultural and religious festivals which we believe are relevant to the children, for example Eid-ul-Fitr (Islam), Christmas, Easter (Christianity), Rosh Hasanah (Judaism), Diwali (Hinduism) or having a Turkish, Italian or Greek Day

The reason for these 'Five F's' should be avoided is that educators often tend to believe they have 'done enough' once these expressions are present in the school aged care environment.

In actual fact, confining our attempts to create an inclusive environment by using the 'Five F's' totally fails to meet the objective. The attempts are akin to tokenism, focusing on a 'tourist-like' approach to understanding and appreciating multicultural and multi-faith diversity in our society.

### WHAT PUSHES PRACTICE BEYOND TOKENISM TO CULTURALLY COMPETENT PRACTICE?

#### Expand your experiences and relationships

Acquaint yourself with as many families and friends from as many cultural and faith backgrounds as possible. Learn about their way of life – their culture as it is in Australia. Learn about the challenges and opportunities that face them and their communities. Try to see, feel and think from their point of view. Apply this learning to your work.

#### Work in teams

Talk, share and discuss what you would like to focus on to broaden children's perspectives. Address in particular a known topic of avoidance; the tendency to brush aside a different point of view or a way of doing things that does not neatly fit within their area of experience.

#### Use technology

Video-record activities and review the video clips. Critically observe if you have gone below the surface with the children during the activity.

#### Do your research

Find out as much as possible about multicultural Australia from friends, professionals, publications and professional development opportunities.

#### Incorporate Reflective Practice

Not only retrospectively but also when planning activities. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Why have I chosen a particular activity and why do I want to explore it further?
- Is the activity connected to anything that others or we may currently do or experience in our life and environment?
- Have the opportunities for children, families and community members to contribute to or lead the activity been fully explored?
- Have I considered collaborating with someone in the vicinity of the service, staff, children and families who has knowledge, a different level of experience or skills relating to the activity?
- What kind of research have I conducted relating to the activity, its presentation and the environment in which it occurs?
- Am I comfortable exploring different ways of doing and thinking when relating the activity to the children?

- How can the dynamic of participant's roles in the activity be changed to facilitate partnering, contributions, leadership and new experiences from different perspectives?

#### Seek out professional development

- Attend sessions, workshops and conferences
- Be an active member of a community of multicultural practitioners and educators
- Share and learn experiences from each other
- Support each other.

### WHAT DOES THE MY TIME, OUR PLACE FRAMEWORK SAY?

The framework is repeatedly encouraging educators to go beyond the 'display and representation' of diversity to the actual 'living' of diversity, thus encouraging the broadening of knowledge and experiences for both educators and children.

Let's take some of the Outcome statements in the framework and look at them in the context of 'Cultural Competence - In Action'.

#### Children respond to diversity with respect (Outcome 2)

##### Case example:

Cricket is one of the favourite sports across Australia and is predominately played by males. Many children in the service like the game and a number of the girls would like to participate, but some of the boys are resistant to having girls playing on 'their team'.

The educator uses the, at times, passionate exchanges between the children to facilitate discussions on diverse perspectives and practices. In this case she uses the example of a game of Aboriginal origin from Western Australia that is similar to cricket. The game is called WANA (digging stick) and is played only by girls. The skills learned by playing the game would enable the girls to defend themselves and their families against attacks from spears.

The conversation following this information ended with an understanding by most of the children that what is common for some is not the same for others. Several of the boys were prepared to check how well the girls could play the game after the discussion and offered places in their team.

Some of the children wanted to know more about different games, who plays them and what they were called in different languages. Others showed an interest in trying out the game's adaptation and looked for wooden sticks and round items (such as rolled up newspaper) that can be thrown towards the stick.

#### Children resource their own learning through connecting with people and places (Outcome 4)

##### Case example:

Every year the local town council, in collaboration with ethnic community groups, organises a Harmony Day parade followed by a food and art and craft fair. For years children attending the centre and their families have watched this community event and mingled in the fair. The children always chat about it afterwards with the educators.

After some reflection, educators decided that children might want to become part of the event rather than just being spectators. When the question was posed to the children, quite a few became very excited about the opportunity.

A plan was made and research commenced into what it takes to participate in the event, which cultural and ethnic backgrounds to represent and what kind of activities should be included.

Various groups formed. Some focused on creating costumes, one decided to study a cultural dance that they wanted to perform during the parade and another group focused on event registration. The project continued over several weeks.

The outcome was that even more children and their families attended the Harmony Day event than in previous years and were part of the parade under the banner that they had created to identify 'our group'. There was a colourful display of costumes and a dance routine that was joined by many family and community members during the parade.

#### REFERENCES: (CLICK ON THE LINKS)

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

[http://www.deewr.gov.au/Earlychildhood/Policy\\_Agenda/Documents/AgeCareinAus.pdf](http://www.deewr.gov.au/Earlychildhood/Policy_Agenda/Documents/AgeCareinAus.pdf)

*Avoiding the 'Five Deadly F's'*: Information Sheet developed by Gudrun Benjamin and Farid Hamid in 2010

<http://www.goodrunsolutions.com.au/>

in which the following sources are referenced:

Making Multicultural Australia

[www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au](http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au)

Racism No Way: Anti Racism Education for Australian Schools

[www.racismnoway.com.au](http://www.racismnoway.com.au)

Australian Multicultural Foundation

[www.amf.net.au](http://www.amf.net.au)

*The Games We Play*: A booklet developed by Gudrun Benjamin and Rick Fleming

<http://www.pointflipit.com.au/goodrun/games/>

